



Opinion ✖

Survey Says: Readers Value Community Newspapers

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By Richard Eckstrom

Although our society is becoming more and more plugged into the Internet, there are some things the online universe cannot provide or substitute for us.

This includes the unique services provided to citizens by community newspapers.

Weekly and small daily papers help strengthen communities, build local economies and report on local governments.

Readers of community newspaper understand and appreciate these services, too.

That fact is underscored in an annual survey taken by the National Newspaper Association, which recently released its latest survey results.

The numbers are self-evident, said Merle Baranczyk, president of the National Newspaper Association and publisher of a community newspaper in Colorado.

The [responses] indicate the level of connectedness people have with their community newspaper.

From year to year, the studies have shown that people believe in their local papers, for the news they need and the advertising they rely on.

With consolidation in the newspaper industry, the rise of the Internet and even some papers shutting down, readers no doubt have heard much about the death of community newspapers.

But to borrow a phrase from Mark Twain rumors of the death of community papers are greatly exaggerated.

Consider the responses in the newspaper group s latest survey, which sampled newspaper readers in small towns and cities where the circulation size of the local paper was 15,000 or less:

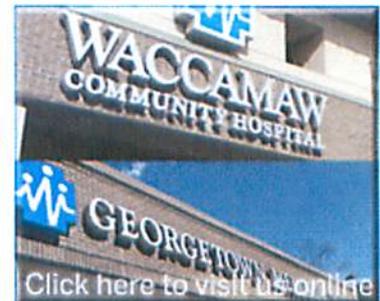
n 92 percent said they thought local newspapers were informative.

n 84 percent said they looked forward to reading their local paper.

n 83 percent agreed that they relied on their local paper for local news and information.

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n 69 percent thought their local paper provided valuable advertising and shopping information.

In some ways, as we move deeper into this new digital era, community newspapers are becoming even more important.

That's because they help foster something important that the Internet and iPhones and iPads and all of the other newfangled gadgets cannot provide !! a feeling of community.

After all, it s in the pages of community newspapers where folks can read about civic club fundraisers, church gatherings, honor roll lists, birthdays, family reunions, and other happenings that provide much of the content of our day-to-day lives.

In this way, community newspaper readers enjoy a special connection to their local paper !! a relationship to it, if you will.

The responses to the newspaper group's survey bear out these facts.

On average, respondents said they spend nearly 40 minutes reading through their local paper. And nearly half said they hold onto it for more than 10 days.

And unlike some of our other modern-day institutions, community newspapers are trusted by those they serve.

About 70 percent of the survey participants said the accuracy and coverage of their local paper is good or excellent, with 59 percent saying the same about their paper s fairness.

Thomas Jefferson once said that if he were left to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers !! or newspapers without a government he wouldn't hesitate to choose the newspapers.

I think readers of today s community newspapers understand the wisdom of Jefferson s words.

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