

Newspapers best place for Public Notices

Bluff City Police Department illustrates the point

BY GREG SHERRILL,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TENNESSEE PRESS
ASSOCIATION

Something caught my eye recently in the Bristol (Tenn.) Herald Courier. A story by reporter Mac McLean underscored perfectly one of Tennessee Press Association's (TPA) primary arguments against allowing public notices to be removed from independent print newspapers and placed in the trust of local and state government Web sites.

The Bluff City Police Department, in Sullivan County, allowed the domain name rights to its taxpayer-funded Web site to expire, despite repeated e-mail warnings over a three-month period from the department's domain name provider.

Following the expiration date, all information on the site became immediately unavailable to the general public, and the site displayed a generic warning message that the domain would be available for sale beginning 42 days after expiration.

Following the 42-day period, a private individual who was disgruntled over receiving a speeding camera ticket acquired the rights to the domain name and used the site to post messages from others who disliked speed cameras.

One can't help but wonder what official information was posted on the Bluff City Police Department's Web site. Information that

apparently wasn't missed at all by the public during the 42-day period that the site was down, showing only a message explaining that the rights to the site were about to expire or be sold.

As recent studies show (Pew Internet and American Life, December 2009), many folks don't routinely go to state and local government Web sites to find the important information contained in public notices. Information such as foreclosure notices, meetings of school boards and notices of construction bid lettings. Those notices, thank heavens, are required to be published in independent newspapers where they are easily accessible to the public, archived, searchable and reliable.

A quick check of the Tennessee Newspaper Directory, published by TPA, shows that there are two TPA newspapers in Sullivan County that are entrusted with carrying important public notices: Bristol Herald Courier and Kingsport Times-News. The Bristol Herald Courier has been published continuously since 1835, and the Kingsport Times-News since 1913. That's 145 years and 94 years, respectively, of bringing important government information to the citizens of Sullivan County. Wonder how long Bluff City government has been in the information-providing business?

Now, newspapers are no strangers to the

Internet. We fully realize that a growing percentage of our readership chooses to search online for news, information and entertainment. Fifty-three percent of Internet users searching for news seek out their local newspaper's online site, according to a 2009 study by the Reynolds Journalism Institute at the Missouri School of Journalism. And newspapers have been quick to respond, with TPA members creating Web sites that offer our readers the best of both worlds — a print version and an online site to meet their needs and to bring them important public notices.

Tennessee Press Service, the business affiliate of TPA, decided to make it even easier for people to find public notices that have run in newspapers all across our state. In 2007, TPS launched www.tnpublicnotice.com, a comprehensive public notice site that aggregates notices from our member papers across the state into one, easy-to-search place. It's updated daily, and it's completely free. Just another way the newspaper industry is making these important notices available to all citizens, regardless of whether they prefer a print product or an online site to receive their news.

We will likely have to fight attempts next year by state and local governments to save an insignificantly small amount of money by removing important public notices from printed newspapers and allowing those same governments to take a stab at making the no-

ties available to the public through myriad state and local government Web sites.

Stop for just a minute and think about how many Web sites that could encompass. In any given county, there could be a county commission Web site, a sheriff's department Web site, county seat or mayor's Web site, other municipality Web site(s), a school board Web site, police department Web site(s), county trustee or property assessor Web site — and that's before even starting to list the dozens of state agencies and departmental Web sites.

Do you really want to rely on searching all those venues to find out what your government is doing?

Newspapers have been integral and independent watchdogs of government activity since the beginnings of our democratic society. They have a proven track record of continuous publication and pride themselves on never missing an issue. You can walk into any newspaper today and search years of archives. In fact, the average TPA member newspaper has been publishing continuously for more than 100 years.

Please remember the fate of the Bluff City Police Department's Web site the next time you hear of a government's attempt to move important public information to an obscure Web site under the guise of saving a few dollars. There's a good reason that your community newspapers have been fighting so hard for your right to know.

Only Christ can bring you salvation

Dear Rev. Graham: I've always tried to do my best and live by the Bible's statement that "God helps those who help themselves" because I want to go to heaven when I die. But recently a friend said she thinks this may not be what the Bible means by this statement. Is she right? Mrs. L.F.



Billy G raham

MY ANSWER

Dear Mrs. L.F.: This statement actually isn't found in the Bible, so in that sense both you and your friend are incorrect. But the statement itself is incorrect — at least if we take it as our guide to living. Let me explain.

You see, behind this statement is the belief that our salvation is up to us, and if we're only good enough then God will reward us with eternal life. He may help us along the way (as the statement suggests), but ultimately God weighs our good deeds against our bad deeds, and if we have enough good deeds, then He'll let us into heaven.

But this isn't what the Bible teaches. In fact, it teaches the opposite — because it tells us that no matter how good we are, we will never be good enough to win our way into heaven. The reason is because God is absolutely perfect and pure, and even one sin — just one — would be enough to keep us out of heaven. The Bible says, "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (James 2:10).

This is why we need Christ, because on the cross all our sins — without exception — were placed on Him, and He died in our place. The Bible says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Receive that gift today by trusting Christ alone for your salvation.

(Send your queries to "My Answer," c/o Billy Graham, Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, 1 Billy Graham Parkway, Charlotte, N.C., 28201; call 1-(877) 2-GRHAM, or visit the Web site for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association: www.billygraham.org.)

Billy Graham's

My Answer

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First Baptist Church

212 East F Street
Elizabethton, TN
(423) 543-1931

www.fbcelizabethton.com

To Comment

To submit letters to the editor please send to: Elizabethton Star, Box 1930, Elizabethton, TN 37044-1930; or send letters by e-mail to webmaster@starhq.com. All letters must include name, address and phone number for verification purposes. Letters must be limited to 300 or fewer words.

Opinion

Television rules are a welcome change

Here is some good news for people who like to watch television and who live in rural areas of Tennessee or near the state's borders. Legislation sponsored by Rep. John Tanner, D-Union City, was signed into law that will enable more local programming, news and sports to be made available to these residents. The new law updates and clarifies broadcast and re-broadcast programming rules. It is a welcome change that has taken years to achieve.

Tanner co-sponsored the legislation that will allow people in rural areas not served by cable television providers to get local programming via satellite. In the past, re-broadcast of local programming either was not allowed or was not provided. This was a disservice to Tennesseans who live in rural areas and need access to local news, sports and community programming, which is easily available to those who live in larger cities. The legislation applies throughout the country and will benefit millions of television viewers.

Another stumbling block for Tennessee TV watchers is that many do not have access to local broadcast news and programming because they live near large Designated Market Areas such as residents of northwest Tennessee who are part of Tanner's 8th Congressional District. These viewers often are geographically

included in market areas from other states. Since Tennessee is bordered by eight states, many state residents fall into this broadcast television void for local programming.

The Satellite Television Extension and Localism Act of 2010 passed the U.S. House May 12 and recently was signed into law. Under that law, satellite TV providers will be required to include the same local programming options that cable TV companies provide. One example of the effect of the law provided by Tanner's office is that the DISH Network has announced new local programming to about 70,000 households in the Jackson media market.

Tanner also has urged the Federal Communications Commission to review the Designated Market Area structure with an eye toward making it more user friendly for Tennesseans. Denying many state residents TV programming that originates in-state in favor of offering residents programming that originates in other states makes no sense. The new law requires the FCC to prepare a study of the issue and to report the number of households that are affected, and whether the Designated Market Areas in question can be adjusted.

The new law and the FCC's review of available local programming is the right thing to do for Tennesseans.

— Jackson Sun



Some things that caught our attention

BY ROZELLA HARDIN
STAR EDITOR
rhardin@starhq.com

During the course of the news covered by the STAR each week, there are some things worth noting.

A red flag was raised when we read that City School Director Ed Alexander said in the called school board meeting Thursday that he had not been asked by board members why he had not recommended tenure be given to teacher Tim Davis. He said he had been asked by members of the media, but could not reveal the information to the public. Apparently, Tim Davis has not been given a reason either, as his wife requested at the meeting that the school director tell her why the T.A. Dugger Junior High School teacher was not rehired.

You would think that with all the controversy surrounding the decision not to rehire Davis, who apparently is popular with both students and their parents, that board members would want to know what is going on. This is not a mute question with the public, and certainly it should not be with the board.

— Rozella Hardin

City Council Thursday night approved a bid proposal to install cameras in the Covered Bridge Park, which we applaud. Most agree that something needs to be done to not only stop the vandalism in the park and in the bridge, but to keep teenagers from hanging out at the east entrance to the bridge.

The teens have a tendency to block the entrance to the bridge by sitting in the street at the entrance or just inside the bridge blocking the path for those walk through the bridge. The Covered Bridge is part of the linear trail and on any given evening, there is a number of people who walk the trail and through the Covered Bridge.

Part of the problem is that parents do not take responsibility for their teenage children. They are left to wander in the park without any supervision. Fights have erupted, walkers have been intimidated and things go on in the park that should not.

Families visit the park with their children, tourists park their cars and walk through the bridge, and many stop to take photographs of the historical

landmark.

Something needs to be done to make the park and bridge a safer place. Cameras should help.

— Rozella Hardin

There were some days on the June calendar worth noting according to the Chase Calendar of Events.

National Bathroom Reading Week was on the calendar June 1-3. The Bathroom Readers Institute sponsored the week as a means of standing up for those who sit down and read in the bathroom...they say 83 percent of Americans have admitted to this time-honored pastime.

On June 8, 1933, the first drive-in movie opened. Today, there are fewer than 100 operating. We should take pride in the fact that one of the 100 still operating is the State Line Drive-In in Elizabethton.

Upsy Daisy Day was June 8 — a day to remind people to wake up gloriously, gratefully and gleefully each morning.

The first ballpoint pen was patented on June 10, 1943. Corn on the Cob Day was June 11.

There's a special day for almost everything. You can always find a reason to celebrate.

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Where we began

The history of the Elizabethton STAR traces back to the Mountaineer, established in 1834. The Mountaineer was the first newspaper in Upper East Tennessee, changing hands and names numerous times over the years. On Oct. 1, 1955, Frank Robinson was named publisher. He purchased the paper in 1977.

Nathan C. Goodwin Publisher ngoodwin@starhq.com	Delaney Scalf Operations Manager dscalf@starhq.com
Patsy Johnson Assistant To Publisher pjohnson@starhq.com	Kathy Scalf Circulation Manager kscalf@starhq.com
Rozella Hardin Editor rhardin@starhq.com	Frank Robinson Owner frobinson@starhq.com