

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Community journalism as ritual: A case study of community and weekly newspapers in Laurel, Maryland

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This dissertation is a study of the intersection of community and community journalism in Laurel, an area with just over 100,000 residents in central Maryland. The case study utilizes ethnographic interviews with 40 stakeholders, including journalists, advertisers, city officials and readers. Using James W. Carey's theory of ritual communication as its theoretical foundation, the study examines the role of Laurel's two weekly newspapers in creating and maintaining community in Laurel. Findings suggest that when the community newspapers failed to meet readers' expectations for community content, the readers' news reading ritual was interrupted; as a result, their sense of community weakened. Furthermore, place, sharing and relationships proved key to the formation and sustenance of community, with the weekly newspapers playing an important role in the process. The study also found that stakeholders wanted the weeklies to maintain editorial spaces in Laurel, dedicate more resources to hiring more reporters, and be more accepting of user-generated content.

COMMUNITY JOURNALISM AS RITUAL:  
A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY AND WEEKLY NEWSPAPERS IN  
LAUREL, MARYLAND

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
2011

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For my grandma and grandpa, Florence and Nicholas,  
and for my mom, Connie.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise the bridge that carried you over.  
~George Colman, the Younger

Without the help and the support of those mentioned here, I would not have been able to cross this long bridge that is the doctoral dissertation.

Pat Haag, deputy clerk to the Laurel City Council, and Monica DeLorenzo, administrative assistant to the Mayor of Laurel were helpful in scheduling interviews and directing me to “the people to talk to.” Robbie Morganfield, pastor at St. Mark’s Methodist Church and fellow doctoral student, and Woody Woodruff, copyeditor at the *Laurel Leader* and fellow doctoral student, were helpful in connecting me with participants. Lindsey Baker, director of the Laurel Historical Society, assisted me in combing through clip files for information on Laurel and its newspapers. Pete Pichaske, former editor of the *Laurel Leader*, first welcomed me into its newsroom in 2008 and paved the way for the paper’s cooperation in this research. To all of you, I am most grateful.

My 40 participants were extremely gracious in giving of their time and local knowledge and have made a tremendous impact on this research. Without them, this dissertation would not have been possible. Thank you for welcoming me into your homes and offices, for connecting me with participants, and for sharing with me your invaluable insights.

Dr. Maurine Beasley was instrumental in the formative process of this research and provided me with many things about which to think. Thank you.

The members of my dissertation committee—Dr. John Caughey, Dr. Kalyani Chadha, Dr. Carol L. Rogers, and Mr. Carl Sessions Stepp—were giving

of their time and talents throughout the course of this research. Thank you for lending an ear, troubleshooting challenges, and most of all, sharing your support.

My dissertation adviser, Dr. Linda Steiner, deserves more thanks than any string of words can hope to signify. Her patience, kindness and wisdom combined made this daunting and overwhelming task not only bearable, but achievable. She, with her red pens (pens plural, as I am certain that she ran out of ink in several throughout this process), has made this work infinitely better. Thank you for the countless hours you spent discussing this project, lending books, reading (and re-reading, and re-reading) drafts, answering questions, and calming nerves. I'm pretty sure, as dissertation chairs go, you're the best.

And to my friends, Andrea Frantz, Merrilee Cox, and Michael Breslosky, who supported me throughout this journey. When I needed to air my frustrations or celebrate a benchmark, they were there to lend an ear and to drink some wine. Their constant encouragement throughout this process helped me to stay the course. Thank you.

And finally, my mom, Connie Wotanis, deserves all the gratitude I have to bestow. She offered every kind of support possible throughout this journey. She painstakingly transcribed interviews. She helped me copy-edit. She cooked me dinners. But, most importantly, she listened whenever I needed her to. And then, without fail, she gave me a pep talk that gave me the motivation to continue on this journey. I would not have achieved any of my successes, this one included, without her love and support. And so, I say a great big THANKS, MOM. As far as mom's go, I know you're the best. I share this with you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

One wintery day in early 2008, I sat next to Melanie as she worked on the final edits of her features section before the *Laurel Leader*—one of Laurel, Maryland’s two weekly newspapers—went to press. In addition to concerns about the correct spelling of Veterans Day (no apostrophe), picture selection and space adjustments, she was arguing with herself about whether or not to cut the names of some kids on a local sports team because she had more content than space. “I cut these names last week,” she mumbled to herself. “These poor kids are never going to get in the paper.” As I began talking with Melanie about her dilemma, the phone rang. I sat back in my chair to give her some space as she took the call. When she hung up the phone, she turned to me and said very seriously, and with a straight face, “Late-breaking craft fair.” Then, she broke out in hearty laughter before proceeding to find space on her pages for the craft fair announcement.

Melanie, who was then the features editor and is now the editor-in-chief of the *Laurel Leader*, was struggling with the realities of journalism in “small” towns.<sup>1</sup> With only 20 or so pages per week to deliver the news, Melanie was—and remains—forced to make difficult decisions about what counts as “news.” The *Laurel Leader* is one of two local, weekly newspapers disseminating news in Laurel. And, the challenges described above sometime grow in complexity when

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<sup>1</sup> The term *small* is, of course, a relative term. The city of Laurel has 19,000 residents, and when adding the residents of areas surrounding the city, also considered “Laurel” by the U.S. Postal Service, the population totals a little more than 100,000. This is large by comparison to other towns, but small considering the two major cities that book end it: Washington, D.C. and Baltimore, MD.

the papers are conceived of—and marketed—as *community* newspapers, given all that is wrapped up within that single word. The word *community* tends to connote warm and fuzzy feelings of belonging and sharing—two things generally regarded as positive—so such a marketing strategy works to create local identity where readers feel a part of something distinctive and special. Many small weeklies describe themselves as *community* newspapers, and the weeklies in Laurel are no exception. But, is Laurel a community and, if so, what role do the two local newspapers in Laurel play in its creation and/or maintenance?

This dissertation explores the relationship between community and news media, looking closely at the weekly newspaper and seeking understanding of the concepts of community and local news media as constructed by the people of Laurel. A number of earlier studies have examined the relationship between communities and news media (Park, 1922; Janowitz, 1952; Stamm, 1985; Rotherbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, & Ryu, 1996; Stamm, Emig & Hesse, 1997). These studies have interrogated the role that news media plays in connecting people to a place or to a group of people. Despite their focus on the connection between media and communities, none of these studies questioned the premise of the existence of a community in the first place; they all took for granted that the community under study existed—and was perceived to exist by their participants. This study does not take that premise for granted; I wanted to learn from the people of Laurel whether they perceive it to be a community and what they take to be the importance of local news media. This dissertation questions perceptions of community from the perspective of a variety of people associated with Laurel,

Maryland. It does not assume a singular definition of community, media or news, but rather seeks to understand the meanings of the concepts from the perspectives of the participants of this research.

### **Focus of the study**

This dissertation is a case study of a Washington D.C. and Baltimore suburb—Laurel, Maryland. I called Laurel home for two years, while I pursued my doctoral studies at the University of Maryland’s Philip Merrill College of Journalism. Early coursework projects piqued my interest in the long history of newspapering in Laurel, which will be discussed later in Chapter 3. Laurel has two competing weekly newspapers—the *Laurel Leader* and *The Gazette*. This study examines perceptions of community and news media from the perspectives of several constituents in Laurel, including journalists, public officials, advertisers and business owners, as well as readers and non-readers of the newspapers.

I am guided by some of the following preliminary research questions:

- Do the stakeholders in Laurel perceive it to be a community?
- Do those connected to Laurel have a *sense of community* in Laurel or in other groups and/or Laurel-based organizations they may be a part of? Is that sense of community guided by local news media, personal interactions, a combination of both acting together, or by something(s) else completely?
- Do the local news media—mainly referring to the two dominant weekly newspapers—play a role in creating and/or sustaining community in

Laurel? Which media, including which other local news media, try to or succeed at this?

- How (if at all) do the various groups of people in Laurel make use of media to participate in community/civic life?

Laurel, Maryland is an appropriate location to study the intersection of community and news media for a variety of reasons. Laurel is distinctive in that it is a suburb of two major metropolitan areas—Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. Here, the elite media (*The Baltimore Sun* and *The Washington Post*, respectively) are, in a sense, also local media. On any given morning, either of these newspapers can be found on doorsteps in Laurel. But, neither of these newspapers regularly covers with any depth or detail the news of the suburbs surrounding the cities they serve. Laurel news often only can be found in the weekly newspapers; Laurel does not support its own news radio or television stations, and most of the existing television news coverage is regional. The Laurel Cable Network Foundation, Inc. has served Laurel with public access television for the past 22 years; residents of Laurel can access it from channel 71 on Comcast and 12 on Verizon Fios (History of the Laurel Cable Network Foundation, 2009). For these reasons, the weekly newspapers play a vital role in informing residents about happenings in their town. But do these “community” weeklies actually help to make Laurel a community? This research aims to answer this question.

## **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the role of news media in creating and sustaining community defined geographically, in terms of physical locations—in this case, Laurel, Maryland. Communities and media have been explored extensively, both separately and in combination. Early communities studies examined physical communities—towns and villages. The studies soon progressed, as did the connotations of the term, to include groups of people, co-workers and professionals, teammates, religious groups and even racial and ethnic groups. Most recently and as a result of technological advances, virtual communities—groups of people who interact via an electronic medium, such as a chat room or virtual world like Second Life, have become the norm. Hardly any current literature examines physical communities against their new, modern-day counterpart—virtual communities. But, all people live, first and foremost, in the physical world, and as such, scholars cannot abandon studies of physical communities. Now, more than ever, understanding physical communities is of utmost importance, given the many ways technologies have influenced the ways in which people not only interact with physical spaces, but also with each other in those physical spaces.

Another purpose of this study is to wrestle with the inherent contradictions of the idiom *community newspaper*. Newspapers (after books) are considered one of the first *mass* mediums. In 1887, German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies made a distinction between community and society. His concepts of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) made clear that people's

behaviors, norms, and morals are different on both levels of human interaction. Society is marked by individualism, where people's loyalties are, by and large, to their own self-interest. People in society are loyal to one another only so long as it benefits their own personal interests and that loyalty is often "superficial" (Bell, Newby, & Elias, 1974, p. 8). By contrast, community symbolizes "unity of being," where people live together as a family or in kinship, understanding the necessity of working together to achieve common goals (p. 8). Poplin (1972) argued, likewise, that the opposite of the "moral community" was "mass society." In mass society, members experience alienation, moral fragmentation, disengagement, and segmentation; by contrast, members of a moral community have a sense of identification, moral unity, involvement, and wholeness (p. 6). How, then, can newspapers, a *mass* medium, which serve a large and seemingly disparate group of people, be called *community* newspapers? This study grapples with this question. While this study will primarily focus on the two weekly newspapers—print media—it will also take into account other forms of media that might be used to create or sustain community in Laurel, such as the online versions of both weeklies and local blogs.

This moment in time is also particularly rich and fraught given the current state of the newspaper industry. Newspapers across the country are facing serious challenges—financial and otherwise. While the hard times seemed to be hurting only large papers while small papers flourished, many weeklies are no longer immune to the worries. As this study began, the *Laurel Leader* was forced to relocate its office to Columbia, Maryland—more than 10 miles north of Laurel—

as a result of a real estate consolidation. It is also a time of challenge for citizens across the country, who are faced with an economic recession. Economists have predicted that the downturn will be deep and prolonged, going on longer than in 1981-1982, the longest recession in recent history (Irwin, 2008). The country was also involved in two wars—one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan—and threats to national security remain high. The coverage of the 2008 election—after which we inaugurated the first African-American, Barack Obama, to the office of President of the United States—was rife with issues race, gender, and class. At such a distinctive and challenging moment in history, the need for good journalism—journalism that not only acts as the fourth estate, but also as a concerned and involved participant in civic and community life—is great.

The main goal of this research, then, is to better understand one town and the news media it uses to stay connected, recognizing that the cultural norms and political atmosphere may affect people's expectations of both news media and communities. This research proceeds from the foundation of James W. Carey's (1989) theory of communication as ritual, which states that communication is a process through which people share, create, modify and transform culture (p.43) Typically thought of as a means of moving bits of information across space, the transmission model of communication conceives of it as a mechanism for sending and receiving information. The transmission model puts a premium on sending greater amounts of information more quickly and more efficiently across greater space. Carey's ritual view of communication suggests that communication—both interpersonal and mediated—is not simply a means to transmit information, but

rather a ritual that draws “persons together in fellowship and commonality” (p. 43).

In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as ‘sharing,’ ‘participation,’ ‘association,’ ‘fellowship,’ and ‘the possession of a common faith.’ This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the term ‘commonness,’ ‘communion,’ ‘community,’ and ‘communication.’ A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs (p. 18).

When applied to community journalism, Carey’s theory suggests that news as a form of communication, and news reading as done by members of a town, can potentially draw people together by shared knowledge and culture. Carey’s theory is discussed in Chapter 2 and elsewhere in this dissertation.

Additionally, because Laurel is located between two major metropolitan cities, each with its own elite daily newspaper, the local news media takes on added significance. In his dissertation on electronic community media, Howley (1997) pointed out that “no doubt a response to the increasing encroachment of global forces upon the local community, communities make use of information and communication technologies in an effort to (re)articulate local identity, culture, concerns, objectives, and experience.” Although Howley defines *community media* as media produced by citizens rather than professional journalists, his point is applicable here. Understanding the ways towns—or

communities—identify themselves, and set themselves apart as different and special when compared to others around them is important. Media serve to establish—or rather reinforce—boundaries; the town newspaper reports on happenings within a geographically bounded space, clearly separate from other towns surrounding it. The question still remains, however, if a town is always a community.

### **Significance of the study**

This study is significant for a variety of reasons. This project contributes to scholarly knowledge of weekly journalism—which, at present, is minimal at best. Weekly newspapers far outnumber daily metro papers. As of February, 2009, *Editor & Publisher* reported there were 6,055 community newspapers and only 1,408 daily papers circulating in the United States (Maddux, 2009). And, despite the fact that there are thousands more weekly newspapers and likely tens of thousands of newspaper journalists working in small markets, weekly newspapers often goes unstudied. Journalism scholarship does not accurately reflect the popularity and practice of weekly journalism.

This research also makes a contribution to community studies. Much of contemporary community studies are focusing on virtual communities. While these studies are important—in both community studies and journalism studies—we cannot abandon the physical communities, which, traditionally, are what newspapers serve often first and foremost and where people continue to reside, whether or not they have a sense of rootedness there. Furthermore, studies which examine the intersection of physical communities and online communities are

necessary and important to better understand the ways that people utilize online media, such as online newspapers and blogs, to interact with communities.

This study also makes a contribution to local knowledge in Laurel. It serves as a prescription for change for newspapers in towns such as Laurel. The comments from Laurel constituents about their perceptions of the weekly papers provide new ideas for better reaching and serving the people of Laurel and other suburban towns across the country competing with major metropolitan cities for an identity of their own. They also reveal existing beliefs about civic participation in Laurel, providing an understanding of the ways news, conceptions of community, and civic participation are linked. As mentioned in the previous section, this research is also a piece of history for Laurel at a distinctive moment in time for not only Laurel, but the country, as well.

Because this study employed ethnographic methods, it also makes a contribution to methodologies of journalism studies. Popular in the 70s and 80s, ethnographic study of news media and newspapers has waned. This study could prove a revival of the method for understanding the culture of communities and local news media. Denzin (1997) advocated what he called a “local, participatory, civic, journalistic ethnography” which raises consciousness, helps maintain “the public’s awareness of its own voice,” and “promotes a form of textuality that turns citizens into readers and readers into persons who take dramatic action in the world” (p. 282). At a time when the realities of newspapering mean more space devoted to advertising and a shrinking news hole, as well as a plethora of new media technologies competing for consumers’

attention, this approach to research could help to enlighten the citizens of Laurel as to the power of their voices and may impact the ways in which they hear the voices of their fellow citizens.

### **Definition of terms**

Because this research will conclude with a definition of *community* as my participants understand it, I hesitate to explicate my own personal definition at the outset. Rather, I wish to offer ethnographically derived definitions based on my participants' comments. My participants had a difficult time defining community, as shown in Chapter 5, which explores my participants' understandings of community in Laurel. And, perhaps not surprisingly, current scholarly definitions, further explored in Chapter 2's review of literature on community, are unsatisfying and in many instances, not useful for analyzing communities.

Even more complicating is the fact that, in reference to journalism, the terms *weekly* and *community* are often used interchangeably. Weekly journalism is often called *community* or small-town journalism—newspapers with circulations fewer than 50,000; radio stations with short reach; television news stations in small markets—but it also comprises small niche media outlets that target specific groups of people with particular identities and interests. Most importantly, weekly/community journalism most often focuses on local news.

According to the National Newspaper Association, “the distinguishing characteristic of a community newspaper is its commitment to serving the information needs of a particular community,” and “despite the emergence of new information technologies such as the Internet, community newspapers continue to

play an important role in the Information Age. Over 150 million people are informed, educated and entertained by a community newspaper every week” (About Community Newspapers). To define a newspaper serving a geographically bounded location as a community newspaper is to suggest that the town is, in fact, a community. This assumption, however, is risky. This study aims to better understand whether or not Laurel is a town, a community, or simultaneously both.

A definition of media is a bit easier to tie down. Media is, of course, plural for medium—a channel through which messages travel. Media include, but are not limited to, things like the newspaper, television, radio, cell phone, and computer, to name a few. While my main interest with this research is weekly newspapers and the role they play for the people they serve, I was also interested to learn from my participants what other forms of media they use to learn and communicate about Laurel. While many kinds of messages can be communicated via media, this study is concerned with what might be considered *news* messages—messages pertinent to a large group, or mass, rather than only a select few individuals.

### **Design of the study**

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology of this project. The study examines the relationship between Laurel, Maryland and its newspapers. The goal of this research is to define *community* from the perspectives of Laurel’s citizens and stakeholders as well as to understand the role media—specifically the two competing weekly newspapers—plays in creating or sustaining community in the

town. It also attempts to better understand weekly newspapering at a time when the newspaper industry is facing great challenges, especially financial ones. This case study focused on Laurel, Maryland, a town of 19,000 residents located midway between Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. Ethnographic interviewing and focus groups reveal the perspectives and perceptions of the citizens and stakeholders in Laurel, Maryland regarding the town (as a community or not) and its newspapers.

### **Role of the researcher**

A desire to adhere to feminist ethics requires that I “locate myself” in this project. Letherby (2003) opens her book on feminist research by acknowledging the importance of locating oneself in the research project.

In producing feminist work it is important that we recognize the importance of our ‘intellectual biography’ by providing ‘accountable knowledge’ in which the reader has access to details of contextually located reasoning process which gives rise to the ‘findings’, the ‘outcomes.’ [...] Our personal biographies are also relevant to the research that we do in terms of choice of topic and method, relationship with respondents and analysis and presentation of the ‘findings’, and this needs to be acknowledged (p. 9).

I come to this study influenced by an upbringing in two small towns—Greentown, Pennsylvania, located in the scenic Pocono Mountains near Lake Wallenpaupack, and Dickson City, Pennsylvania, located just outside of Scranton. I also spent four years at a small, community-minded liberal arts university—

Wilkes University—in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. While many of my colleagues at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, which is located just nine miles from the nation’s capital, were interested in researching national and elite media, I’ve always been most interested in small town, local news. Growing up, I watched my maternal grandmother’s daily news ritual—reading the local morning and afternoon papers from cover to cover. At home, the local news station played continuously—at 5 p.m., 5:30 p.m., 6 p.m., 7 p.m., 10 p.m., and 11 p.m.—on our television screen; there wasn’t much *new* news from program to program, yet my mother watched as if it was something she was *supposed* to do.

I never really noticed this influence until I was an undeclared sophomore at Wilkes University unsure of what direction my life would take. After taking a news writing course, I began writing for the weekly campus newspaper, *The Beacon*. Writing about the happenings on campus made me feel more connected to my university. I felt, suddenly, like an insider. I majored in communication studies and was an editor at that paper for two years. And during those two years, I learned about the successes and struggles of my school, my fellow students and my professors. I cared about the university—the community. I suddenly felt an ongoing urge *to know*—not just about what was happening on my campus, but also in my hometown and in the world, as well. And that’s what newspapers can do for people and places. Keep them *in the know* and connected to those around them—at least I felt that way as a writer. I never really knew how others readers felt. This case study of Laurel gave me a first real glimpse into the thoughts of readers and community members.

After finishing my degree at Wilkes, I headed west to Pittsburgh, to attend Carnegie Mellon University, where I would study rhetoric. But more importantly, perhaps, I felt homesick. To cure my sickness, I listened to my hometown radio station live on the Internet. Hearing familiar voices talk of traffic accidents on the highway I used to travel, or of news from surrounding towns, was comforting.

I settled into Pittsburgh after the first semester, when luckily, I not only managed to line up two courses with a focus on media, but I also pursued an internship with a program called *Take Back the Hill*. *Take Back the Hill* is a newspaper produced by teenagers in Pittsburgh's Hill District. The Hill District is a collection of predominantly African American neighborhoods that lies right outside of downtown Pittsburgh. In recent years, the neighborhoods have been afflicted by drug abuse and gang violence.<sup>2</sup> The newspaper project was part of an after-school program at The Hill House, an association in Pittsburgh that provides "care and support for more than 500,000 children, adults and seniors living in urban environments" (About Us, 2009). The *Take Back the Hill* project was meant to help the urban teens learn not only to express themselves, but also to reclaim their neighborhood with an understanding that the future was in their hands; their voices could make a difference. Though I only worked on this project for one semester, its premise remains with me today. Citizens can reclaim their towns and neighborhoods through writing and reading news.

When I began my doctoral studies at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism, I knew I was interested in issues related to community and local

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<sup>2</sup> During the course of my internship, a teen was gunned down late one night on the sidewalk in front of the building in which I worked with the teens. The shooting was linked to gang violence.

news, but I couldn't quite pinpoint why. Reflecting on my own experiences, however, made it abundantly clear. The power of news media in towns, neighborhoods, and communities is great. I saw this as a writer at Wilkes University, as a workshop teacher in Pittsburgh, and as an emerging scholar at the University of Maryland.

This particular project grew out of an earlier project with the journalists at the *Laurel Leader*. During my coursework, I took an ethnography course with Dr. John Caughey. As part of the course, students were challenged to carry out a project utilizing ethnographic methods. Immediately, I knew I wanted to get inside a newsroom. With the help of a few friends with connections, I soon found myself inside of the *Laurel Leader's* newsroom. The opening vignette is a scene from that project, which inspired this dissertation. I feel lucky to have spent two years in Laurel, a comfortable town where people smile at you when you walk past them down Main Street. Reading the newspaper made me feel more connected to the place, even though I knew very few residents there. This study summarizes not only the experiences of my participants as they interact with Laurel and the news media there, but also highlights some of my own experiences of adapting to a new community.

### **Chapters ahead**

Chapter 2 lays a theoretical foundation on which to examine the concepts of community. Chapter 3 reviews previous research on the relationship between community and media, as well as the role online media, such as community blogging, play in this relationship. Chapter 4 reviews previous studies of

journalism that were conducted using ethnographic methods and provides a methodological framework for this research. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 detail my participants' thoughts about community in Laurel, newspapering in Laurel, and the role of local blogging there, respectively. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes these findings and offers analysis and discussion of their impact on community journalism in Laurel. Chapter 8 also explores the theoretical implications of this research, as well as the need for additional research in this area.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
Review of Literature  
Part I: Community

A community can be located in a town, a village, or a neighborhood. It may emerge through a memorable experience or a hobby. A cause or a crisis. Religions, races, and regions. A sense of community is known to spring up in and around all of the aforementioned. Community can be found in suburbs across America, in churches, at workplaces, in “Worlds of Warcraft” and for some, in their “Second Life.” Members of the “Days of Our Lives” community connect through plot lines, while fantasy sports fanatics connect across foul lines (though both *technically* connect via cable or fiber-optic lines). Academic communities gather at their respective conventions once a year, while PTA parents and city councils gather once a month. A group of my mom’s fellow retired teachers get together for breakfast once a week, while she sees her community of “regulars” at the gym she goes to nearly every day of the week. In one way or another, we are always floating in and out of communities; they are at the center of our social lives.

Communities can be both tangible and intangible in that sometimes we see our fellow community members, while sometimes they are simply imagined (Anderson, 1983). The word *community* can refer to “actual social groups” or “a particular quality of relationship” (Williams, 1983). Sometimes communities are grounded in place, while others are grounded in feelings and senses. Communities can have thousands, or only handfuls, of members. For many of us, the thought of community makes us feel “warm and fuzzy” (Williams, 1983). It

fills some of us with nostalgia, but as James W. Carey noted, it can make others of us feel claustrophobic—as if we need to escape it (1997b). But, “unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society*, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term” (Williams, 1983). Community is complicated, no doubt.

Many have attempted to define and theorize community. Its elusiveness makes it a difficult concept with which to work—but also one that seems deceptively easy, such that many scholars use the concept, albeit in many different ways. In 1955, Hillary compiled and reviewed 94 definitions of community to find points of agreement among them only to conclude that “there is no complete agreement as to the nature of community” (p. 119). According to Carey (1997b), here agreeing with Raymond Williams, “community is one of the most difficult, complex, and ambiguous words in our language. It is a contested concept, one that represents or gathers to it contradictory, mutually exclusive images, meanings sacred and profane by turn” (p. 1). We are, he suggests “a people who are forever creating new communities and then promptly trying to figure out ways to get out of town” (1997b, p. 2). And, it’s no wonder. Like anything else, communities have both positive and not-so-positive qualities. While they often provide us with friendship, security, and a sense of belonging, they also can have a tendency to smother or squash our individuality—at least that is often one of the arguments against community.

Especially in America, the tendency toward individualism is also a force with which to reckon. People yearn for independence, and the sheer number of

lawsuits in this country attests to our desire for individual rights. Complicating all of this, new media technologies have emerged as a way to keep us connected, though we are, often times, physically apart. But, the need for community—for coming together around shared goals and values to make positive change, or simply to feel a sense of belonging—remains essential to American democratic ideals, no matter how many individual rights we look to secure. As Carey (1997b) correctly noted, “We live fully interdependent lives. The notion of the self-sufficient individual, the self that contains within his or her own person, the resources necessary to a full life, is the single most pervasive myth of our time” (p. 4). In other words, no matter how much we may desire to, we cannot go it alone—in America or any other corner of the globe. We need to rely on others to fulfill many of our physical, social, and emotional needs.

Indeed, the need for examination of “community” at a time of profound technological as well as political and cultural change is necessary and important as we face modern challenges in our interdependent lives. This study examines the role of local print press in supporting local communities at a time when the newspaper industry is struggling to survive and adapt in a new technological and virtual environment. This chapter explores many of the theories of community in order to cultivate an understanding of the conditions that allow modern communities to both develop and grow.

### **What is “community”?**

Because community is complex and difficult to define, a common practice is to define what community is not. The starting point for most discussions of

community begins in 1887 with German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies, who dichotomized the concept of community by comparing it to that of society. He wrote about the dissolution of community and the ascent of impersonal society during the rise of the industrial revolution, when there were not only significant changes in technology, but as a result, social relationships. In his treatise *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft*, translated *Community and Society*, he argued that there are fundamental differences between the two, most noticeable in peoples' behaviors and expectations toward one another. For Tönnies, community, unlike society, occurs naturally; "whenever human beings are related through their wills in an organic manner and affirm each other, we find ... *Gemeinschaft*" (Tönnies, 1963, p. 42). Communities resembled three types of natural relationships: blood, intellect, and proximity (p. 48). "*Gemeinschaft* by blood" is represented by family units or relationships—parental, spousal, sibling. These bonds are natural;

The common root of this natural condition is the coherence of vegetative life through birth and the fact that the human wills, in so far as each one of these wills is related to a definite physical body, are and remain linked to each other by parental descent and by sex, or by necessity become so linked (p. 37).

"*Gemeinschaft* of mind," refers to bonds formed around common goals that only can be achieved through "co-operation and co-ordinated action" (p. 42).

"*Gemeinschaft* of locality" is based on common habitat, such as a neighborhood. Here, "a common relation is established through collective ownership of land" (p. 42). "*Gemeinschaft* of locality" can be expanded to include a village and then a

town, though this is “the highest expression of which the idea of *Gemeinschaft* is capable,” according to Tönnies (p. 50). All three of these kinds of common bonds are informal, unlike the bonds shared in society, which are mechanical and contractual.

Opposite community, society or *Gesellschaft*, “deals with the artificial construction of an aggregate of human beings” (Tönnies, 1963, p. 64). Unlike *Gemeinschaft*, which is naturally occurring and organic, *Gesellschaft* represents bonds that are mechanical and contractual. For example, a relationship that occurs between a buyer and a seller is contractual, for there are no goods with common values. Goods and services have a price, and “nobody wants to grant and produce anything for another individual, if it be not in exchange for a gift or labor equivalent that he considers at least equal to what he has been given” (p. 65). Favors and goodwill do not exist in society. Though in both community and society, relationships are fostered and sustained, “in the *Gemeinschaft* [individuals] remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in the *Gesellschaft*, they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors” (p. 65).

Nearly one hundred years later, Poplin (1972) described a similar dichotomy between moral communities and mass societies. In moral communities, members have a sense of belonging and of common goals. They are compelled to participate in the community and see their fellow members as “whole persons who are of intrinsic significance and worth” (p. 6). By contrast, mass societies are sources of alienation; their members have divergent goals, are

not compelled to participate in collective activities, and do not regard each other as possessing worth or value (p. 6).

Similarly, Rousseau (1991) contrasted communal versus contractual theories of human association. The controversy inherent in these two theories of association, she pointed out, is between “those who make human relationships artificial or conventional and those who make them natural, inborn” which has similar properties of Tönnies’s community-society dichotomy. Contractual thinkers, who would align with Tönnies’s concept of *Gesellschaft*, “bring people into unity with each other through various kinds of agreements, negotiations, conventions, and arbitrations” (p. 2). Communal thinkers, like those in *Gemeinschaft*, “take people to be in some kind of unity with each other by nature, prior to any choices or negotiations” (p.2).

Typologies, or constructed types, of human associations (such as those discussed above) have played an important role “in theory construction and in the conduct of empirical research” (Poplin, 1972, p. 110, paraphrasing McKinney). A constructed type is “basically a simplified and sometimes purposely exaggerated model of the personality, social, or cultural system that is being examined by the investigator” (Poplin, 1972, p. 109). Popular in sociology, typologies provide researchers with some analytical and explanatory power. Though they often represent ideal types or polarizations, their prevalence indicates the “necessity to distinguish fundamentally different types of social organization in order to establish a range within which transition or intermediate forms can be comprehended” (McKinney & Loomis, 1963, p. 12). Others who have used

typologies in the spirit of Tönnies include Émile Durkheim, Charles Cooley, Robert Redfield, Howard P. Becker, Pitrim A. Sorokin, Max Weber, and Talcott Parsons (McKinney & Loomis, 1963, pp. 13-23). However, typologies are somewhat limiting in that they often times employ polar opposite types that refuse to admit a middle ground or that are hybrids. Though establishing two poles implies a continuum, classifying types that fall somewhere in between can be a challenge. How, then, do we characterize human associations that have characteristics of both the types and fall somewhere in the middle?

Selznick (1992) called the *Gemeinschaft* an “ideal type” whose imagery is “seductive.” But it has limits, and “does not encompass the full range of variables that constitute community and affect its quality” (p. 307). Sennett (1970) rejected typologies, arguing that “the trouble with this idea of two poles—village-community versus city-group—is that it has proved itself too neat, too logical, and too simple to account for the varieties of community solidarity” (p. 32). Certainly, any attempt to define *community* is likely to be messy, and as Sennett pointed out, difficult. The word *community* holds different meanings for different people; generalizing about communities “in ways that might seem to be universally applicable,” is therefore, impossible (Brydon, 2008). Selznick (1992) argued that definitions of community do not allow us to empirically study one; rather, we should be forming a “normative and descriptive” theory of community which

is at once affirmative and critical—affirmative in that it explores, identifies, and embraces the positive contributions of community to human

flourishing; critical in that it asks of a particular community how far, in what ways, and with what effects it deviates from the standard” (pp. 360-361).

A theory, rather than a definition, provides analytical power in that it incorporates the criteria that are necessary for an ideal community to exist. But, as Warren (1986) pointed out, “there is no one good community. Rather there is a whole series of good communities, depending on what weight you’ve given to each of a whole spectrum of different values” (p. 35). Therefore, if there is no ideal community that exists in reality, devising an ideal “type” by which to describe or classify a community is not a useful exercise, as Selznick suggested.

### **Toward a theory of community**

Devising an “affirmative and critical” theory of community requires a critical look at existing ideas about the nature and essence of community. Rather than create a new typology for community, which is polemic in nature, defining certain conditions that promote a sense of community provides more explanatory and evaluative criteria against which communities can be judged.

A discussion of community conditions requires acknowledgment of the ways the word *community* can be used. When preceded by ‘a’ or ‘the,’ the word community seems to denote something physical or tangible, if not at least perceptible. A community can be a place or, it can represent a group of people; sometimes it represents both simultaneously. *Community* can also be intangible—a feeling of which we can only get *a sense* (Stacey, 1974). Gusfield (1975) acknowledged these two basic uses of the word community, one being

territorial and the other being “relational” having to do with the “quality of character of human relationship, without reference to location” (p. xvi). But community is not synonymous with the words *city*, *town*, or *neighborhood*. Community isn’t always organic or found within a given location. Surely, people often live among one another and do not meaningfully interact, forming positive and nourishing relationships. For instance, the apartment building (located in Laurel, Maryland, the “community” in question for this present research) in which I lived for one year had seven other residents, only three of whom I actually knew by first name. Nor do people with similar interests necessarily form such relationships.

In other words, community is never automatic; it requires work to both form and sustain it. Community, first and foremost, is the result of the work of people. But there are certain conditions that, when present, create an opportunity for a sense of community to be felt among members as well as sustained by those members. These conditions include (1) place, (2) sharing, and (3) relationships. For community to be found or felt, all three need not be present simultaneously; however, the strongest communities will take advantage of all three conditions. Though place is becoming less central to sense of community because of new communication technologies, it remains a foundational condition under which many communities form. For even people meeting online do so in some *cyberspace*—even though it may not be physical. Therefore, the discussion of the three community conditions will begin with place.

### ***Condition 1: Place***

The Chicago School, whose notable scholars included Robert E. Park, Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth, and Morris Janowitz, used physical places—such as towns, cities, even the ghettos—to study human interactions and societal changes via localized communities. These places served as laboratories for their ethnographic fieldwork. Up until the twenty-first century, with the advent and rise in popularity of the Internet, “community” was often investigated on location, in physical spaces. Goist (1977) pointed out that “for an important segment of the American imagination, ‘the town’ is synonymous with ‘community’” (p. 3). And, for a majority of Americans, “the small town was the basic form of social organization” prior to 1910 (Tarkington & Gale 1977, p. 13). But, in 1942, Morgan saw that American communities were not living up their potential:

In modern America, the village, the neighborhood, the hamlet, or the city, often has become but an economic aggregation or only an incidental grouping, without the acquaintance, the personal relationships, and the common interests and activities, which are the essential characteristics of a community (p. 32).

Still, several scholars saw place communities as interesting sites for social study. Keller (2003) noted in her book *Community: Pursuing the Dream, Living the Reality*, about the first planned-unit development in New Jersey:

With few exceptions, community always denotes a there. The territory that encloses a community offers a proximity and density conducive to other kinds of closeness. No matter in which container—village, town,

suburb—community as captured, delimited space shapes the scale of collective life and the patterns of life created therein (p. 6).

But, in an age where new technologies have changed our relationship to physical place by allowing us to maintain connections with people and places via an Internet connection rather than being physically present for conversations or even special events, one might wonder why “place” would remain the starting point for a discussion on requirements of community. Clearly, place, or physical proximity, is no longer necessary for people to interact, form relationships and stay connected; the Internet affords opportunities for meeting new people and sharing experiences more easily and across virtual space (Evans, 2004). But while it might not be necessary, place still holds importance in an understanding of community insofar as it grounds people and provides them with a sense of identity and rootedness, which serves as an important foundation on which to build community. After all, all people do live in some “place.” Because people’s need to connect with others is so strong, when meeting new acquaintances one of the first questions they tend to ask is “so, where are you from?” (Frantz, 2003, p. 1). Place serves as an important way for people to establish something in common. According to Hummon (1990), conversations about hometowns or places of residence are not merely ways to pass time, but instead

they represent one way—and a distinctly important way in American culture—that people make sense of reality. Here, talk about small towns becomes a way of characterizing a way of life, and discussions of urban crime involve commonsense theories of how society works. Here, debates

about suburbs and cities involve deeper commitments to competing values, and questions about where one lives become queries about who one is. From this interpretive stance, widespread talk about communities suggests the centrality of community ideology and identity in American culture (p. xiv).

As Hummon pointed out, place is an important part of personal as well as communal identity. Meyrowitz (1985) highlighted “the specialness of place” in his treatise on the impact of electronic media, like the telephone, which he believed was eroding the importance of the physicality of place. Additionally, those who value face-to-face conversation, like Dewey (1927), Carey (1997a), and even Habermas (1991), argued that place—or rather social space—is important for fostering social relationships and community. Carey’s (1997a) notion of a “republican community”—one in which we recognize the interdependence of our lives—“is organized around the principle of common social space in which people mingle and become aware of one another as inhabiting a common place” (p. 10). These common places could include a town or neighborhood, but also what Oldenburg (1999) coined “third places”—or “a generic designation for a great variety of public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal, and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work” (p. 16).

Oldenburg’s “third spaces” resemble Habermas’ (1991) bourgeois public sphere, where “private people come together as a public” to debate self-governing (p. 26). Habermas’ notion of the public sphere, however, was somewhat limiting

in that it included only “propertied and educated” men who gathered in public houses such as salons and coffee houses to discuss news and other civic and economic matters (p. 37). Oldenburg’s “third spaces” represent a modern take on Habermas’ public sphere, though unlike the public sphere, there is no guarantee of the “rational-critical” debate expected in the bourgeoisie salons and coffee houses. But, third spaces do represent places where people spend leisure time with others. So, while we may identify with the town in which we lived as a source of community, we may also identify with other places, like a particular barber shop, bowling alley, bookstore, or a local pub as a site for a sense of community.

So-called “third places” act as a leveler, in that they are “accessible to the general public and [do] not set formal criteria of membership and exclusion” (p. 24). Third places expand possibilities for community by allowing more informal, yet face-to-face associations with people whom people might not regularly associate—people of a different race, social or economic status (p. 24). Those places also ground our interactions with others, often becoming one of the defining conditions for the community they have fostered.

Furthermore, physical spaces allow for actual boundaries, which make it easier for members to know when they are inside or outside of their community. Regulars at the local pub or barber shop often feel a sense of comfort and belonging upon entering, knowing that they are among others who are like-minded and accepting of them. Such boundaries, however, can also lead others—who may not be considered regulars—to feel uncomfortable, diminishing the

maximum sense of community that could be felt or achieved. As a result, there are no guarantees that community will be fostered in a town, neighborhood, or third space; place alone does not guarantee community.

A place does not become a community until people are willing to use that space to its fullest advantage by interacting in ways that helps them to foster and form meaningful relationships around things they share in common (place being one of them). Nonetheless, place—with its tendencies to ground people and provide roots and identity, as well as create boundaries—creates an ideal condition within which communities can develop and grow. The next two sections explore sharing and relationships as the two other defining conditions for community.

### ***Condition 2: Sharing***

Community is the work of people. In order for people to be willing to do the work required to develop and sustain a community, people must have an incentive or reason for doing so—beyond the general need or desire to be social creatures. When people share one or more things in common, connections are established, making interaction more likely, if not more natural. According to Morgan (1942), who wrote on small, physical American communities, “the existence of a community is determined, not by the amount of organization and social machinery, but by the extent to which common needs and interests are worked out by unified planning and action, in a spirit of mutual interest” (p. 24). There are many things people can share which draw them together, forming community. Place, the first condition for community, is something that people

can and often do share in common, which can serve as the basis for their coming together—though it is neither necessary nor sufficient for community to exist. But yet words like “hermit” describe individuals who live in seclusion. However, even modern-day hermits have the ability to be a part of a community with the development of the Internet and online communities—more on that later.

Members may share values, beliefs, or goals, like making their town a good place to live or their children’s school a positive learning environment. Goals may extend from shared experiences—like fighting breast cancer or recovering from the aftermath of a natural disaster, like Hurricane Katrina—or beliefs—like faith, spirituality, or politics. Goals should benefit the enhancement or growth of the entire community. According to Keller (2003), organizations that have members’ personal gains as the primary goal of the organization are not sufficient for community. “For community to exist, individuals must not only be close to one another but moving toward collective goals as well” (p. 8).

Experiences that can inspire shared goals may be positive or, in many cases, negative. For instance, “communities of crisis” are “fashioned more by the times than by intellectual ideas” (Fowler, 1995, p. 90). Heskin’s (1991) analysis of a group of Californians who became cooperative land owners as a result of a canceled freeway project is a fine example of people coming together as a result of a common experience and crisis. In 1975, a group of families met to fight for their homes in an area of Los Angeles, which were being potentially sold to the State of California for a freeway project (14). When the fight was over in 1980 the tenants found themselves collective owners of five “scattered-site

cooperatives.” As a result, they were forced to work together to save their homes and manage their collective space in what Heskin called (also the title of his book) a “struggle for community.” Sennett (1970) argued that “the most direct way to knit people’s lives together is through necessity, by making men need to know about each other in order to survive” (p. 138). Sometimes, experiences that draw people together are a result of survival, such as people who fostered communities as a result of their lived experiences through tragedies like 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, which requires people to focus more on their broad commonalities rather than their insignificant differences.

Community members also may share a common history (or collective memory) of living in a town through all its changes, or living through a war or even a social movement and all its challenges. Remembering times gone by can be more powerful than living in the present for many communities, when memories serve as the bond that people share. Communities based on memory are ones “that derive from long-established belief systems that link the present and the past” (Fowler, 1995, p. 91). They are molded from traditions and religion, as examples. Selznick (1992) argued that “the bonds of community are strongest when they are fashioned from strands of shared history and culture” (p. 361). Shared history helps people to feel a sense of belonging and rootedness.

Similarly, communities also form around common interests in things ranging from crafts and sports to humanitarian issues and philanthropic causes. Goode (1957) identified communities of interest when he recognizes that people of a profession often called themselves a community. These people, who are not

tied together by location but rather by professional interest, are bound by membership criteria such as education and prestige. Their common professional interests connect them in a variety of ways, which may include working together to set and uphold ethical standards of practice, strive for newer, better ways of practicing their profession, or acting both collectively and individually in a manner that is socially responsible. Though the members of such a community may not interact personally with regularity, buying into such shared goals and working towards them, even if on an individual basis, contributes to a sense of community—a sense that others like you, in a similar position, are acting in a manner similar to you in an effort to achieve goals valued by the community.

But needing to share *some things* in common does not require community members to share all things in common. Differences among members can help to strengthen community bonds as much as commonalities, if they are valued and respected. Without some differences, communities would not be able to meet the needs of their members. “As a framework for common life” communities must “develop some division of labor, some system of authority, some proliferation of roles, groups, and institutions” (Selznick, 1992, p. 367). Even in the smallest communities, individuals—equipped with their own unique skills and abilities—contribute to community life in ways that their fellow members often cannot. They lend their expertise to different activities, so that goals, which benefit the entire community, can be met. Communities often do this by forming subgroups, which help us to create “multiplex relationships” (Selznick, 1992, p. 370). Even within one community, we may serve multiple roles. For instance, a woman may

not only be a wife, mother, and sister but at the same time, a citizen, president of the PTA, neighbor, and colleague in the same or other communities (p. 370). By playing different roles, individuals not only make multiple important contributions to their communities but also, they are able to maintain their individuality. These “mediated membership[s] and multiple affiliation[s], working together, enhance solidarity at the same time that they preserve independence” (Selznick, 1992, p. 370). By playing multiple roles, people interact with many others forming relationships, the third condition for community.

### ***Condition 3: Relationships***

People can share things in common, but, whether when coming together in a physical place or in non-territorial sites, community will not form unless people work together at forging relationships, which can exploit all of the possibilities for community at hand. Community requires that people be engaged in meaningful exchanges—hence where the fuzzy notions of the term come into play. As Williams (1983) pointed out in *Keywords*, the word *community* rarely is used unfavorably; rather, it is a “warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships” (p. 76). In formulating their own definition of community, McMillan and Chavis (1986) noted that a definition needed “to represent the warmth and intimacy implicit in the term” (p. 9). For Block (2008) community “is about the experience of belonging. We are in community each time we find a place where we belong” (p. xii). In his view, the word “belong” takes on two meanings: “to belong” means to be a part or member of a community. But

“belong” also suggests that a community belongs to its member, where there is a “sense of ownership and accountability” (xii). This sense of belonging—as well as of ownership—is fostered through human relationships. Morgan (1942) argued that a community’s members are

people who to a considerable extent have cast their lots together, who share problems and prospects, who have a sense of mutual responsibility, and who actually plan and work together for common ends. There must be a mutual understanding, respect, and confidence. There must be mutual aid—willingness to help in need, not as charity, but simply as the normal mode of community life. There must be a feeling on the part of each individual that he is responsible for the community welfare (p. 22).

In his oft-cited work on the collapse of community in the U.S., Putnam (2000) postulated that community is made possible through “social capital,” or “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). As a member of a community, an individual has some of his needs met by belonging to the group; as a result of his belonging and contributions, he helps other individuals to help meet their needs, thus fostering a sense of reciprocity among the membership. Selznick (1992) added that for a community to flourish, its members are and are expected to be “appropriately present [...] on many different occasions and in many different roles and aspects” (p. 364). High levels of participation are required in order for the relationships to form and the work of community to be accomplished.

Information and communication technologies (called ICTs, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3) have changed the understanding of community, in that they allow humans to have meaningful interactions without physical proximity. However, whether or not they succeed in creating new communities or supporting existing ones are questions with which scholars are continuing to wrestle.

Wellman (1999), studying networks, argued that social network analysis changed the way we can understand community—as divorced from place. Network analysis “avoids the assumption that people necessarily interact in neighborhoods, kinship groups, or other bounded solidarities” (p. 17). Conversation and meaningful dialogue are necessary for communities to work together to maintain peace and order or achieve common goals; communication technologies now allow us to form relationships with people from across the globe. But, do these relationships create community? Selznick (1992) argued that identifying with others does not necessarily mean we have formed or will form meaningful relationships with them that will lead to community. “The mere fact that an identity-forming process is at work does not tell us how effective it is. [...] Of all the elements of community, the moral worth of a formed identity is the most problematic. (This is one reason to avoid the common error of equating a *sense* of community with community itself.)” (pp. 361-362, emphasis and punctuation in original). The Oxford English dictionary defines a “relationship” as 1) “the fact or state of being related”; 2a) “a connection or association”; 2b) “an emotional (esp. sexual) association between two people”; 3) “a condition or

character due to being related” and; 4) kinship (p. 1216-1217). By such a definition (especially 2a), it seems entirely possible that relationships can form via ICTs. However, romantic relationships sustained long-distance solely via ICTs are often difficult to maintain and are more likely to end in separation. There is something to be said for physical proximity in sustaining relationships. Carey (1997b) argued that we can only “figuratively” live in cyberspace, and until we “transcend our biology, we will by necessity live in real neighborhoods with real neighbors, real buildings with real tenants, with whom our lives are structurally intertwined. The imagined ecological community of cyberspace parasitically lives off the geographical communities which sustain and protect it” (p. 14).

Driskell and Lyon (2002) agreed that virtual communities fall short of exhibiting the qualities or traits of community grounded in place, but also in sharing, and relationships. They argued that while participants in online communities are “topically fused,” they “remain psychologically detached, with only limited liability toward other residents,” making cyberspace “less likely to support true community than the environments of local place and shared space” (p. 387).

In other words, as human beings, people are forced to live *first* in the real world, and only secondarily in the virtual world. The majority of their primary needs—like those near the base of Maslow’s hierarchy, including physiological, safety, and social needs—are satisfied by real, rather than virtual representations of, people.

But, Hill and Hughes (1997) found that participants of USENET, an online political discussion forum, did constitute a community, though one that had roots in the offline activity of more traditional political discussion and debate. The researchers concluded that “people are merely moving their age-old patterns of interactions into a new realm” (p. 25).

ICTs—which can include “old” media like newspapers and television as well as “new” media like blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and Instant Messaging—have proven to be powerful tools in supporting existing relationships; they function best when supporting existing real-world relationships rather than acting as the sole means of interaction for creating and maintaining virtual ones. These technologies are transforming culture and the ways in which people interact with one another, and they are here to stay. Inventors, scholars, and everyday users continually strive to use them in the most beneficial and efficient ways, as they can be powerful tools to support relationships, which can foster community. Without relationships, people are merely strangers to one another.

But, as Jay Rosen (1997), one of the founders of public journalism, noted, unless strangers “are also in practice as citizens” and “in a conversant relationship to one another”—no communication medium will help us to foster meaningful public life. New communication technologies may (and *should*) help us to develop and/or maintain relationships, but the work of making those relationships useful and meaningful is independent of those mediums and rests in the hands of individuals willing to do the work. ICTs can inspire and aid, but ultimate

responsibility for community lies with individuals willing to forge meaningful relationships.

All three of these conditions—place, sharing and relationships—present opportunities for communities to materialize. The strongest communities are those which exploit all three conditions simultaneously. All three conditions are important factors in the development of communities—communities that play important roles and exercise essential duties for their members, far beyond making them feel warm and fuzzy on the inside.

### **Why community matters**

As the world goes global in the twenty-first century, community is more important than ever—and not simply because it makes people feel warm and fuzzy. The way that people think about community and the way they use the word need attention and reexamination. Though Tönnies outlined community in contrast to society many years ago, several of his ideas about what constitutes “community” remain relevant today. Communities still primarily arise as a result of locality, relationships, and shared interests, as discussed at length in the previous sections. But today, rather than being requirements for community, these three are better considered “conditions.” Calling them conditions rather than requirements suggests that when they are present, community is possible—but not inevitable. And, because community is possible under these conditions, rather than inevitable, people may take steps to create community where it does not presently exist, or where it is not realizing its full potential.

For instance, architects and planners build planned residential communities to maximize interaction among residents, like building apartments in such a way that doorways face one another and jogging trails and swimming pools converge in places where people can congregate and interact. They also create physical locators, like gates, paths, even street names to help create boundaries and shape identities within a certain physical community (Sidney Brower, class lecture, April 23, 2008). But, though her focus is on great American cities, in her canonical book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jacobs (1961) rejected the notion that planning alone can actually create community. She argued that planners must understand function before they can design form: “It is futile to plan a city’s appearance, or speculate on how to endow it with a pleasing appearance of order, without knowing what sort of innate, functioning order it has. To seek for the look of things as a primary purpose or as the main drama is apt to make nothing but trouble” (pp. 14-15). Surely, just as *place* alone cannot create community, neither can gates nor walking paths. However, such designs can create conditions under which community can form—though there are no guarantees, much to planners’ dismay.

Likewise, marketing specialists strive to develop communities around specific brands, though their motivations are somewhat different than that of a city planner. Marketers try to draw people into brand communities in order to build or sustain a profit margin. These specialists exploit the term *community* for its connotations of belonging. However, according to Steiner,

the best of the branded communities at most supply a veneer of identification with symbols and rituals, and perhaps even acceptance of some principles for governing membership and behavior. They lack, however, commitment to mutual aid, to respectful communication, to mutual learning and respect for difference (2010).

Many people also earn a living as “community organizers.” In 2009, community organizing experienced a resurgence, no doubt as a result of the “Obama effect” (Rimer, 2009). Barack Obama, elected United States president in 2008, began his career as a community organizer in Chicago. Typically, community organizers “knock on doors, attend community meetings, visit churches and synagogues and mosques, and work with unions and civic groups and block associations to help ordinary people build power and counter the influence of self-interested insiders and highly paid lobbyists at all levels of government” (What is Organizing?). Community organizers bring into the discussion the voices that have previously been excluded by leaders or government officials (Kiefer, 2008). The need for community organizers—the need to bring more voices into discussions—highlights the work required for community to be realized. For community to form, all (or most) of its members need “to be present,” as Selznick (1992) pointed out. When some members exclude others, and others fail to participate, community is stifled. In order to get community back on track, organizers work as mediators, trying to encourage more members to get involved as active participants in the community. But is a community a *true* community if it is forced or facilitated by an organizer?

Tönnies, who believed community is organic, would argue no. But, Tönnies was writing on community at a time when there were far fewer complicating factors that interfered with the sustenance of organic communities. Especially in developed countries, like the United States, culture has transformed in ways that make community more work than in the past. Private life is now more possible in ways that, two centuries ago, it was not; communication and transportation technologies helped to make it possible. Entertainment media keep people in their homes rather than forcing them to go outside of their homes to occupy their time. People, in general, have more “stuff” to contend with, as “citizenship now is a year-round and day-long activity, as it was only rarely in the past” (Schudson, 1998, p. 311). Carey (1997a) pointed out that political communities “founded on civic ties rather than blood relations or bureaucratic rule are rare creatures in history” because they are difficult to sustain.

Yet, community remains fundamental to our private and public lives. Today, many communities are not based in blood relations, but rather in places, interests, and inorganic relationships—relationships not based on accidental or chosen associations but rather on deliberate and purposeful connections built to achieve goals. All communities are fragile, and like republican forms of government, “have a definite beginning, a point of origin in historical time, and therefore, they presumably have an end” (Carey, 1997a, p. 207). The struggle for community is difficult and important because communities serve important purposes that go well beyond heightening our sociability and making us feel warm and fuzzy. The work of community organizers and architectural planners is

not so much for creating community—as that is the work of its members—but rather helping along, or creating, the conditions under which community is more likely to develop. Fostering and supporting community is important because 1) in neighborhoods as well as nations, all lives are in some way interconnected and interdependent; 2) a prosperous democracy requires community; and 3) the twenty-first century presents global problems which, in many cases, require and depend upon local solutions, carried out by people working together in communities. The next sections examine these three reasons in more detail.

### ***We're all connected***

First, peoples' lives are interdependent, and communities can positively exploit that interdependence. The old cliché “no man is an island” applies here. Thinking that one can be truly self-sufficient is the “single most pervasive image and myth of our time” (Carey, 1997b). According to Hopper (2003), society has encouraged greater individualism—a value on which the United States was founded—which threatens the survival of communities everywhere. Such a sense of individualism, at least in the United States, stems from the country's “rights tradition” (Carey, 1997b). The individual's right to choose, to pursue happiness, to remain free from the constraints and rule of the state, and to climb the economic ladder all tend to stand in the face of *community*. These choices and pursuits pave solitary paths with little or no regard for others.

According to Walzer (1995), Americans “live in a society where individuals are relatively disassociated and separated from one another, or better, where they are continually separating from one another, continually in motion,

often in solitary and apparently random motion” (p. 57-58). He outlined four mobilities that contribute to our detachment from meaningful communities—geographic, social, marital, and political. Geographically, Americans move—change residence—regularly, weakening our sense of place. Socially, Americans change social class as a result of income and education rather easily. Family life is disrupted by high rates of separation, divorce, and remarriage. And politically, Americans “choose for themselves rather than voting as their parents did, and they choose freshly each time rather than repeating themselves” (p. 58-59). These four mobilities help advance individuals. People can afford to move to a better neighborhood. Their careers launch them from the lower to the middle class, or from the middle to the upper class. They develop intellectually, surpassing the intellect of their parents.

All of these changes create divisions and separations. When people change economic and social classes, they often have less in common with those whose class they formerly shared. When people move, they leave behind their former community of neighbors. Moving and changing threatens that which we have in common, creating tension within, or destruction of, community. The American way of life has had a tendency to push people apart from one another; but communities can do the work of bringing people back together, interacting because we want to, not because we need to in order to get something out of that interaction.

An example of American individualism at work is seen in our economic model, in which we enter into contracts with others in order to get what we want;

“we only have need for individuals aggressively pursuing their own self-interest” (Carey, 1997b, p. 6). This model “paints a picture of a society without community” (p. 6). Economics is the process of exchange or trade, which can be transacted from individual to individual. But economic institutions “would prove impossible to efficiently operate” without “elementary particles of trust and mutual understanding, loyalty, and mutual regard” (p. 6). In order for contracts to be binding, a common culture is required, one in which parties understand one another and believe each will uphold his end of the bargain. Otherwise, no one could ever be assured that, individually, he or she would come out of the deal unscathed. But an economic model functioning within a community—one in which social capital, trust, and reciprocity are at work—make contracts easier to form and likely, more binding. When entering into business with a neighbor, or the friend of a friend, there is something to lose if the deal goes bad. Friendship or trust can be lost as can the possibility of future contracts. Individual prosperity is reliant upon others’ willingness to enter into contracts now and in the future.

Carey’s notion of economics, which requires community, is in contrast to Tönnies concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. According to Tönnies, the realm of economics exists in *Gesellschaft*, or society. And, “human *Gesellschaft* is conceived as mere coexistence of people independent of each other” (1963, p. 34). *Gesellschaft*, unlike *Gemeinschaft*, is “a mechanical aggregate and artifact” (p. 35). People are generally hostile toward one another, and “nobody wants to grant and produce anything for another individual, if it be not in exchange for a gift or labor equivalent that he considers at least equal to what he has given” (p.

65). Yet Tönnies himself admitted that “each act of giving and receiving implicitly includes a social will” (p. 66). Though he does not define what he means by “social will,” he seems to be implying that there needs to be some levels of trust among the individuals engaged in the exchange in order for the transaction to succeed. Though interactions that are economically or contractually based may take place only once, often contractual interactions—with grocers and service people—are repetitive. People return to the same stores or do business with the same people repeatedly because they develop a level of trust—a relationship—with them.

An interesting example of such an economic relationship built around and upon community was found at the 2009 annual gay pride festival, known as PrideFest, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Executive Director of the Rainbow Alliance and PrideFest organizer John Dawe said that several vendors returned to the second annual festival, many coming from across the state to participate: “This is just another festival, and it’s bringing everyone with a common interest and culture together *with vendors who want to do business with them*” (Moody, 2009, emphasis added). Dawe’s comments suggest that because of the nature of the festival, some vendors may have been (or perhaps were) unwilling to do business at the event because they did not agree with or accept the nature of the event: a celebration of gay and lesbian sexuality. However, other vendors who accept or support the gay community did travel, some more than 500 miles, to do business with the festival-goers. And, because it is an annual event, this is likely a business—and community—relationship that will continue so long as the

festival returns to Wilkes-Barre each year. Indeed, Kates (2004) found that gay men show community solidarity in their spending decisions, choosing to support gay-friendly brands and boycott anti-gay brands.

The PrideFest example demonstrates that there is more to economic and business transactions than an exchange of goods; morals and values are involved, and at the core, community emerges among those who participated in the event and appears to last, as gay-friendly vendors travel to support their patrons, who do likewise. Relationships (even business ones), built on trust, acceptance, and common interests are essential components of community. And, elements of community are—and need to be—present in society. If there were not, we would not, as Carey argued, be able to operate an economy efficiently.

Beyond contracts, interdependence has a profound impact in the individuals we become. Gladwell (2008), in his book *Outliers*, argued that the reason some people succeed and others do not has much more to do with the people around them—their community—than with individual aptitude or ability.

People don't just rise from nothing. We do owe something to parentage and patronage. The people who stand before kings may look like they did it all by themselves. But in fact, they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot. It makes a difference where and when you grew up. The culture we belong to and the legacies passed down by our forebears shape the patterns of our achievement in ways we cannot begin to

imagine. It's not enough to ask what successful people are like, in other words. It is only by asking where they are *from* that we can unravel the logic behind who succeeds and who doesn't (p. 19, emphasis in original).

As Gladwell argued, people cannot fully understand the individual unless it is in the context of those around that individual. Community has a profound effect on us all—it determines the person someone becomes and, as Gladwell showed, it very well may determine individual success. As much as advocates of classical liberalism and libertarians would like to think that individuals can prosper without community—in some form—it is unlikely, if not impossible.

### ***Democracy requires community***

Like economics, democracy requires community. Though founded on many ideals of classical liberalism, democracy—which requires open dialogue, collaboration, and an active citizenry—is carried out in communities by groups of people working collectively rather than individually. Michael J. Sandel (1996) showed in his book, *Democracy's Discontent*, that the erosion of community in America coincided with the “crisis of self-government” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (p. 205).

A national economy dominated by vast corporations diminished the autonomy of local communities, traditionally the site of self-government. Meanwhile, the growth of large, impersonal cities, teeming with immigrants, poverty, and disorder, led many to fear that Americans lacked sufficient moral and civic cohesiveness to govern according to a shared conception of the good life (p. 205).

At the root of this problem is a disconnect between the liberal and republican views of American government. Central to the liberal view, according to Sandel, is the individual's capacity to choose his or her ends. From this view stemmed the contemporary notion of individual rights. The republican view centers in shared self-governance, which requires "a sense of belonging, a concern for the whole, a moral bond with the community whose fate is at stake" (p. 5). While both of these views have been formative in our understanding of American democracy, Sandel argued that of late, liberalism is more dominant. He said, "In recent decades, the civic or formative aspect of our politics has largely given way to the liberalism that conceives persons as free and independent selves, unencumbered by moral or civic ties they have not chosen" (p.6).

The tendency to lean on individual rights has become second nature for most Americans. Carey (1997a) argued that "the assertion of rights has become a mere tropism, as automatic as a plant turning toward light. In the biological world, however, tropisms get organisms into trouble when the environment radically changes" (p. 209). Though individual rights are important, they do not necessarily trump the needs of the community, as the republican conception of freedom and democracy shows. Rather than deny the rights tradition, a proper balance between communities and individuals is needed, respecting the need for individual rights—and individuality—but understanding the importance of living and working together. Upholding individual rights while forsaking community is not plausible; democracy requires community if it is to be sustained.

Without community, open dialogue, conversation and genuine concern for others are not plausible nor, as a result, is democracy. Community, open dialogue and conversation in the public sphere are not easy to achieve. In 1927, Dewey proclaimed that “optimism about democracy is to-day under a cloud.” In 2009, the same proclamation could very well be heard. Present day headlines proclaim that voter turnout is generally low; newspaper circulation is way down (Arango, 2009), and “public life is not going well” (Merritt, 1997, p. xiii). According to Warren (2001), the “foundation for people’s development as members of society and as democratic citizens lies in local communities. It is the institutions of local community life, schools, churches, and less formal interactions that integrate people into democratic society” (p. 22). If this is true, communities have the potential to revitalize democracy, encouraging a more active citizenry in public life.

In many instances, citizens are active in both public (community-oriented) and private (individually-oriented) life (Schudson, 1998). But, private life is more easily possible today than it was in the past; communication and transportation technologies make it so. While this poses challenges to democracy and community, it is a reality of the modern world. Rather than allow the private and the public domains to clash or to hinder one another, people must find meaningful ways for them to work together. They cannot continue to give in to the temptation to retreat into their private lives because they share the same lifeboat (Carey, 1997b, p. 6). A strong democracy requires that people be active in their local communities, which can lead to a stronger, more vibrant public arena, where

people can willingly and openly participate in dialogue and debate to solve problems. This is especially needed now, when global issues are affecting us at local levels, and vice versa.

***Global issues need local solutions***

Global issues are impacting people locally and, likewise, local problems are growing into global concerns. Examples of such impacts are everywhere. For instance, a growing homeless population is the result of increasingly unstable global economies. Homelessness touches communities across the globe, but is often dealt with on local levels. Nearly every global issue—from global warming to public health—has both local implications and, in many cases, local responses or solutions. Community response—beginning at local levels—will be crucial for reacting to the growing challenges we face domestically and abroad. Organizing locally first, in small numbers, can begin the necessary processes to help preserve natural resources, find renewable energy solutions, put an end to poverty, hunger and homelessness, and cure diseases. Democracy is more than a political form of government; democracy is empowerment. Placing power in the hands of ordinary citizens to organize locally and to take action through shared dialogue and community building is the essence of democracy. Refreshing, and in some cases, rebuilding our local communities is essential for reviving American democracy. Building social capital is one way to do this; but, perhaps more important is seeing the bigger picture and creating stronger links across different communities (Warren, 2001). Retreating into the safety and comfort of communities—without looking beyond them—is nearly the equivalent of retreating into private,

individual life. “We need a strategy that brings people together across communities” in order to begin thinking globally by acting locally (Warren, 2001). Just as individuals cannot go it alone, neither can communities. Communities, too, require interdependence; they must take advantage of resources outside of their own borders in order to remain viable and effective (Warren, 1986). But how, in a world where people are scattered, where people succumb to tendencies to retreat into private life, and where face-to-face conversations are few and far between, can communities—and democracy—remain vibrant?

The next chapter explores the role of local journalism in creating, supporting, and sustaining local communities. In the absence of face-to-face dialogue, journalists and their newspapers play an important role in sustaining the community conversation.

In order to maintain the balance between individuals and communities, we need third parties—or “fair-minded participants” (Merritt, 1997) to make heard the instances when we get off kilter. Communities need newspapers as much as—if not more than—newspapers need communities. After all, “communities are human systems given form by conversations that build relatedness” (Block, 2008). When community members are too numerous (or too preoccupied with their personal lives) to engage in face-to-face dialogue with their neighbors and to come together at city hall to discuss not only problems, but solutions, newspapers serve as the facilitator of the community conversation. On the pages of the newspaper, community members should hear each others’ voices. They should

feel compelled to contribute to the conversation through letters to the editor. They should understand the community's values, its challenges, and its goals. And, most importantly, they should feel as though they are a part the community about which they read each week on the pages of their community newspaper. Journalism—and specifically community journalism—plays an important role in the life cycles of communities, in supporting democracy, and in maintaining relationships among neighbors, friends and civic leaders. Chapter 3 examines community journalism as a medium for community, discussing the role of journalists and ordinary citizens in helping to maintain communities in time (Carey, 1989).

**CHAPTER THREE**  
Review of Literature  
Part II: Community journalism

Because community is important—important for individuals as well as societies, and especially for democracies—an examination of community journalism, the method by which people record the good works and challenges of communities as well as engage in conversations, is necessary.

Journalists use a variety of communication technologies to do community journalism in the twenty-first century, including radio, television, the Internet, and even social media. No longer are they restricted to ink and newspaper, though it remains one of the central ways communities spread their news. This chapter examines the community newspaper and its ability to support local, physical communities. The community newspaper, like several other communication media, is experiencing transition, as more and more readers look to the Web in search of local news, and as many newspapers—community ones included—shut their doors or cut back their staffs for economic reasons. But, before a discussion of the challenges of community journalism can begin, a definition of the practice must be explicated. After doing that, this chapter explores the relationship between community and communication, with special attention given to community journalism—as done by professionals and amateurs using “old” and “new” media—to better understand its role in supporting community life.

**State of community journalism**

Community journalism is often thought of as small-town journalism—carried out by weekly (sometimes daily) newspapers with circulations fewer than

50,000; radio stations with short reach; television news stations in small markets (Lauterer, 2006; Howley, 2005). But, it can also comprise small niche media outlets targeting specific groups of people with particular identities and interests. According to the National Newspaper Association, “the distinguishing characteristic of a community newspaper is its commitment to serving the information needs of a particular community,” and “despite the emergence of new information technologies such as the Internet, community newspapers continue to play an important role in the Information Age. Over 150 million people are informed, educated and entertained by a community newspaper every week” (About Community Newspapers, 2008).

Ziff (1986) characterized two kinds of journalism—provincial and cosmopolitan. The community newspaper, or “the provincial newspaper ... is implicated in local values and if it feels it must criticize a deeply held community value, it does so for the benefit of other, deeply lived communal beliefs” (p. 164). In contrast, the cosmopolitan newspaper “insists on an objective and dispassionate accounting of the news, and may stand above local values in its editorials” (p. 164). Ziff challenged the argument that journalism “is or ought to be governed by universal standards of ethics and responsibility” (p. 159). While some standards, like ensuring accurate content, are universal, many others are not. The community, or provincial newspaper, because of its literal closeness to its audience, must approach reporting with a great deal more thought and concern for its audience, its reputation, and in many cases, its bottom line.

Jock Lauterer, long-time community journalist turned journalism professor and scholar, said, in comparing big city dailies, that at community newspapers “there is a profound philosophical difference in the way we look at our community, at our readers, at our advertisers, and how we write, handle and package the news” (1995, p. xiv). That difference, he went on to say, is in the way they understand the ones about and for whom they write: “At a community newspaper, news is not events happening to sources. News is people, your people, and how the changing world affects their everyday lives. News is people being caught up in events” (p. xiv). Community journalists understand the essence of community—the importance of place, of the relationships that people maintain, and of the values and goals they share and work toward. They also understand that they cannot hide behind a masthead. Their readers are their neighbors, their fellow church members, and the people they’ll see in line at the local grocery store or coffee shop.

By contrast, the rest of the news media, according to Lauterer, is the subject of readers’ frequent complaints. Some of those complaints include that the news media are not involved in the community and maintain an ivory tower mentality, they are condescending, sensation-driven, self-righteous, impersonal, inaccessible, unaccountable and uncaring (Lauterer, 2006, pp. 71-73).

This anecdotal evidence may provide one explanation for why weekly community papers far outnumber dailies. “People hunger for community, but the economic reality of the mainstream media is that they can’t supply that need anymore, or choose not to” (Densmore, quoted in Fanslow, 2009 p. 24). As of

February 1, 2009, *Editor & Publisher* reported there were 6,055 community newspapers and only 1,408 daily papers circulating in the United States (Maddux, 2009). According to *Editor & Publisher*, a “weekly” is defined as “any publication printing at least once a week, but less than four times a week (one to three times a week)” (Maddux, 2009). The outlook for daily metro papers only has become grimmer as the popularity of online news and an economic recession further weaken the industry. “Daily newspaper circulation has declined every year since 1987” (Sessions Stepp, 2008). Maddux (2009) reported that the “total U.S. daily newspaper circulation dropped 2.1 million, from 50.7 million to 48.6 million” as of February 2009 (Maddux, 2009, “Part I: Dailies”). Circulation of weekly papers (paid and free) is nearly on par with dailies, at a total of 45.5 million as of February 1, 2009 (Maddux, 2009, “Part II: Weeklies”). Beyond this data, there is little literature on the difference between free versus paid weeklies, or on the difference between chain versus independently owned weeklies, although such literature could be useful. The growth of the Internet, major media conglomeration mergers, and a growing distrust of newspapers generally, have been cited as some of reasons for the decline (Seeyle, 2006; *The State of the News Media* 2004).

The 2009 Survey of Journalism & Communication Graduates, conducted by the James M. Cox Jr. Center for International Mass Communication Training and Research at Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Georgia, showed that the job market for new graduates with bachelor’s degrees in journalism was grim. Journalism and mass communication graduates faced a

14.9 percent unemployment rate as compared to the U.S. labor force, at 9.8 percent. Those graduates who did find employment at daily or weekly newspapers made comparable median starting salaries, of \$27,000 and \$25,000 respectively. And, of those searching for employment in journalism, 18 percent desired to work at dailies, while 11.7 percent wanted to find work at weeklies, though nearly 20 percent reported looking for work in online markets. Just more than three percent of graduates seeking work in print reported finding work in dailies, while 1.7 percent reported finding work at a weekly (Becker, et al., 2009).<sup>3</sup>

The job market for young journalists looking for work at community weeklies is difficult to crack, likely because community newspapers tend to operate with very small staffs. Each of the two newspapers under examination in this study has only a handful of editors and reporters. Yet, the community each staff serves is 20,000 times its size. How can five journalists cover a community of 100,000 residents? Can the few stories they write represent the diversity of voices in the community? Certainly, communication in many forms is an essential component to successfully community life—and newspapering is merely one form of such communication. The next section examines the role of communication in community life.

### **Communication in community life**

According to Carey (1989), ritual communication “conceives [of] communication as a process through which a shared culture is created, modified, and transformed.” The notion of ritual communication provides the theoretical

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<sup>3</sup> The survey did not explicate how “daily” or “weekly” were defined.

grounds for a discussion of the purposes of and possibilities for community journalism (p. 43). Typically thought of as a means of moving bits of information across space, the transmission model of communication conceives of it as a mechanism for sending and receiving information. The transmission model puts a premium on sending greater amounts of information more quickly and more efficiently across greater space. Carey's ritual view of communication suggests that communication—both interpersonal and mediated—is not simply a means to transmit information, but rather a ritual that draws “persons together in fellowship and commonality” (p. 43).

In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as ‘sharing,’ ‘participation,’ ‘association,’ ‘fellowship,’ and ‘the possession of a common faith.’ This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the term ‘commonness,’ ‘communion,’ ‘community,’ and ‘communication.’ A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs (p. 18).

Carey's ritual theory makes clear that conversation and communication are the elements that make community possible. A sense of community is created and sustained through the process of communicating—whether face to face or through media. Citizens must share things in common as well as be actively engaged—talking with one another—to make community work. Furthermore, Carey's ritual theory suggests that people cannot communicate effectively if they do not

appreciate—and seek out and discuss—that which they share in common rather than that which forces them apart. This means, when applied to community journalism, reporting good news as well as bad news. An emphasis on sharing need not mean reaching consensus on controversial issues in the community, but rather a willingness to engage meaningfully with one another on the basis of some basic shared beliefs; understanding that despite differences (and differences of opinion) people all have some fundamental goals and values and based on that, they can find ways to work together to resolve problems and challenges.

Dewey (1927)—a scholar whose work significantly influenced Carey’s thinking—argued that true “local communal life becomes a reality” only through face-to-face communication, or conversation (p. 218). Discussing the superiority of conversation versus publication, he argued

Vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator. Publication is partial and the public which results is partially informed and formed until the meanings it purveys pass from mouth to mouth. There is no limit to the liberal expansion and confirmation of limited personal intellectual endowment which may proceed from the flow of social intelligence *when that circulates by word of mouth from one to another in the communications of the local community* ... But that intelligence is dormant and its communications are broken, inarticulate and faint until it possesses the local community as its medium (p. 219, emphasis added).

Years earlier, in 1916, however, Dewey argued that

persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity, any more than a man ceases to be socially influenced by being so many feet or miles removed from others. A book or a letter may institute a more intimate association between human being separated thousands of miles from each other than exists between dwellers under the same roof (quoted in Barney, 2004, p. 36).

Dewey flip-flopped here; but he made two interesting arguments, both of which have merit and modern-day relevance. Speech and conversation, as well as mediated forms of communication, are both very important to community communication. Park (1922) demonstrated this point in his study of the immigrant press in America, where he argued that the “mother tongue is the natural basis of human association and organization” (p. 5). Immigrants who came to America organized their lives and formed their communities on the basis of the language they spoke.

Our great cities, as we discover upon close examination, are mosaics of little language colonies, cultural enclaves, each maintaining its separate communal existence within the wider circle of the city’s cosmopolitan life. Each one of these little communities is certain to have some sort of cooperative or mutual aid society, very likely a church, a school, possibly a theater, but almost invariably a press (p. 6-7).

Park pointed to the importance of interpersonal as well as mediated communication in immigrant communities, but more importantly to the significance of a local language, where members of a community share a common

accent and vocabulary with negotiated meanings. Learning such a language is crucial if one is to function fully in a community context. As a result, such a distinction is important in the context of community communication.

Carey (1997c) argued that “all ritual begins ... in the gridless ambience of conversation” but resisted Dewey’s 1927 insistence on face-to-face conversation by suggesting that

such ritual [face-to-face communication], of course, can be displaced (abbreviated, transformed, resituated) in secondary, mediated forms.

However, these forms—the printing press, television, the Internet—do not so much create communities as remind us of communities elsewhere embodied in first-order ritual and conversation (p. 315).

The two scholars make a similar point—that true community life has its foundation in face-to-face interactions and personal discussions and that mediated communication cannot create community, but rather point to ones that already exist in real life. This point, however, has been a matter for debate.

### ***New communication technologies***

New communication technologies, like the Internet, have in some cases, proved otherwise. Several of these technologies have either supported existing communities or fostered new ones through their channels. New communication technologies allow relationships to form where previously—without such technologies—such relationships were difficult, if not impossible. Rakow (1992) studied women’s use of the telephone in a small Midwestern community. She found that “women’s talk holds together the fabric of the community, building

and maintaining relationships and accomplishing important community functions” (p. 34). In Rakow’s case, the telephone supplemented or supported an existing community. Rakow found that the talk the women did on the telephone did not replace the importance of actual get-togethers and found that the women’s use of the telephone was closely linked to their location and mobility (or lack thereof). Several of the women she interviewed lived away from their families (because of their husbands’ work or choice to live in a different location). Rakow found that the telephone may ease the separation from family and friends; it may help transcend the restricted mobility of those confined by small children, the illness of their husbands or other relatives, old age, disabilities or even fear; but it does not solve these problems. A telephone is not an equal substitute for a full, secure, purposeful life among others. Indeed, in some respects the use of the telephone in these cases should be seen as symptom—of isolation, loneliness, boredom, or fear—rather than as a cure (p. 151).

Apple, Inc. might disagree with Rakow. The powerhouse technology company recently took Rakow’s understanding of the ways a telephone provides connection to physically disconnected people to a whole new level with iPhone 4’s “FaceTime,” which allows cell phone callers not only to hear the person on the other end of the line, but also to see them. Apple described the new feature this way:

People have been dreaming about video calling for decades. iPhone 4 makes it a reality. With the tap of a button, you can wave hello to your

kids, share a smile from across the globe, or watch your best friend laugh at your stories — iPhone 4 to iPhone 4 or to the new iPod touch over Wi-Fi. No other phone makes staying in touch this much fun (FaceTime).

Apple, with this latest breakthrough in telephone technology, relies on the notion that virtual connections are *real* connections, and while they are a substitution for physical connection, they are no less *real* simply because they are virtual.

Wellman (2001) seemed to confirm Rakow's findings in his discussion of individuals who stay connected through technological or virtual networks, saying "well-connected people [feel] lonely because of the lack of physically-present community members" (p. 243). Yet, Wellman argued that communities should be defined socially rather than spatially.

He said contemporary communities are not limited to neighborhoods anymore, as people achieve and maintain relationships outside of their neighborhoods "through phoning, writing, driving, railroading, transiting, and flying" (2001, p. 233). Since the advent of the telephone, and as Wellman pointed out, other communication and transportation technologies have emerged, which play a role in community life. One of the most recent of those developments is the Internet, which made the creation of virtual communities possible. William Gibson, the science fiction novelist who in his 1982 novel *Burning Chrome* also coined the word "cyberspace," said in a 2007 Rolling Stone interview that in the near future, the line between the virtual and the real will become blurred. "One of the things our grandchildren will find quaintest about us is that we distinguish the

digital from the real, the virtual from the real. In the future, that will become literally impossible” (Leonard, 2007).

But, at present, scholars of community are still making the distinctions. In “geographically dispersed virtual communities,”—communities that have no roots in physical place—“participants ... have strong interpersonal feelings of belonging, being wanted, obtaining important resources and have a shared identity” (Hollander, 2002, p. 32, paraphrasing Blanchard and Horan; Wellman, 2001, p. 247). They are formed by individuals using the tools made possible by the Internet. In geographically dispersed virtual communities, members may never actually “meet” one another or interact in a face-to-face manner. But, Wellman argued that members of these communities “are truly in cyberplaces, and not just cyberspaces” (Wellman, 2001, p. 247). Cyberspace is “a medium by which people arrange things and fill in the gaps between meetings” (Wellman, 2001, p. 247). It has also been defined as “the online world of computer networks” (Cyberspace). But, cyberspaces become cyberplaces, according to Wellman, when frequented by community members more often than they frequent physical communities. In these cyberplaces, participants have “strong interpersonal feelings of belonging, being wanted, obtaining important resources and having a shared identity” (Wellman, 2001, p. 247).

Much like geographically-based places, cyberplaces become meeting places for members to interact with one another, much like physical “third spaces” (Oldenberg, 2001). But, like even geographically-based places, not all cyberspaces become cyberplaces. Rather, in some instances, the Internet has

played a role in supporting existing geographically-based communities.

“Physically based virtual communities” form as a result of an existing physical community and support, rather than create an entirely new, community (Hollander, 2002, p. 32, paraphrasing Blanchard and Horan).

This study of two Maryland weeklies is most concerned with the use of internet communication technologies (ICTs) to support physically-based communities, though further exploration of virtual communities is warranted, since all forms of media have the potential to support or sustain community communication, whether via “old” or “new” forms. Several studies, like Rakow’s research on telephone, have shown this potential. Cell phones (Wei & Lo, 2006), email discussion lists (Hampton, 2007), and online newspaper message forums (Rosenberry, 2010) have all been shown to help sustain relationships and, in doing so, create a sense of community among users. Even as technologies continue to advance, making it easier to *stay in touch* without actually *being close enough to touch*, and as local communities grow too big for all residents to personally know one another, both “old” and “new” forms of mediated communication have the potential to provide interaction that at worst facilitates a separate and secondary community, and at best, inspires real community on a personal, face-to-face level. The next section examines some of the most important and influential works demonstrating how “old” media—specifically newspapers—have helped to sustain community.

## **Newspapers and community**

### *An historical glance at early American community presses*

Print has long been understood to maintain connections and support community. In a collection of historical case studies about the relationship between local communities and the press, Nord (2001) articulated some of the interesting ways that newspapers have been used in community life. The cases cover a wide span, going back to Puritan times and leading up through twentieth century. He examined the production of news by looking closely at “the producers, the institutions, and the content” of early journalism (p. 14). Nord speculated that for those who refrain from participation in public affairs, the newspaper “is the place we go for this community experience; indeed, it is the only place where this community exists” (p. 13). He offered, in his introduction, an example from his own contemporary local newspaper in Bloomington, Indiana of a letter to the editor written by a fellow Bloomington resident. The woman sent her sympathies and regards to fellow residents who were dealing with the disappearance of their daughter. She wrote: “To the Behrman family, I want you to know that I have kept you and Jill in my prayers since day one. I have never met you, nor may ever, but that doesn’t matter. We are part of the same ‘family’—God’s family—and I share in your sorrow” (p. 13). Nord argued that this letter writer’s “community experience” comes “not from face-to-face associations but from the printed word” (p. 14).

He also offered a number of ways that local journalism has facilitated a sense of community. He argued—as did the famous Chicago sociologist Robert

Park—that newspapers, which used a standardized language via which people could talk about politics and public life, helped to form early American communities; indeed, they helped forge the nation. Interestingly, these early newspapers were also characterized by controversy, which they amplified on their pages rather than diffused (p. 89). This example shows that newspapers do not necessarily need to act as boosters in order to support a community and foster shared goals. Working out public affairs problems via public dialogue—and on the pages of newspapers—can help to strengthen communities.

Nord's analysis of nineteenth century Chicago newspapers also demonstrated that newspapers, especially the *Chicago Daily News*, “provided their audience with a limited, organized, common frame of reference, so that diverse city dwellers could communicate with each other—communicate in the sense that they could think about the same things at the same time and thus share a vision of social reality” (p. 111). Nord's investigation of Chicago newspapers demonstrated the capabilities of a newspaper in facilitating community life in cities, towns and even urban neighborhoods, as is the case of the Chicago newspapers. Especially in urban areas, where “society” seems more prevalent than “community” as a result of sheer population numbers, newspapers can do much in the way of creating a sense of fellowship among the dwellers in a specific locality.

Nord showed the undeniable relationship between the practice of journalism and the social, political, and technological climate within which it functioned. For instance, during the early and mid-1800s, newspapers helped

individuals to feel like participants in democracy. Nord stated: “In a democratic society such as the United States, the newspaper emerges as one of the few bulwarks against the menace of individualism” (p. 93). His study of the Chicago *Daily News* at the height of modernization and urbanization revealed that the newspaper had an “urban vision” born out of changing times and necessity. This vision was one of a public community, “*public* because it was nontraditional, not face to face, nongeographical, built upon government, formal organization, and mass communication; *community* because it was rooted in shared private interests, common experience and sympathy, and a deep sense of interdependence” (p. 128). The newspapers played a crucial role in creating a sense of community in the cities they served.

Steiner (1983) examined a geographically dispersed community—of women suffragists—and the ways its members used print to keep their community alive. In her analysis of nineteenth century suffrage periodicals, Steiner found that the stories and experiences shared on the pages of the suffrage periodicals enabled the women to bond as a community with shared interests. She concluded that “no national movement could have survived, much less succeeded, without the newspapers which dramatized the experiences and visions of the new women and provided the ground on which they could come together as a community” (p. 12).

Park (1922), to return to the aforementioned study of the immigrant press in America, showed specifically the necessity of community presses. Park predicted the continuation of such immigrant publications without a foreseeable

end, stating that “as long as there are people in this country who have common racial or nationalist interests, they will have papers to interpret events from their own peculiar point of view. [...] The press has become an organ of speech. Every group has its own” (pp. 12-13). In the case of the immigrant presses, their languages provided definitive boundaries; those who could not read or understand the language of the press could not have access to the community and to its distinctive culture and ethos. Likewise, today newspapers, especially small, local newspapers, have features that provide boundaries. For instance, a local town paper only prints crime reports for infractions committed within the town’s boundaries, and only prints obituaries of people from the town, making some of that information irrelevant to people outside of those boundaries. A local paper only tells the stories of the people within its publication’s scope or reach. It communicates, via a local language, the morals and values important to its readers. In doing this, the local newspaper presents, and has a hand in creating, a distinctive community culture that is grounded in place and time. It sets examples of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. It hails some and vilifies others. In doing so, it creates a shared culture. Of course, these examples—provided by Nord, Steiner and Park—represent newspapers in an idyllic sense, a point at which they reach their fullest potential in helping to create a sense of community among readers.

### ***The 20<sup>th</sup> century community press in America***

In the mid-twentieth century, more formal studies of what is today called “community journalism” began. Morris Janowitz (1952), an urban sociologist of

the Chicago School of thought, published the first comprehensive examination of such newspapers, looking at Chicago weekly newspapers, which he defined as “weekly, English-language publications” (p. 19). He sought to distinguish the community press from other forms of journalism, such as mass media, like national and regional daily newspapers. Among the features that distinguished the community press from these other forms included its specialized and bounded audience as well as its content. Janowitz began by asserting that “while the daily press adheres itself to the whole metropolitan center, the unique character of the community press arises from the fact that it has as its audience the residents of a specific sector of the urban metropolis. Its local community audience conditions its content, determines its appeal, and facilitates its impact” (p. 7). He believed that the urban community press existed because people worked outside of their residential communities; because work was a primary means of social integration, people needed something else to help them integrate in their home communities. The newspaper, he argued, provided such a social link (p. 15).

Janowitz’s content analysis of Chicago weekly newspapers from 1920, 1935, and 1949 revealed some of those newspapers’ distinctive content. He found that the majority of content was news and features, with only approximately five percent of space devoted to editorial concerns. From 1920 to 1949, the percentage of news and features grew by about three percent, while editorial content diminished by nearly three percent. This mirrored the content distributions in daily newspapers, which he analyzed for contrast (p. 76). News, however, was defined quite differently in the community press. Janowitz reported that “in the

typical community newspaper social and personal news, local voluntary associations, municipal services, and voluntary community service receive the most space in that order” (p. 85). In contrast to Nord’s findings, Janowitz found an overall overwhelming booster quality to the community newspapers (especially the independently-owned ones) which minimized conflict and rarely reported instances of controversy within the community (making it appear as though no controversy ever existed). When controversy did arise, for instance when a daily newspaper published something negative about the community, the local newspaper would defend against the criticisms in order to uphold the image of a positive community (pp. 87-88).

Janowitz showed that the advertising appearing in the weeklies reflected local businesses, thus promoting again a sense of unified community; all content, in other words, was local and relevant to the community audience. Stories containing hard news were more prominent than stories of human interest, though there was a plethora of news relating specifically to people, including “births, confirmations, engagements, weddings, deaths,” which readers submitted (p. 82). In addition, both professionals and citizens frequently submitted publicity releases for upcoming local events. Over time, however, he did find that local content began to decline in favor of more city news. For example, in his 1920 content analysis, he classified 92.8 percent of the content as “local” and only 1.2 percent of the content as “city-wide.” By 1949, the total percentage of “local” content had dropped to 75.4 percent and the “city-wide” content had risen to 9.3 percent (p. 79). This might reflect changes in ownership (from independent to chain),

although he does not make this connection. He does show, however, that in 1910, only 30 percent of community newspapers were owned by chain organizations; by 1950, 87 percent were owned by chains (p. 69). The decline in local coverage seems directly correlated with the decline in local, independent ownership. He does discuss ownership, which he chunks into three main categories: small independents, large independents, and chains (p. 106). He found that the

chain news content is less community oriented, less intimate, and less personalized than the independents. As compared with independent newspapers, chains publish more items about business enterprise, more about accidents and commercial amusements, less about organized religion, less social news, and fewer items about local voluntary associations. These differences place the chain community newspaper closer to the daily newspaper than the independent community newspaper (p. 107).

As more and more community newspapers were—and continue to be today—bought up by chains, the content is likely to change. From 1978 to 1996, the number of independent newspapers dropped from 634 to 317 (Garaneau, 1996). In 2005, 40 percent of all U.S. newspapers were owned by 21 of the biggest companies by revenue (Percent of Daily Newspapers). This means, likely, that owners of such publications are absent from the communities which they serve, among other implications, discussed in more detail in the next section.

Another distinctive quality of the community newspaper was its dedication to local history. According to Janowitz,

developing and maintaining a community focus of attention involves utilization of community history, not only by specific items about local community history but more frequently through a style of writing which proudly refers to the age of individuals or to the number of years an organization has been in local existence. Even routine announcements try to emphasize the stability and persistence of organizations, and all types of anniversaries are seized upon for this purpose. The most extreme form which this type of news coverage takes can be found in the special editions celebrating the historical anniversary of the local community or its newspaper (1952, p. 83).

Corporate chains that swoop in and buy up local newspapers are often uneducated about the historical nuances of the town on which they report.

Janowitz's work on the Chicago community newspapers offered important insights into the distinctive qualities of the community press, including its human interest content, its local audience, and its editorial operation. His study, as well as Park's research on the immigrant press, put community journalism on the scholarly agenda. Soon others began exploring the relationship between local newspapers and communities, who was involved in their production, and how and why people read them. The next section examines some of these works.

### **Stakeholders in community journalism**

Another fruitful body of research examines the ways that different constituent groups—readers, journalists, government officials, and business owners—understand the practice of community journalism. These groups of

people all have a stake in community journalism. Often, these groups are looked at individually rather than in conjunction.

### *Citizens/readers*

For example, Stamm (1985) studied the relationship between “individuals and newspapers vis-à-vis the individual’s ties to community” (p. 3). Specifically, he found that readership “emerged consistently as a correlate of ties” to community, though it was not the only variable. Other variables that affected people’s participation in community included political participation, time spent reading, and interest in the news (p. 105).

Stamm predicted that people’s use of the community newspaper would change over time. The primary direction of this change, he (correctly) predicted, would be “toward increasing ties with a complex, regional community” (p. 191). He posed some of the following questions in his conclusion:

- Will newspapers be used to help understand the complex interrelationships between the sub-communities (“nuclei”) which make up the regional community?
- Will newspapers be used as a substitute for transportation between nuclei? (e.g. to read about an event in a nearby community before, or instead of, attending it?)
- Will newspapers help individuals to maintain “home town” identification within a regional community? (p. 192).

This last question is an interesting one, and one that is relevant to the present study of Laurel, Maryland, a community that might be described as a “regional community” as its population numbers push 100,000.

More recent research from Stamm, Emig, and Hesse (1997) stemmed from the “community integration hypothesis” theorized in earlier works by Robert Park and Morris Janowitz. This hypothesis stated that “community newspapers have replaced interpersonal channels as the key mechanism by which individual behavior is integrated with the forms of collective behavior required for community” (p. 97). Their telephone survey of 432 respondents’ Likert scale answers regarding three key measures—local media use (of newspapers, radio, and television), interpersonal communication, and community involvement—found, not surprisingly, that those most “settled” in the community had the highest involvement. However, their results also showed that “interpersonal communication, not local mass media, is the primary mechanism for community integration of the individual,” refuting their original hypothesis (pp. 101 and 105).

Earlier research by Stamm and Weis (1982) had suggested that individuals tend to read news differently depending on their stage in life. The authors concluded that “news interests seem to change along with the person’s changing relationship to the place where he/she lives” (p. 67). Not surprisingly, the settling and settled individuals (who tend to be age forty and up) are apt to read more local government and controversy news, with their interests in the local economy and crime peaking once settled. In a later study, Stamm and Guest (1991) found that newcomers to communities seek out certain information to help in their

integration into said communities (p. 656). However, that information is often not found or acquired through newspaper reading. Stamm's research has indicated that newspapers' content tends to cater to a more settled community audience, suggesting that community journalists need to do more in the way of content that attracts as well as helps newcomers to learn about and feel comfortable within their new communities.

Rothenbuhler, Mullen, DeLaurell, and Ryu (1996) also conducted a telephone survey to better understand the relationships between communication, community attachment, and community involvement. While they found that newspapers did play a role, several other factors, including age, population density, education levels, localism of activity, and number of children in the home were also important variables affecting a person's attachment to and involvement in communities. These studies highlighted the many variables that come into play when trying to assess why people get involved in community affairs as well as why they read community newspapers. Clearly, newspapers are not the only variable in determining community attachment or involvement, but that does not mean they should be discounted.

### ***Public officials***

While studies of individual readers are more concerned with community connection, studies of town officials and administrators tend to focus on the power dynamic that exists between them and newspaper administrators. Several studies (Olien, Donohue & Tichenor, 1984; Weaver & Elliott, 1985; Smith, 1987) examined the perceptions of local government administrations towards the

community press, many using agenda setting theory. Obviously, no matter the size of the newspaper or community, tensions will exist between the press and the government. The press, acting as a watchdog, works to keep government officials honest while the government officials work to promote their agenda in their own words, which are often, in their view, incorrectly interpreted by the press.

Kanervo & Kanervo (1989) concluded that government officials work toward two goals: getting information into the paper and keeping information out of the paper. They found that

eighty-nine percent of mayors and city managers said they had suggested topics for newspaper coverage in the last two years, while in that same time period only thirty percent had asked their community paper not to cover certain issues. Yet it is the attitude that newspapers should stay away from certain topics and attempts to keep topics from the newspaper that make up the more ominous face of control (p. 315).

Administrators' relationships to community presses are often described in the context of these power dynamics and rarely focus on administrators as community members as well as people in positions of power. In most cases, they are both, but their professional roles almost always supersede their personal roles in such analyses.

### ***Journalists***

Gaziano and McGrath (1987) surveyed 100 journalists to gauge their perceptions on newspaper credibility against their level of involvement in the communities on which they report. This study demonstrated the apparent level of

discomfort many journalists feel when living or getting involved within the communities they cover. They found that while “nearly 9 in 10 agreed that ‘it’s important to know a lot of people in the community’ ... fewer than 3 in 10 agreed that ‘it’s important for people who work for newspapers to be involved in community organizations’” (p. 320). Another interesting finding recalled that thirty-eight percent of the journalists sampled were categorized as “younger transients,” meaning they had weak to moderate ties to the community and were under the age of 35, though the authors did not ask these journalists the reasons for these weak ties, which might include being new journalists, being new to their positions or communities, or being unhappy in present or previous communities (p. 324). Overall, Gaziano and McGrath concluded that community journalists seek to keep distance between themselves and their readers in an effort to maintain a level of credibility for their newspaper (p. 325). The study also revealed that “a significant minority of journalists work in relative isolation from news sources, readers, and supervisors” (p. 328). Community journalism, which Janowitz argued required human interest and historical perspective, is being done in many places by young journalists with little or no connection or intimate knowledge of the towns and communities they cover. This is an unfortunate trend. Ziff (1986) argued:

It is the great sadness of American journalism today that however diverse their geographic background and polished their skills, so many journalists are valued because they are interchangeable; they put themselves behind the word processor in whatever city to which they are called by corporate

employers. The unique value of each person and each region is thus endangered by a system of replaceable parts ( p. 165).

Community journalism requires an intimacy with the place and the people of the community; being a native or an ‘old timer’ is a positive quality rather than one that needs to be guarded against. Community journalism needs to replace the culture of replace-ability with a culture of investing in good journalists who will remain in their towns long-term, develop intimate knowledge and report fairly and with context.

Whether this level of intimacy exists more at independent weeklies or chain-owned weeklies, or whether it is related to the demise of journalism, or of community, is unknown. More research is needed to investigate how the levels of intimacy—among many other factors—differ at independently-owned versus chain weeklies. Out-dated statistics show that more and more weeklies are bought up by chains (Garaneau, 1996). If this trend has continued—and in all likelihood, it has in the past ten years—teasing out the complexities of its implications is needed. Noam (2009) showed that pressures against localism—in almost every industry—have “transformed industries into large national units” (p. 12). And, while he argued that everyone, including himself, loved localism, it is not without its significant challenges.

To many people, the ideal is a system of public-spirited, small, locally based media. It is an appealing vision. The closest examples in the private sector are family-owned small-town newspapers that sometimes operate with a certain ‘noblesse oblige,’ forgoing some profit for

community-spirited coverage. Yet with the greatest sympathy for such a system, one must also recognize its problems. Economically, it is based on the extraction of monopoly profits from local advertisers. Anybody who has placed a classified ad in a local newspaper can attest to that power. Politically, it provides major influence to the proprietors and their heirs; even when such power is used sparingly, its existence is clear to any survival-minded official (p. 12).

Certainly, many factors determine people's uses and perceptions of community news, as well as the various things that determine their connection to a particular community, whether they are readers, journalists, or government officials. Still, the role of community press should not be discounted and is worthy of continued study, especially in the face of the current economic climate when many believe newspapers are on the verge of extinction.

### **Contemporary research—Different takes on community journalism**

Contemporary theorists of community journalism, such as Howley, Altschull and Hindman upend the previously held notions of community journalism. Specifically, they argue that community journalism should allow more direct participation from those in the community. They are more concerned with direct participation in the news process than with the content of community news. This concern with direct participation is linked to a concern for restoring a more participatory and deliberative democracy to our communities. Altschull (1997) argued that community journalism draws “in the citizen at every step of the news process, from defining the news to determining the news sources to even

helping to gather the news” (p. 149). In particular, community journalists (when not community members, themselves) should allow readers to define news. This also means allowing all community members “equal access to the community’s resources and skills they need” in order to define and/or report community news (p. 152). This is key. Nord (2001) reminded us from history that “in any society those who hold the power and authority always seek to control communication” (p. 3). If community journalism is to enable citizens to participate in the governing of their own lives, then those citizens need open access to the dominant communication systems that function in their communities.

Hindman (1998) echoed this sentiment. In her ethnographic study of an inner-city Minneapolis neighborhood newspaper, *The Alley*, she argued that “community media ... can play a vital role in creating and maintaining strong democracy” (p. 30). She observed that, at present,

local communities have given away their autonomy by allowing professional reporters to define news, to govern how and from whom it is gathered, and to present it in certain, prescribed ways. [...] Only when local communities take back the ability to communicate among themselves will they begin to take back real democracy (p. 30).

Community journalists, in this respect, need not be professional, but rather people who are invested in the community (even if they are not actual members of that community) (p. 34). They need not shy away from conflict, but rather embrace it so as to learn more about themselves. She concluded that, for readers and producers of *The Alley*, community “does not mean a blending or creation of

common culture, but a mixture, each group distinct but living among the others, sharing a bond created in this particular place and by this particular newspaper” (p. 38). They find commonality in their location, their interest in the community and the desire for democratic participation, and their communication through *The Alley* helps to create a sense of community among a diverse group of neighbors.

This conclusion stands in stark contrast to Janowitz’s findings, which touted common values and morals as one of the most important foundations for the community press. Rather, Hindman argued that people can hold different values but still come together and achieve a sense of fellowship where they live when good community journalism is practiced. This is a much more realistic outlook for today’s communities and community presses. If we are to accept that the majority of community journalism is done covering physical communities with moderate to large populations—large enough that it is impossible to know everyone in town—then accepting a certain level of diversity will allow for better community coverage and integration than ignoring such differences.

The most significant leap in attempting to critically evaluate and theorize community media comes from Howley’s (2005) four case studies of community media.<sup>4</sup> Like Altschull and Hindman, Howley describes community media as participatory, but more specifically, as “alternative” media in that it seeks to resist or counterbalance the “hegemony of dominant media institutions and practices”

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<sup>4</sup> I use the word media here rather than journalism because that is the term Howley uses. Here, it is appropriate when he talks about community radio, which offers entertainment programming rather than journalistic programming. But, the operating challenges he describes are applicable to entertainment media as well as journalism operations. Likewise, many of the features and foundations of community media, its reason for existence in the first place, are synonymous with community journalism.

(p. 34). He argued that community media, produced by community members who are non-professionals, generally possess “an intense desire to reassert local autonomy and defend particularistic identities in the wake of transnational media flows and the attendant homogenization of cultural forms” (p. 33). Howley’s cases demonstrate the complexities and challenges involved in making participatory media work. The case of WFHB highlights the economic challenges that one community radio station in Bloomington, Indiana, faced and the content dilemmas those challenges created. For example, WFHB was a listener-supported radio station committed to providing the community with diverse programming while maintaining neutrality. As such, volunteers were often discouraged from offering personal, political and social opinions on air in order to keep happy their listener base. While this philosophy was “a bulwark against overtly oppositional discourse,” he argued that this limited “the range of ideas and opinions presented over local airwaves and thereby [reinforced] many of the same social, political, and cultural inequities a participatory medium like community radio professes to rectify” (p. 117). Community media, while often idealistic in their aims to be inclusive and to challenge the status quo presented by commercial media, often end up acting very much like the status quo because of social, political, and economic forces at play, as the WFHB case study demonstrates. Even community media run by amateurs is bound by economic realities, which pose similar challenges to those faced by commercial media at nearly every turn. Non-print community media, which is significantly more costly to sustain than print media because of the sheer equipment needed for operation, carries even heavier

burdens. But, regardless of the technology—audio, video, digital, or print—community media and community journalism, in Howley’s view, should represent the underrepresented, give a voice to anyone in the community who wishes to express it, and “create an alternative public sphere for marginalized constituencies within a geographic community” (2005, p. 185).

Studying *Street Feat*, a publication written and produced by the homeless and disadvantaged in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Howley noted that the newspaper “not only provided a staging ground for identity formation, but also encouraged readers to understand their own subject positions in relation to those whose experience may be quite foreign, yet whose lives are nonetheless intimately connected to their own” (2005, p. 187). Howley’s analysis of the different kinds of community media at work not only highlight the ways in which they serve to build and maintain communities, but also the power struggles and challenges inherent in the process (p. 259). He concludes that by challenging the very notions of what we believe community to be, “we can better appreciate the central role communication plays in distinguishing communities by containing difference within unity while simultaneously forging a shared collective identity” (p. 259).

As shown, scholars offer different takes on just what is “community journalism.” Just as there are many definitions of *community*, there are many ways to interpret *community journalism*. Howley’s definition, however, would be more helpful if it distinguished between citizen journalism, a relatively new phenomenon by which “the people formerly known as the audience employ the press tools they have in their possession to inform one another” (Rosen, 2008) and

that of public, or civic, journalism, which has been defined as journalism produced by professionals but aimed at a very local or narrowly defined community with the intention of helping public life to “go well” (Merritt, 1997; Rosen, 1999).

In the late 1980s, many citizens and journalists alike became fed up with “journalism as usual.” They felt that journalism was a public service and that professional journalists had a social responsibility to the public that they were not adequately fulfilling. A critical examination of the standard practices of the profession ensued and the Public Journalism movement took off in response. At the center of the movement was a concern for communities and finding ways to better involve citizens in their local communities, governments and institutions. After all, communities—as discussed in Chapter 2—are the lifeblood of democracy, which requires an active citizenry and open dialogue. Public journalism set out to revive democracy via journalism, and in the process, also sought to reawaken communities.

### **Public journalism—A model for good community journalism**

The objective of community journalism, in my view, should be to support existing communities—as they are *and* as they *could be*—as well as foster a sense of community among readers. Communities are the foundation of democracy, and without active communities, the public sphere suffers. Community journalism represents an important faction of the “fourth estate” and has distinctive responsibilities in making public life go well in the small towns across

America (and elsewhere). The Public Journalism movement provides the best example for how this can be accomplished.

At a time when many held the press to be a “handmaiden to a cyclical process that was making a mockery of politics,” the 1988 presidential campaign was the breaking point (Rosen, 1999, p. 36). The Dukakis and George H.W. Bush campaigns focused on image rather than issues. The candidates were picking fights in order to get a good “story” out of the press, and the journalists were accused of speaking ““a language common in Washington’ but foreign to the rest of us” (p. 38). The state of journalism and American democracy was in disarray. And Buzz Merritt, a journalist from the Midwest, made it clear that a public in peril is a serious problem:

No matter the state of individual morals, the efforts of government, the structure of families, the rise or fall of the yen and the deutsche mark, the course of a menacing comet; if public life does not go well, if communities cannot act collectively and effectively to solve problems, Americans’ fears about the future will surely be realized (Merritt, 1997, p. 7).

The late David Broder, a prominent *Washington Post* reporter, spoke out in advance of the 1990 November elections: “It is time for those of us in the world’s freest press to become activists, not on behalf of a particular party or politician, but on behalf of the process of self-government” (quoted in Rosen,

1999, pp. 39-40).<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, inspired by Dewey and Carey, Jay Rosen had just finished his dissertation on the “problem of the public.” He began engaging in talks with journalists who would listen about his ideas—what later became known as the public journalism movement. In the early years of the movement, its founders had a difficult time defining it. Rosen admitted in 1994 that “we’re still inventing it” and Merritt, in his book on the practice, argues that “to codify a set of public journalism rules” would be an “arrogant exercise, a limiting one” (Glasser, 1999, pp. 5-6). Merritt’s newspaper, the *Wichita Eagle*, was one of the early experimenters in public journalism. Merritt (1997) believed that changing journalism was akin to shifting a culture—it would not happen overnight (and it hasn’t). Some of the required shifts include:

- Seeing journalism’s primary role as “helping public life go well.” This means abandoning the long-held notion that journalism’s purpose is to “tell the news” (p. 139).
- Rethinking objectivity and detachment as cornerstones of good journalism, and thinking of journalists as “fair-minded participants” whom he likens to referees in sporting events. The referee displays “no interest in the final outcome other than it is arrived at under the rules” (p. 97). Merritt contended that journalists should worry less about the need for separation from public life, and think more about the important connections they have to it.

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<sup>5</sup> Broder would, six years later, renege on this point of view. He is quoted as saying during a symposium in 1996, “I honestly believe that once we take on the responsibility of being the agent for engaging them, that we are in politics” (Glasser, 1999, p. 4).

- Looking beyond what's going wrong in the public sphere and imagining, even describing, "what going right would be like" (p. 140).
- Conceiving of people not just as consumers of news, readers or non-readers, but as a public, "potential actors in arriving at democratic solutions to public problems" (p. 140).

Indeed, public journalism required that journalists truly consider citizens as allies, as people capable and willing to participate in making changes for the better if only presented with the opportunities to do so. Public journalism's goal "is not to better connect journalists with the community" though this is obviously a step in the right direction; its goal is to "better connect the people in the communities with one another. So it is as much or more about public life than it is about journalism" (p. 142).

Several years later, Haas (2007) further refined and defined a "public philosophy for public journalism" in which he stated that the "journalist's primary responsibility should be to help bring into being a deliberating public by creating and sustaining an open-ended unbounded public sphere to which all citizens have access and in which all topics of interest to citizens and all opinions available can be articulated, deliberated, and critiqued" (p. 47). For Haas, the essence of public journalism is serving and giving voice to marginalized social groups (p. 6).

The movement failed to sweep through mainstream journalism. Rem Rieder, editor of *American Journalism Review*, complained at a 1995 conference that

public journalism is nothing new. It's what good papers have always done. Good reporters and editors know what matters to their readers. They're in touch with their communities ... Public journalism is a marketing ploy ... It leads to boosters rather than hard-edged watchdog reporting" (quoted in Rosen, 1999, pp. 179-180).

He went on to argue that the failures of journalism were the result of staff cuts, and that to do more than inform on the news pages was "dangerous" and would contribute to the already large credibility problems plaguing the industry.

Likewise, Nip (2008) concluded after studying the *Savannah Morning News's* news practices that the practices of civic journalism (a term often used interchangeably) were not integrated into the daily routines of the newsroom staff in reporting the news or engaging citizens in conversation and problem solving within the community.

The concept of the movement was solid and if adopted, could have made an impact, especially on community journalism; in fact, it is a wonder why more community newspapers were not more hospitable to the public journalism movement. Community journalism could benefit from adopting the principles of the public journalism movement. Rather than focusing on detachment, community journalism should value reporters' connections to the places they cover. Professional journalists are capable of being connected and at the same time, fair-minded. Community journalism also has local responsibilities and stakes in small government, and has the capability to revive and inspire democratic participation in communities. Community journalism would do well

to incorporate more reader/citizen participation—in both the reporting of community news as well as in local democratic life. The technologies of the 21<sup>st</sup> century now allow more direct participation from members of the community in collecting and reporting the news. Community journalism in Janowitz's and Nord's traditional view, as done by professionals, versus community journalism done by citizens, as in Howley's, Altschull's and Hindman's views, need not be mutually exclusive. Both professionals and amateurs can do the work of connecting the community via news production and dissemination. The question remains—who is doing it better?

As new technologies place communication tools—once previously accessed only by professional journalists— into the hands of ordinary citizens, the future of community journalism is brought into question. Access to the Internet now means access to an instant audience at little to no cost. Blogging has proven a popular mechanism for ordinary citizens to become commentators and journalists in their hometowns. And, as communities grow and community journalism staffs shrink, ordinary citizens turned community bloggers are beginning to do the work of reporting hyperlocal news to narrowly defined audiences, much in the spirit of the public journalism movement.

### **Community blogs—The future of community journalism?**

Citizens are beginning to fill in the gaps where community presses are dropping the ball. For instance, in Laurel, a town of 100,000 citizens, even two competing weekly newspapers cannot possibly cover all of the parts and people of the community. As a result, several citizens have taken it upon themselves to

report local news via weblogs devoted to Laurel's happenings. As the newspapers shrink—literally in size, content, and staff—the Internet provides unlimited space for interested citizens to cover or comment on their community's happenings and events. Active citizens maintain these websites, and through their networks of connections, establish a readership just as a community newspaper establishes subscribers. No longer is the community newspaper the sole source for local news. An examination of these websites, their relationship to the local newspapers as well as how they are perceived by locals in Laurel, appears in Chapter 7.

Citizen journalism has become a popular practice since the advent of do-it-yourself (DIY) weblogs and mobile phones with Internet connections. But, citizen participation in the news process is not new, although the degree of participation has changed since colonial times. Letters to the editor reflect an active citizenry engaged in the press and in conversation with one another. Nord (2001), who studied early twentieth century Chicago newspapers, found that readers were actively engaged in conversations with newspaper editors, with the reading public, and with themselves (p. 251). The letters, sent to the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Chicago Herald* between 1912 and 1917 revealed “a wonderfully active community of readers [and] an activity rooted in the social and political institutions of time and place” (p. 269).

Reader and Moist (2008), who studied letters to the editors (LTEs) in two alternative magazines, argued that LTEs “reinforce and/or challenge” the “collective values” of the magazine readers (p. 834). They concluded that letters

serve to represent the writer—as a “textual avatar”—allowing the writer to position him or herself within the community. The LTEs become the “means by which community members maintain and express their individuality within the collective” (p. 834). Furthermore, “the act of writing an LTE itself elevates the writer from being merely part of an aggregate (the ‘audience’) to being an active part of community life” (p. 834). In a study of NPRs “letter to the editors” segment, Reader (2007) concluded that producers of the segment actively imagined a sense of community among NPR listeners when they selected or rejected the letters to be read during the program. This suggests that “imagining community is as much a *process* of journalism as a product of it, a process that is largely defined by the sociology of the news profession” (p. 665). So, just as they strive to be fair and balanced, the imagining of community is also part of the daily routine for journalists.

According to Wahl-Jorgensen (2007), who studied the relationship of letters to the editor to democracy, letters are deserving of scholarly study because they remain one of the few places where the voices of ordinary citizens are privileged. “Letters sections are among the few places in contemporary media that depart from the top-down liberal view of citizenship, and offer a more active role for citizens in political decision making” (p. 27).

While many readers continue to write letters to the editors of print publications, the Internet has opened up the “gate” for citizens interested in participating directly in the press. Online, readers are not constrained by the newspapers’ editorial gatekeepers. All readers can leave comments on articles

(though comments are often monitored by said gatekeepers and removed if deemed inappropriate), and easy blogging software allows anyone to create web pages that publish his or her views on current events. Citizens now have access to many of the same tools that journalists once controlled. The Internet has made it easy for citizens to participate in the news making process.

For example, in July of 2005, citizens blogged during the horrific London bombings in an attempt to report what was happening “on the ground.” Likewise, during the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech, when student Seung-Hui Cho fatally shot 32 students and professors before turning the gun on himself, students were capturing the events using the video applications on their cell phones. One student, Jamal Albarghouti, was even interviewed repeatedly on CNN throughout the day for his video and audio of gunshots heard outside one of the classroom buildings. Major news networks like CNN and MSNBC have added applications on their websites specifically for citizen journalists to submit raw footage or “on the ground” reporting. “The idea behind citizen journalism is that people without professional journalism training can use the tools of modern technology and the global distribution of the Internet to create, augment or fact-check media on their own or in collaboration with others” (Glaser, 2006).

Many citizen journalists are bloggers, but Bently, *et al*, noted an important distinction between the two. Citizen journalism sites are monitored by an editor whereas community blogs do not have gatekeepers and anyone is allowed to post (p. 242). This, however, depends on the type of websites and weblogs. For instance, many news organizations have “community blogs” which solicit citizen

journalism as well as general editorial-type postings. But the ease of use of new Internet communication technologies (ICTs) has allowed individuals to establish their own community blogs, where their voice is dominant; they are the gatekeepers, while readers are free only to comment on the blogger's posts. Some authors of community blogs consider themselves an "editor" or gatekeeper, deciding when certain items should or shouldn't be posted and when comments are inappropriate. "The best civic bloggers tend to set a civil tone that encourages people to remain neighborly, and many discourage anonymous commenting" (Fanslow, 2009, p. 29). Sites like blogger.com and WordPress.com make creating a personal blog not only possible but also free. And those who do it would likely call it a "labor of love." "Most place-based bloggers are investing countless hours (usually for free) because they love their communities and want to see them be the best place they can be" (p. 29). A placeblogger is "the collective name for the citizens who generate locally driven blogs and news sites" (Fanslow, 2009, p. 24). According to Rutigliano (2007), "blogs are civic journalism on steroids" (p. 225). Many community bloggers are ordinary citizens

who write about and advocate for their communities in sustained, organized ways on the Internet. These blogs (the word is shorthand for Web log) and local news sites are run as a labor of love by one or more writers, most with no formal journalism training. The best blogs evolve into online communities where dozens—sometimes hundreds—of citizens regularly comment, offer news tips, and generally gather around these

blogs just as they might meet at a local coffee shop (Fanselow, 2008, p. 24).

The Pew Internet & American Life Project reports that 12 percent of people “create or work on their own online journal or blog.” Twenty-two percent (as of December 2007) reported using the Internet to “post a comment to an online news group, website, blog, or photo site.” Thirty-three percent of those surveyed reported reading blogs online, while eleven percent reported doing so daily (Smith, 2008). Yet (as of November 2008), 70 percent of people reported using the Internet to get news (Internet Activities). The question remains: as more and more people utilize the Internet to access news, will they do so to access national, regional, or local news? Will community journalism—as done by professionals and citizens—take off on the web? Could community blogging surpass or replace community newspapers as sources of hyperlocal news?

Community blogs “intend to apply the blog software popularized by the more well-known individual bloggers to a specific geographic area and allow the residents of that area to create and maintain their own news organization” (Rutigliano, 2007, p. 225). Individual bloggers, however, also sometimes consider themselves to be community bloggers. G. Rick Wilson, one of the participants in this study, maintains his own personal blog called “Laurel Connections: A small journal from a small town.” Wilson is the editor and gatekeeper, but the blog centers on issues important to Laurel, Maryland residents. Those residents are free to comment on Rick’s post, but ultimately he, like a journalist, controls the content of his site.

No data is yet available to suggest just how community news websites are faring. However, a Zogby poll (2008) found that while 70 percent of Americans think journalism is important to the quality of life in their communities, two thirds are dissatisfied with the quality of journalism in their communities. The same survey found that “very few Americans (1 percent) consider blogs their most trusted source of news, or their primary source of news (1 percent).”

Community blogs are still in relative infancy; their future is difficult to predict and success will likely be the result of a number of factors, including cultural, economic and technological shifts in the practice of community newspapering. According to Fanslow,

Community blogs are having a sizable impact on traditional journalism. Many serve a watchdog function, just as investigative reporters from the ‘legacy’ media used to do (and sometimes still do, newsroom budgets and corporate ties permitting). Paraphrasing A. J. Liebling, New Haven Independent editor Paul Bass wrote, ‘Power of the press now belongs not to those who own one, but to those who own a modem. We own a modem.’ Some civic minded bloggers take a critical tone with local government; others are less combative. But no matter what the prevailing tone, these blogs give readers a rich sense of place (2009, p. 24).

Like Park’s immigrant press and Janowitz’s view of the community press in Chicago in the 1940s and 1950s, the modern day community press—which now includes professionals involved in newspapering and online news gathering as well as ordinary citizens producing community blogs—creates a sense of place

for community members and acts as a method of integration in communities. But community journalism also helps to create, sustain, and maintain our communities. The newspapers and blogs become a “third space,” a term coined by Ray Oldenberg, who defined it as “a setting beyond home and work (the ‘first’ and ‘second’ places respectively) in which people relax in good company and do so on a regular basis (2001, p. 2). Third spaces have the potential to fulfill the requirements for Habermas’ public sphere in that when people occupy these spaces to interact with one another, they have the potential to engage in dialogue that may develop into what Habermas called “rational-critical debate” (1991, p. 164).

Of course, several of Habermas’ requirements must first be met—namely that in order for rational-critical debate to take place, the members within the public sphere must be of a certain level of education; they must be literate and versed in literary and political writings. Habermas argued that though the mass press—which really became popular in the nineteenth century with the advent of the penny press—expanded the public sphere, it eventually weakened it “by eliminating political news and political editorials” (p. 169). These papers, he argued, made the sphere a “culture consuming public” rather than a rational, critical public. Furthermore, mass media allowed the public to read news in private rather than public spaces, which “deprived it of the opportunity to say something and to disagree” (p. 171). While much of this is true, new communication technologies allow the reading public to engage in rational-critical debate with one another via the Internet and blogging.

Though present-day mass media may not satisfy exactly Habermas' notion of a public sphere engaging in rational-critical debate, a newspaper reading public is better than a non-newspaper reading public. Oldenberg's use of the term "third space" refers to an actual physical place where people can associate and gather—places like coffee shops, bowling alleys and barbershops. But, it can and should also be applied to non-physical gathering places, like newspapers and community blogs. People can—intellectually—gather via newspapers and blogs to engage in community dialogue. Posting comments after reading a news article or blog or writing a LTE allow readers to engage in conversation with one another—albeit not always in real time. Especially for place communities, newspapers and blogs can help to facilitate relationships and sharing, providing a sense of community (Kaye, 2007, p. 130).

But, "blog content generally reflects the biases of the blogger, who tends to take one side of an issue, furthering a sense of belonging to a group of like-minded individuals" (Kaye, 2007, p. 130, citing Levy 2002, Seipp, 2002, and Rosenberg, 2002). Especially for those dissatisfied with the traditional news media in their communities, blogs serve as a way for them to come together to "grind the axe" so to speak. This axe grinding is called "fisking" and has become a motivation for using blogs in the first place. Fisking, according to the Urban Dictionary, "is derived from articles written by Robert Fisk that were easily refuted, and refers to a point-by-point debunking of lies and/or idiocies" (Fisking). The term is often used within the blogosphere. "By its nature, fisking requires another medium whose content can be challenged and errors exposed"

(Kaye, 2007, p. 142). Blogs often exist solely to challenge other mediums and in themselves may contain content that can be challenged. Fisking could be considered at odds with dialogue. But, blogs create a platform for people to engage in debate without the constraints of space or gatekeepers. Picking apart arguments can be the beginning of critical dialogue. Community blogs serve as a way to bring people together, into the public sphere, engaging in open (potentially rational and critical) dialogue in the Habermasian sense as a way to better their communities. Newspapers can learn from community blogs, which seem to be gaining in popularity.

Discussing Habermas' public sphere in relationship to blogs, Barlow (2008) pointed out that

what blogs have managed to do, in some respects, is re-establish the public sphere much in the way that the coffeehouses, salons, broadsheets, and pamphlets (and more) first established it three hundred years ago. As its critics emphasize, beyond technological manifestations, it could be argued that there is little in the blogosphere that is really new. Blogs may carry debate (debate that may have been stifled, but debate in the public sphere nonetheless) to a new venue, but there is nothing revolutionary in what the blogs are *doing*. (emphasis in original, p. 5).

And, though blogs allow for more instant participation, only those who can afford access may participate. While blogs do have democratic qualities, newspapers—especially free weeklies—are still far more accessible to Americans than Internet blogs. Community newspapers can revitalize their content by taking

a lesson from the bloggers in their communities. If, as Barlow pointed out, discussion on such blogs are conversations that may have been stifled, the newspapers can bring them to the attention of the (likely much larger) community audience.

Community journalists need to re-evaluate their content, their audience, and the kinds of conversations they are fostering. If they truly care for the communities on which they report—and want to see public life go well in those communities—they need to find ways to revive the public debate and become a regular “third space” where people go to perform the ritual of communication (Carey, 1989), helping them not only to feel a part of their community, but to help maintain it.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Methodology

The present research examines community journalism in an attempt to better define *community* in the context of a town, using its citizens and stakeholders, as well as its newspapers, as the analytical lenses. It also attempts to better understand the present and future role of weekly local newspapering, especially at a time when the newspaper industry—weeklies included—is facing great challenges, especially financial ones. This case study focuses on Laurel, Maryland, an area with more than 100,000 residents located midway between Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C.

A case study approach was chosen because it is an approach capable of examining simple or complex phenomenon, with units of analysis varying from single individuals to large corporations and businesses; it entails using a variety of lines of action in its data-gathering segments, and can meaningfully make use of and contribute to the application of theory (Berg, 2007, p. 283).

So-called “community case studies,” specifically, allow investigators to select their focus either broadly or narrowly, the latter being the case here. “Community case studies may specifically focus on some particular aspect of the community or even some phenomenon that occurs within that community” (p. 297).

Laurel, Maryland was chosen as a case study for this research for a number of reasons. I moved to Laurel from Adelphi, Maryland after my first year of study at the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland; I was unhappy with the housing options immediately surrounding the campus and

had heard good things about Laurel from several acquaintances. So, the summer prior to my second year of study, I moved into a one-bedroom apartment on Main Street in Laurel. Laurel looked and felt a lot more like “home,” which for me was Dickson City, a small town just outside of Scranton, Pennsylvania. Scranton and its surrounding areas are similarly populated when compared to Laurel. Laurel’s Main Street, the Patuxent river walk park, the single-family homes and the nearby shopping options were somewhat removed from the three and four lane “highways” and abundant apartment complexes that surrounded me in Adelphi.

To help me learn about the town, I began reading the *Laurel Leader*, which was tossed outside my door each Thursday.<sup>6</sup> I later learned that one of my colleagues at the Merrill College worked part-time as a copy editor at the *Leader*. About that same time, I was looking for a place to conduct an ethnographic research project for an American Studies class in which I was enrolled. With a few phone calls from my friend to the paper’s editor, I was soon inside the *Leader’s* newsroom observing and talking with the editors and reporters. The project was successful and served to pique my interest in learning more about this paper and its competitor, *The Gazette*, not only from inside the newsroom, but from inside the *community*. What did others in Laurel think about their newspapers? At a time when the newspaper industry is in flux, if not jeopardy, how were these two community newspapers faring in their market? A case study, using ethnographic interviewing, seemed like the approach that would yield a comprehensive look at the state of community journalism in Laurel, a suburban

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<sup>6</sup> *The Gazette*, the rival weekly paper, was not delivered to my apartment, although it is delivered free elsewhere in Laurel.

town with two competing newspapers. Two-newspapers towns are a rarity these days and have been on the decline for more than a century. The Newspaper Preservation Act, authorized by Congress in 1970, allowed newspapers to work together via Joint Operating Agreements (JOAs)—a business structure that allows two newspapers to share costs of business, advertising and circulation expenses. At the time of the act, many big city major dailies entered into such agreements. At the highest point, 28 JOAs existed. In 2009, only nine remained (Milstead & Smith, 2009). In Laurel, no such JOA exists. The *Leader* and *The Gazette* are owned and operated by two different newspaper companies—the Tribune Co. and the Washington Post Co., respectively. Data on the number of competing weeklies nationwide was unavailable.

To achieve a wide-ranging, detailed examination of Laurel, which spans a relatively large area and has more than 100,000 residents, several constituent groups were chosen as points of focus (Berg, 2007, pp. 298-299). Ethnographic interviewing with journalists, city officials, and local business owners, along with focus groups and interviews with residents help to reveal the perspectives and perceptions of the citizens and stakeholders in Laurel, Maryland regarding the community and its newspapers.

### **Research questions**

I began this research with the following research questions:

- Do the stakeholders in Laurel perceive it to be a community?
- Do those connected to Laurel have a *sense of community* in Laurel or in other groups and/or Laurel-based organizations they may be a part of? Is

that sense of community guided by local news media, personal interactions, a combination of both acting together, or by something(s) else completely?

- Do the local news media—mainly referring to the two dominant weekly newspapers—play a role in creating and/or sustaining community in Laurel? Which media, including which other local news media, try to or succeed at this?
- How (if at all) do the various groups of people in Laurel make use of media to participate in community/civic life?

### **Rationale for qualitative methods**

Choosing a methodological approach is largely dependent upon two things: research objectives and world view. I chose qualitative methods because I agree with those who argue that complete objectivity in research is never possible, that the social world is messy and cannot be “controlled,” and that researchers are active participants in the creation of the reality they set out to study. This theoretical and methodological position is known as *interpretive* or *constructionist*. Scholars in this camp are more concerned about “how people made sense of their social worlds” than about cause and effect relationships (Deacon, et al., 1999, p. 6).

When researchers first began exploring the social realm, they needed to work hard to establish their credibility in the scholarly community; at first, adopting the methodological and theoretical positions of the hard sciences—known as *positivism* and later *postpositivism*—was the only way to do so. This

theoretical position maintains that a singular truth is attainable through use of controlled, quantitative experiments. But many scholars quickly realized that facts do not merely exist, waiting to be discovered by an objective researcher. Qualitative methods help researchers to understand the complex relationships of social worlds. *Community* and *news media* are both complex concepts, as I showed in chapters two and three. Neither has a cut and dry definition, especially in today's technological world. Using qualitative methods allowed for the participants to speak in their own voices and for an understanding that multiple interpretations of these concepts were expected and welcomed. This research “focus[ed] on the social practices and the meanings of people in a specific ... cultural context” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 122). Below is a brief discussion of the strengths of ethnographic interviewing and how employing this method enhanced my understanding of the relationship between weekly newspapers and communities. Also in this chapter, a review of foundational newsroom ethnographies and the lessons learned about the method follow. Participant recruitment and selection is discussed, as is my approach to interviews with participants. Institutional Review Board permissions as well as ethical considerations are also discussed. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how data in this study was analyzed.

### **Ethnographic interviewing**

Caughey (2006) defines ethnography as “a cultural description, or a cultural portrait, based on interviews and participant observation” where “the subject portrayed is typically a group, a community, a scene, an institution, or

society” (p. 7). According to LaPastina, in ethnography, the methods for data collection and analysis, along with the relationships between the participants and the researcher, stand in contrast to those in the positivistic paradigms.

“Ethnography has represented a shift from empirical practices of data collection, pushing scholars to introduce nonobjective strategies ... and a greater level of self-reflexivity among researchers” (LaPastina, 2005, p. 139). The method derives both from anthropology, where ethnography was “developed to holistically study isolated societies” (Bird, 2005, p. 302), and from sociology, specifically the Chicago School, where the intention of urban scholars was to gain an understanding of everyday life (Deegan, 2007, p. 11). However, according to Bird (2005), a “central and unifying” principle of all ethnographic work is “a commitment to cultural interpretation” (p. 302).

Ethnography is most commonly understood as a combination of two qualitative methods: participant observation and interviewing (Caughey, 1982, p. 222). This case study relied on ethnographic interviewing to uncover the perspectives and perceptions of Laurel citizens and stakeholders regarding weekly news and community life in Laurel. Some observation was also utilized, as I often interviewed participants on their own “turf”; I attended several community events, which were accessible to me in part because I lived in Laurel. However, such observation was secondary to the interviewing. Life history techniques, a subset of ethnographic methods that focus on individual experiences rather than group experiences, were also useful here. Because of the time in the field and the often personal relationships developed between researchers and participants,

ethnographic methods reveal more than would be possible with a survey, archival research, or even simply talking with participants outside of their natural surroundings (Smith, 2007, p. 229). “In particular, fieldworkers using ethnographic approaches convey vivid, dynamic and processual portrayals of lived experience” (Smith, 2007, p. 229). Heyl (2007) considered interviews ethnographic when

researchers have established respectful, on-going relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds (p. 369).

Researchers often interview their participants several times, formally or informally, individually or in a group. Interviews may be structured (a set of pre-determined questions asked to each participant); semi-structured (a general outline of questions to be asked exists, but allows for tangents and spontaneous questions and conversations), or unstructured (objectives may exist, but are reached through free-flowing, unprompted questions and/or conversations). Interviews in this research were semi-structured; while a list of questions was planned for each participant, spontaneous questions and conversations were the norm throughout the interviewing process.

Ethnographic interviews may be conducted in the field, on the participant’s “turf” (at their home or workplace) or in a neutral location (like a coffee shop). Presumably, working in a participant’s natural setting will likely

make them more comfortable and at ease, making for more natural conversation rather than a strict interviewing style. Throughout the course of this research, I tried to interview participants on their “turf”—in their homes or offices—whenever possible. When that wasn’t possible, neutral locations in Laurel—like coffee shops, churches, and diners—were chosen.

Heyl (2007) highlighted Kvale’s two common ways of approaching ethnographic interviewing, determined by the “vocabulary of methods” the researcher brings from his or her discipline (p. 371). The first conceives of the researcher as a “miner” who “goes to the vicinity of the ‘buried treasure’ of new information in the specific social world, seeks out good sources ... and carefully gathers up the data—facts waiting to be culled out and discovered by the interviewer’s efforts” (p. 370). The “traveler” metaphor, on the other hand, “sees the interviewer as on a journey from which he or she will return with stories to tell, having engaged in conversations with those encountered along the way” (p. 371). The “miner” metaphor seems to suit researchers with a positivistic point of view, where the traveler metaphor stems from a more interpretive perspective. The problem, though, with both of these approaches to interviewing is that they place all of the power in the hands of the researcher rather than sharing it with the interviewees. Finding facts or returning with stories implies that the researcher is solely responsible for the collection of the facts or the creation (in textual form) of the stories.

Feminist researchers, however, see ethnographic interviewing differently. They view ethnographic interviewing more as a conversation where there is “co-

construction of meaning” (Heyl, 2007, p. 374). In other words, the researcher is as much a part of the stories obtained as are the interviewees who tell them because the “researcher and the interviewee are active creators in all phases of the interview process” (p. 373). In addition, a conversational style of interviewing can help to put participants at ease and help them to understand that the project will allow both the participants and the researcher to learn from one another. Ethnographic interviews should attempt to achieve a level of intimacy between the interviewer and the interviewee, where the participants feel comfortable not only to share stories with the interviewer, but also their concerns about the project, knowing that their perspectives will be heard and respected. Feminist researchers do not take for granted the effect their presence and participation has not only on the outcomes of ethnographic projects but also on the lives of their participants; so, putting participants at ease during interviews and assuring them that you will do all you can to represent them accurately, protect them, and continue to involve them in all phases of the project is very important. I took a feminist approach to this research and went into the field with an understanding of the significance of my presence and how my participation might affect the outcomes.

Taking a feminist approach means being able to put yourself in your participants’ shoes, to an extent. I found this difficult to do in some cases, especially when I was denied interviews with the editorial staff of *The Gazette*. I could not understand, for instance, their reasoning for refusing my requests when, in the same breath, they spoke of a desire to be transparent in their daily

operations. I, along with my dissertation adviser, tried to explain the project in ways that would put the editors' concerns at ease to no avail; as a result, an important group of voices is missing from this research. More details about our attempts are discussed later in this chapter.

Furthermore, achieving a level of intimacy with forty participants and only six months to spend in the field proved difficult. Several of my interviews lasted more than one hour. Three participants invited me into their homes. And, I made several attempts to attend public gatherings—like Riverfest, the Mayor's Open House, and the Main Street Festival—where I might see my participants and reconnect with them. And, several participants followed up with me and continued to contact me, either to alert me to a happening in Laurel they believed I should be aware of, or to connect me with other participants. Still, the majority of my interactions with my participants were the result of our scheduled one-time interview. Because I wanted to talk with as many people as I could, doing multiple interviews with each participant seemed unfeasible, especially when many of the participants—several of whom I interviewed during their work hours—were on tight schedules. In an ideal world, this project would have been on-going for several years, allowing multiple interviews and more frequent informal interactions with my participants; but the nature of completing a study for a dissertation somewhat limited the amount of time I could devote to the field. However, the interviews that I was able to conduct provided many very interesting anecdotes and perspectives. Though I stuck, generally, to a set of pre-determined questions, interviews were conversational and sometimes took

unexpected, yet interesting turns. Finally, allowing participants to comment on drafts of this research allowed them to be part of the process, adhering further to the feminist ethical model. The next section details the works of several newsroom ethnographers who went before me and from whom I was able to take many methodological notes.

### **Methodological critique of newsroom ethnographies**

Newsroom studies have been conducted almost as long as newsrooms have been in existence. In 1950, David Manning White conducted the now classic “gate keeper” study to understand how journalists identify and select news to print. To do so, he asked “Mr. Gates,” the wire editor for a Midwestern city’s morning newspaper, to save all unused wire copy for one week and to notate every evening for one week why each story did not make it into the paper (White, 1964, pp. 163-164). While the study was not ethnographic, it had a qualitative nature in that it analyzed and categorized the written responses of Mr. Gates. White concluded that a gatekeeper’s selections are in fact subjective, and that “the newsman, as the representative of his culture” prints only what he deems true, whether consciously or not (p. 171). This foundational study inspired future ethnographic studies of newsrooms.

In 1955, Warren Breed published a study about the ways newsmen learn newsroom policy. Breed interviewed approximately 120 newsmen at mid-sized newspapers in the northeastern U.S.; all interviews lasted more than one hour. This study employed “intensive” interviewing within a functionalist framework (Breed, 1955, p. 328). In addition, Breed stated that some of “the present data

come from the writer's newspaper experience," though he made no effort to explain the nature or extent of that experience (p. 328). Such an explanation could have provided readers with a more transparent understanding of his conclusions, which stated that a newsman conforms to the publisher's newsroom policy because his "source of rewards is located not among the readers, who are manifestly his clients, but among his colleagues and superior" (p. 335).

For an ethnographer, prior knowledge of the subject of study can be helpful in that it provides context as well as intimacy, but also it can complicate things. In Breed's case, he did a lot of generalizing, using language like "thus, despite his relatively low pay, the staffer feels, for all these reasons, an integral part of a going concern. His job morale is high" (p. 331). This quote does not refer to a specific newsman but rather to his subjects generally; in one entire section of the paper, he does not directly quote any of his participants.<sup>7</sup> When readers are left wondering how much of Breed's generalization is grounded in what he learned from his interviews and how much is based on his own personal experience as a news person, the strength of the conclusions is weakened. Nonetheless, Breed's study is foundational for future ethnographic approaches to news studies.

In 1971, Malcolm Warner attempted to replicate Breed's approach in three major network television newsrooms. Warner compared his findings regarding policy control in television to the policy control of the press detailed in Breed's

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted here that there is little regard for gender in these studies, and seemingly no attempt to elicit the perspectives of women by interviewing female reporters (though it is likely that, in 1955, there were not many to interview). Most of the articles make reference to news "men" and, likewise, take men as their participants.

article. However, he stated this only briefly in a footnote, saying that the article “attempts to re-interpret the present writer’s earlier analyses of decision making in TV newsrooms against the background of the Breed study” (Warner, 1971, p. 293). If readers miss this significant footnote, the comparison between the “press” (which is never defined) and the current data from the television stations could be lost on them. In addition to interviews, which Warner conducted informally, participant observation was utilized across the three networks, though he never specifies for what length of time. While the article is informative, Warner did not quote any of his participants directly. Though Warner utilized interviewing and participant observation, his work failed to meet some of the (now) basic criteria for writing ethnographies, namely demonstrating that a level of intimacy and respect for participants was achieved by allowing them to “speak” in their own voices in the final text. Thick descriptions of participants and their work environment are also absent.

In 1973, Lee Sigelman, then an American Political Science Association intern in state and local government, took Breed’s article to task. He gathered data through participant observation and taped interviews. Sigelman focused his research on local political reporters to understand media bias (Sigelman, 1973, p. 132). Sigelman refuted Breed’s conclusions, by pointing out that because Breed only examined conflict in the newsrooms he studied, he “overstated the significance of conflict between reporter and newspaper” (p. 149). Sigelman’s article provided minimal ethnographic description of his site, but his conclusions were grounded firmly in direct quotes from his participants.

Tuchman's (1978) *Making News: A Study in the Construction of Reality*, a collection of some earlier articles, was based on participant observation and interviews over a period of ten years at four field sites (p. 9). *Making News* was hailed as a "formidable book" (Whitney, 1978, p. 804) and a must-read for those studying newswork (Bantz, 1980, p.349). Tuchman's study sought an understanding of not only how news is produced, but how reporters decide to cover one story versus another (Tuchman, 1978, p. ix). To discover this, Tuchman took professionalism and routine as her lenses. While researching for the book, Tuchman conducted fieldwork at four different newsrooms in "Seaboard City," which she described only as a "metropolitan area" (p. 9). These sites included both television and print newsrooms. She highlighted some of the challenges of observing newswork—its around-the-clock schedule, and busy, cramped work spaces. At one of the sites, Tuchman said she was "barely tolerated" because of the literal space constraints of the press room. Tuchman, a sociologist, used many direct quotes and gave voice to her participants, some of whom she named, some to whom she gave fictitious names, though her text could have had even more credibility had she been able to name all of the journalists and news organizations she worked with. In all, Tuchman's book was a step in the right direction, offered a fresh theoretical perspective—interpretive rather than functionalist—for studying news via ethnographic approaches.

Also in 1978, Richard J. Gelles and Robert R. Faulkner conducted an ethnographic study of a television newsroom, given the name Channel 1, "a medium market station serving an eastern city with a population of 400,000"

(Gelles & Faulkner, 1978, p. 91). The news crew they followed consisted of seven journalists—smaller than the average television newsroom at the time (p. 91). The study sought to understand time as a resource (as an independent variable) in the process of news production and selection. The authors changed their method mid-way through the study. Initially, they each observed at a different site. After two weeks, they teamed up and studied just one newsroom (p. 92). While claiming to be ethnographic because the data were gathered by field observations and informal interviews with the news staff, the authors fail to provide the thick description of scenes or events and incorporate only one direct quote from a participant.

Just one year later, in 1979, Philip Schlesinger's *Putting "Reality" Together* hit library shelves. Schlesinger, another sociologist, conducted a study somewhat similar to Tuchman's although in London. The book, which is the result of more than 120 interviews and 90 full days of observation, is an inside look at the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation). The author did fieldwork inside the national BBC newsrooms to provide readers with an inside perspective of the BBC (Schlesinger, 1979, p. 11).

Methodologically, Schlesinger consistently incorporated direct quotes from his participants alongside anecdotes from interviews. In the text, he made statements like, "one newsman, commenting on this chapter, and agreeing with its argument, observed that the above passage was 'the Bible of hypocrisy,'" suggesting that he shared the text with some of his participants prior to its publication (p. 107). Unfortunately, he did not find it necessary to discuss the

complexity of his method, but instead added in a footnote: “This book is long enough as it is, so I will not develop any points about method and the problems of ethnography here” (p. 273). The author makes only passing mention of his treatment of sources, which include naming some—like editors, whose names he said fall within “public domain”—but not others (p. 255). While arguments can be made successfully for either naming sources or granting them anonymity, scholars should explain their reasons transparently. Schlesinger’s gloss of this important decision calls into question the credibility of his methods.

In all, Schlesinger’s book, though not as popular as Tuchman’s, is another attempt at understanding the complexities of newsrooms and newswork via interviewing and observation. Nearly ten years later, Richard V. Ericson, Patricia M. Baranek, and J. B. Chan (1987) published their ethnographic study of the ways journalists define and shape social deviance, which continued the trend of interpretive investigation and the idea that news and knowledge are social constructions. The lengthy study is based on several months of observation at two Toronto news organizations—the *Globe and Mail* newspaper and the CBLT television station (p. 81)—as well as “less regular and systematic” observation of and interviews with journalists from many other Toronto news organizations.

The authors, whose backgrounds are in criminology, go to great lengths (unlike many of the others) to explain their methodological choices—devoting an entire chapter to a discussion of ethnography and other social science methodologies. In that chapter, they highlight the strengths and weaknesses of using ethnography and the ways in which they intend to execute the method.

Citing Carey, they point out that ethnographic methods are “essential if we accept that the core concerns of cultural studies compared to behavioural studies are understanding rather than explanation” (p. 77).

Unlike the other ethnographies discussed earlier, Ericson, Baranek, and Chan detailed the limitations and constraints they faced during the research process. One of the biggest constraints they dealt with was skepticism from research participants. They found that several of the journalists were reluctant to participate, wanted assurance of anonymity, and even interfered with the authors’ research.

To gain participants’ trust, the authors had to bend and flex, just as their participants did, often by “offering assistance as a human gesture of reciprocity” (p. 90). The researchers reported listening in on conversations in the field to help reporters gather information, calling the newsroom to ask for a film crew on a scene, and making contact with sources when the reporter was distracted with another task (p. 91). Some of the reciprocity, though went too far. When asked to be a source for a story, the authors declined, but they note that “occasionally we were asked to participate in the ‘staging’ of television visuals, for example, posing as a travel-office customer using a credit card for a story on fraudulent uses of credit cards” and obliged (p. 91). While the first request, serving as a *named source* on a story related to your area of expertise (which was the case in this example) is acceptable, *posing as a source*, which the journalists would have otherwise had to do work to find, for example, an *actual* shopper, for B-roll footage was unethical. These examples demonstrate just how many fine lines exist

in the ethnographic research process; researchers need to negotiate them instantaneously. But, despite these questionable decisions, the authors did a better job of incorporating direct participant quotes as well as anecdotes from their observations in their text—much more than the other two full length texts of this kind.

In all, these works drew more methodological criticisms than praises (Mishra, 1980; Rubin, 1981; Endry, 1988; Savage, 1988), but they offer much that is useful for future studies, given the difficulties of doing ethnography. One of the most noticeable differences from present day ethnography (in all fields) is that the authors of the aforementioned studies by and large fail to write their texts ethnographically; that is, they do not allow their participants to speak in their own voices or provide thick description of scenes, events or participants. Nearly all of these studies were published before the shift in thinking when “the voices representing postmodern, feminist and multicultural positions” became the norm (Heyl, 2007, p. 373). They preceded 1986, a moment Denzin (1997) called the “crisis of representation.” Denzin (1997) himself encouraged the feminist communitarian ethical model, which promoted ethnographic collaboration with participants, empowering them and giving them more ownership over the final text, as well a care-based ethical approach, which values “personal expressiveness, emotionality, and empathy” as well as individual uniqueness. Such an approach requires that researchers not only employ observation and/or interviewing during their time in the field, but also that they use their data and write the final text in a way that represents their participants and their

circumstances with care and attention to detail. In many of the texts, the voice of the researcher—which is academic in tone—dominates the texts. Because the genre of ethnographies have greatly opened up in the past twenty-five years, researchers now have more flexibility to write their texts in styles that not only complement the study being conducted, but also remain true to the participants, incorporating their voices and stories often and in interesting ways (Caughey, 2006).

The strength of the collection of aforementioned newsroom studies as a whole is, of course, that most of them employ an interpretive approach to better understand the processes of news work. At their respective times of publication, these studies were, in a sense, methodologically experimental. It was not only challenging but also risky for these researchers to approach the study of news work ethnographically, as the social sciences were just beginning to feel their way out of the shadows of positivism and post positivism. As such, hiccups in methods are expected and perhaps even forgiven. But, most importantly, these studies provide learning moments for future ethnographers, whose studies will be better as a result of their predecessors.

The most recent examples of newsroom ethnography—or “second wave” newsroom ethnography (Paterson & Domingo, 2008, p. 3, citing Cottle, 2000) focus on new media production and online news. Chris Paterson and David Domingo (2008) edited a volume of online news ethnographies that offer insights into the work of online journalists. Many of the pieces in the book—for instance, those by Cawley, García, and Brannon—provide narrative description of events in

the field as well as many direct quotes from their participants to better explain by showing, rather than telling, what happens in online newsrooms. However, one of the challenges faced by online ethnographers mirrors those faced by Tuchman, Schlesinger, and the rest of the original newsroom ethnographers. Researchers are still experiencing barriers to entry into newsrooms. “The increasing security culture in larger media organizations makes it easy for executives to prevent or limit a researcher’s access, even when journalists are eager to cooperate” (Paterson & Domingo, 2008, p. 8). Paterson and Domingo speculate that this is a result of the “consolidation of corporate media ownership” but acknowledges that little is known about the “whys” for such denials because such experiences are rarely written about (p. 8). In the sections that follow, I detail my ethnographic approach to this case study, as well as discuss the hiccups I faced throughout the process, including being denied interviews with journalists at one of the Laurel newspapers.

### **Participants—Selection, recruitment, and participation**

This study’s primary method, as mentioned above, was interviewing. Some interviews were individual, some in pairs, and others in small groups of three to four people. Because of Laurel’s size—approximately 100,000 residents—representative sampling was impossible. However, I strove for depth.<sup>8</sup> In order to get a purposive sample of voices, I recruited individuals who “had experiences, or possess knowledge and/or expertise, that are important to the

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<sup>8</sup> Many ethnographers consider depth to mean multiple, extended interviews with only a handful of participants. Such depth, however, would not have allowed me to talk with the variety of participants I desired in a six month span in the field. To achieve depth with forty participants, I conducted one-time but lengthy interviews (1-3 hours each) with my participants.

research questions” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 121). I conducted interviews with multiple participants in a variety of “constituent categories” which included:

- Journalists from the *Laurel Leader*
- Executive Editor and Publisher of Patuxent Publishing and *The Gazette*, respectively
- Local government officials, including the mayor, four (of the five) city council representatives, and the city administrator
- Advertisers/local business owners
- Residents of Laurel across different age groups, ethnicities, socio-cultural backgrounds, and of both genders

These constituents represent “exemplars of a wide range of characteristics” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 123). I used snowball sampling, which “yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 124 citing Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981, p. 141). In total, I conducted 29 interviews with a total of 40 individuals connected to Laurel in some way. Table 1 provides demographic information for the participants obtained from the questionnaires participants filled out either prior to or after our interview.<sup>9</sup>

According to census figures, my sample was fairly close to the racial make-up of Laurel. While Laurel is 55 percent white, 65 percent of my

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<sup>9</sup> Some questionnaires were left with participants to fill out at their leisure after the conclusion of our conversation. I provided those participants with self-addressed stamped envelopes. Three were never returned.

<b>Gender</b>	Male	14	<b>Marital Status</b>	Single	9
	Female	23		Married	25
				Divorced	0
<b>Ages</b>	20s	5		Widow	1
	30s	1		Engaged	1
	40s	6		No response	1
	50s	11	<b>Children</b>	Yes	26
	60s	7		No	11
	70s	4			
	80s	2	<b>Degree Earned</b>	High School	12
	No response	1		Associate's	3
<b>Race</b>	African American	5		Bachelor's	10
	Caucasian/White	26		Master's	8
	Indian	1		Terminal	2
	Irish American	1		No response	2
	Hispanic	1			
	Korean	1	<b>Years as Laurel Resident</b>	0-10	2
	Scottish	1		11-20	5
	No response	4		21-30	7
				31-40	8
<b>Religion</b>	Baptist	1		41-50	2
	Roman Catholic	9		51-60	1
	Christian	3		60+	4
	Eastern Catholic	1		Non-resident	5
	Episcopal	1		Former resident	1
	Hindu	1			
	Jewish	1	<b>Work in Laurel?</b>	Yes	17
	Lutheran	1		No	12
	Methodist	9		Retired	8
	Presbyterian	1			
	Protestant	4	<b>Belong to Laurel Organizations?</b>	Yes	27
	"Recovering Catholic"	1		No	10
	Unity	1			
	None	1			

\*In all, there were 40 participants in this research; however, two males and one female participant failed to return the questionnaire, so the numbers here add up to 37. The "No response" slots indicate that people who returned the questionnaires left those categories blank.

participants identified as white. Blacks in Laurel account for 34 percent of the population, while 13 percent of my participants identified as black. Asians and “other” account for seven and four percent of Laurel’s population, respectively, and my participants identified as one and 10 percent, respectively.<sup>10</sup>

My participants skewed old and female. Obviously, this impacted the finding in this research. Those interested in participating in community research were those who felt invested in the community in some way. Had my participants skewed younger, my results would likely have been much different, as I suspect many younger residents in Laurel would have reported not reading the newspapers or being as interested in the community; future research may determine if online community news sites such as Patch.com are better able than “old-fashioned” newspapers to engage younger people in the lives of their home communities.

### ***Recruitment of residents***

Recruitment of residents was, at the beginning of this research, particularly difficult. I relied on flyers, free Internet advertisement, and snowballing in my efforts to recruit Laurel residents.<sup>11</sup> Flyers were hung in three Laurel grocery stores with community bulletin boards, as well as on the bulletin board in the Laurel Library and throughout the journalism building at the

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<sup>10</sup> My percentages do not add up to 100 because four of my participants provided no response to the race question on the questionnaire.

<sup>11</sup> The cost to place a classified ad announcing the project in the *Laurel Leader* for one week was quoted, at the least, at \$145.00. This price deterred me from advertising in the local newspapers, given the fact that I did not have a research budget with which to work.

University of Maryland.<sup>12</sup> Attempts were made to hang flyers elsewhere, including several other local Laurel businesses and community centers, but many owners/operators would not oblige my requests. Five ads—posted weekly from mid-January 2009 through late February 2009—were posted in the “Volunteer” section of the “Suburbs of Washington D.C.” Craigslist.<sup>13</sup> A message, similar to the Craigslist ad, was also posted to the Laurel Yahoo! Group. A Gmail account was set up to receive all messages related to the project:

laurelmediaproject@gmail.com. A standard email message was used to reply to all cold queries sent to the email address.

However, participants recruited through the snowball method received more detailed, personalized responses. A landline phone number was also included on flyers and ads for participants without access to a computer. A customized voicemail message provided an explanation of the project, so that participants calling could learn more about the project before leaving their contact information.<sup>14</sup> Resident participants were offered confidentiality, as well as the chance to be entered into a \$10 gift card raffle if they agreed to participate in a focus group.<sup>15</sup> Two of the focus groups formed as a result of the Craigslist and Yahoo! Group ads. The third was a result of a personal connection at St. Mark’s Methodist, where a colleague in the Philip Merrill College of Journalism held a prominent position; he helped me to recruit participants through his church. A final focus group was the result of snowball sampling from participant referrals.

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<sup>12</sup> See sample flyer, Appendix 1.

<sup>13</sup> See sample Craigslist advertisement, Appendix 2.

<sup>14</sup> Scripts of the phone and email messages are included in Appendix 3.

<sup>15</sup> Four focus groups were conducted.

Other pair or individual interviews resulted from recruiting I did at the Mayor's Open House—a community event at the Laurel Municipal Center that featured booths from many Laurel organizations—as well as the snowball effect. In all cases, participants were selected based on their residential location—Laurel, Maryland. Participants were not selected or discriminated against based on age, sex, race, ethnic origin, religion, or any social or economic qualifications. To qualify for participation, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and live or work in Laurel.<sup>16</sup> The location, time, and duration of the interviews (and overall participation) with all participants was agreed upon and scheduled at the conveniences of both the researcher and the participant(s).

### ***Recruitment of journalists at The Gazette and the Laurel Leader***

Previous research connections with journalists at the *Laurel Leader* made getting them on board relatively easy. A letter, sent snail mail to the editor, Melanie Dzwonchyk, was answered within a few weeks, and all members of the editorial staff agreed to participate without hesitation. An individual interview with each editor and reporter was conducted, with interviews ranging from forty-five minutes to one and one half hours. In all, six interviews resulted from my contact with the *Laurel Leader*.

Attempts to contact *The Gazette* were not as easy, as I had no prior connections there. Contact was initiated with a simultaneous snail and electronic letter to the assistant managing editor of the Laurel edition, Jeffrey Lyles. After

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<sup>16</sup> Residents under age 18 were not included in this research. Late in the field research, I considered petitioning the IRB to include young people, but the process would have taken longer than I would be remaining in the field. This was, admittedly, an oversight on my part; in future research, I will give more consideration to including young people.

two weeks with no response, a snail mail letter was sent to the Prince George's County *Gazette* editor, Vanessa Harrington. After another two weeks with no response, I attempted to contact one of *The Gazette* reporters, Tim Gelles, whose email address is published in the newspaper. Gelles replied quickly with interest in participating. A week later, he replied saying, "I was just told I cannot participate because it would be my take on covering Laurel from the media perspective, and I cannot speak on behalf of the company" (email communication, April 17, 2009). Dr. Linda Steiner, adviser to this research, and I had several "debates" with the editors, including the executive editor, Lloyd Batzler. One editor told me that participating would go against their "journalistic guidelines." Ultimately, they declined participation out of concern over the fact that they are part of "a publicly traded company and [we] need to be concerned about the competition," though they said they do "want to be transparent" (email communication with Steiner, April 23, 2009). Another concern expressed by Batzler was that the newspaper "had a number of young reporters who are untrained" or who have given "opinions" or "wrong answers" when being interviewed in the past. I was allowed an interview with the publisher, Frank Abbott; because he was not directly involved with editorial decisions, speaking with him would not, according to Batzler, violate their policy. While this had the potential to undermine the goals of the project, I was still able to assess the role of the *Gazette* by allowing my other participants to discuss it, including citizens, political figures, local business people and civic leaders.

### ***Recruitment of public officials***

Leadership in Laurel city consists of a mayor and five city council representatives. Formal letters requesting participation were sent to the mayor and city council via email. Their executive assistants replied on their behalf and worked with me to schedule the interviews. All agreed to participate with the exception of one council member, whose schedule, she said, would not permit her to participate. An additional interview was conducted with Laurel's city administrator, who oversees all communications from the government offices, including the Mayor's blog, *Laurel Straight Up!*

### ***Recruitment of advertisers/business owners***

Like residents, business owners and advertisers were difficult to recruit. Several attempts were made to solicit businesses in person, accompanied by formal letters explaining the project, without success. Formal letters were then mailed to an additional fifteen local business owners and/or advertisers at random. Follow-up emails secured only three interviews. A fourth interview was the result of coincidence; a couple I had interviewed as residents were also local real estate agents, and we were able to discuss their business during our interview.

### **The interviews**

Each participant provided signed consent before our interview began. Participants also completed a basic questionnaire, which provided me with demographic information as well as some basic information on their news reading habits, which could be cross-checked with their responses during our interviews.<sup>17</sup> All interviews—save one at the participant's request—were digitally recorded

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<sup>17</sup> For a copy of the questionnaires, see Appendix 4.

upon the participants' verbal consent. Journalists, city officials, and business owners were all individually interviewed. Residents were interviewed, depending on availability and ease of scheduling, as individuals, in pairs, or in focus groups of three to four people. While I only interviewed each participant once for this present study, I did rely on them—in ongoing relationships—to help advance my knowledge of Laurel, as well as to find additional participants for the study. A few participants continued to keep in touch with me via phone and/or email, and would share new thoughts as they arose. Additionally, all participants agreed to being contacted after our interview, if necessary, for follow-up questions or conversations.

A different set of questions was devised for participants in each of the constituent groups listed above.<sup>18</sup> Each participant—depending on what category within which they fell—was asked questions from the appropriate list. Most questions were open-ended. Interviews were semi-structured, as a number of factors affected them. In some instances, time prevented me from asking every question on the list. For instance, several of the small business owners agreed to interviews during their normal workdays and so were unable to devote an hour or more to our conversation. In those cases, I asked questions that I felt to be the most important and relevant to the participant(s). Sometimes, questions were asked out of order, depending on how conversations developed. One conversation with a resident took on a life of its own; though we ended up covering all of the questions I had intended, I asked formally only two questions throughout our three-hour conversation. Some interviews, because of

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<sup>18</sup> Lists of interview questions are provided in Appendix 5.

participants' schedules, were divided into two sessions; most were completed in one session.

Interviews took place in many different settings and locations. Several residents invited me to their homes in Laurel; others met me at a variety of local establishments, including coffee shops and diners. Two focus groups were held in a space in St. Mark's Methodist Church in Laurel, while another was held in the Laurel Museum, and one in my own apartment. All city government officials were interviewed at the municipal center save one, who invited me to her law office in Laurel. Business owners/advertisers were interviewed at their business establishments. Each location provided interesting insight into daily life and business in Laurel. I was able to witness participants interact with others they knew in public places, as well as to see laminated news clippings hanging proudly in local business establishments. For a detailed list of the interviews—their location, length of time, and date—please refer to Appendix 6.

### **Institutional Review Board**

This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were provided with the information presented in the IRB application, including the benefits and risks of participation in this research, methods, and confidentiality orally and in written form via the consent form.<sup>19</sup> Upon their written consent, participants who were considered public officials (journalists, publishers, public officials) were named to maintain levels of authenticity and credibility. However, to minimize the risks to the participants, each participant was allowed access to a draft of the work before presentation or publication to

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<sup>19</sup> For copies of the consent forms, see Appendices 7 and 8.

ensure that they were comfortable with the information included. Additionally, some individuals or places (organizations, businesses, etc.) named by the participants in interviews were altered to protect the anonymity of people or places not directly involved in this research. The names of participants considered to be public individuals are used as a result of their written consent; because real names will be used, there was a social risk to these participants. However, this risk was minimized by allowing the participants to view drafts of the study before any publication. Following Liebow (1993), all named participants were given an opportunity to comment on the draft, and any information they found to be damaging to their status in Laurel was discussed and negotiated. Of the 21 named participants, 11 replied with comments. The overwhelming majority of their comments were both positive and constructive. Several participants provided factual corrections. For instance, if I had named a town as being in an incorrect county, they pointed that out so that I might get it right for the final draft. Others sought to update me on changes that had occurred since my time in the field. Their comments are highlighted, some places in text and others in footnotes, throughout the remaining chapters.<sup>20</sup> All other participants were granted confidentiality via pseudonyms; because of this, there was no risk to them.

Interviews were digitally recorded. I was the only researcher with access to the material and participants were allowed to ask for information to be “off the record” at any time. In addition, if participants felt that the details they were

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<sup>20</sup> Mike McLaughlin said upon review of the draft, “I hope you get a lot of comments on it, even if you may feel like you’ve disturbed the beehive, because it will enrich your final product and confirm its importance.”

disclosing were sensitive in any way, I worked to either disguise those details (if using them was relevant and necessary to the authenticity of the report) or left them out altogether. All materials—hard-copy and digital— are to be destroyed after the project and its publication is complete.

### **Ethical considerations**

Because this research brings together methodological assumptions from three fields—the practical field of journalism and academic fields of journalism and cultural studies—special consideration had to be given to the treatment of participants, specifically whether or not to use their real names in the final text, as discussed above. A question which raised much thought and discussion was: can participants be protected if they are named? Caughey (2006) summarized the dilemma:

Because your participant helped you by voluntarily opening up his or her life, you have a significant obligation to protect this person in what you write ... On the other hand, you both entered into this relationship with the understanding that your purpose was to learn and write about the person's life. The issue here involves what to tell and how to tell what you do tell (pp. 84-85).

A stark contrast marks the treatment of sources in journalism and ethnography. Journalists expect complete openness from sources and almost always print their real names in stories. Under certain circumstances, journalists will provide anonymity to sources if it is thought that their comments might endanger them in some way. However, when the “greater good” can be served,

journalists are often most loyal to the truth and sometimes end up exposing their sources without permission. By contrast, the norm in academic ethnographic work is to provide anonymity to participants. Participants can be named only when the participants' written consent is provided. Likewise, ethnographers often work closely with participants even after the fieldwork is complete, allowing them access to drafts of the thesis, essay, or book. Allowing participants to object to a characterization or to an interpretation gives some power back to them. In the instances that participants want material changed, researchers can oblige their request, or take a similar approach to that taken by Leibow (1993) in *Tell Them Who I Am*; he added the participants' comments about the text in running footnotes throughout it and did not alter his original interpretations.

The "new journalism" movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which combined the genres of journalism, ethnography, and the novel, shed light on methodological and ethical dilemmas, including naming sources. Also called "intimate journalism," the new journalism called into question how journalists treat their sources. Harrington (2003) summed it up this way:

As [intimate] journalists, for instance, our ethical obligations are not only to the subjects but also to readers, whom we are to keep informed as the ultimate justification of our press freedoms. This stance contrasts that of ethnographers who believe they are so indebted to their subjects that they would never publish anything that might harm or embarrass them, even anything with which a subject disagrees. Journalists are sensitive to the impact stories might have on subjects, particularly ordinary people who

have no experience dealing with the press. Yet journalists remain committed to the idea that their ultimate allegiance is to readers. If withholding what we know to be true in order to protect subjects would mislead readers, we don't withhold it. As journalists, we usually name names, unlike ethnographers who hide their subjects' identities supposedly to protect them. We use real names because we believe it lends authenticity to our stories and because the truth and accuracy of those stories can then be tested, something that is impossible with most ethnographic reports" (pp. 100-101).

I consider myself well-suited for this particular project, having been trained as a journalist and as an ethnographer. But these two backgrounds presented me with some difficult options to weigh. My journalism instincts told me that, above all, I was beholden to those who would read my study, to the truth, and to the advancement of knowledge. I owed it to readers to present what I had learned in a straightforward, honest, and truthful manner. I also felt that I could not convey the unique culture of the town if I did not name it.

My ethnography instincts (and a desire to adhere to the feminist ethical model), on the other hand, told me that protecting those who helped me throughout this research journey was, at all costs, most important; without them, new knowledge would not be possible. Denzin (1997), who has written about both journalism and ethnography, argued that the social sciences "maintain the illusion of privacy within the postmodern world" (p. 280). He credited writers like Wolfe and Mailer, "new journalists" who combined the genres of journalism

and ethnography, with lifting “the veil of secrecy that traditionally surrounds social science and ethnographic inquiry” by writing about real people, with real names, real descriptions, and with real life consequences (p. 279).

Because this project is a case study of Laurel, Maryland, its people and its newspapers, it was important for me to name both the town and the newspapers. Doing so not only enhances the credibility of the text, but also provides a cultural description of Laurel at a specific moment in time. Getting specific about place and time is a foundational principle of cultural studies: “Contextualizing cultural forms and audiences in historically specific situations helps illuminate how cultural artifacts reflect or reproduce concrete social relations and conditions—or oppose and attempt to transform them” (Kellner and Durham, 2001, p. 12).

Conover (2000), a journalist/anthropologist who went undercover as a corrections officer in order to write *Newjack*—a story about Sing Sing, “New York State's most troubled maximum-security facility”—solidified the culture of the prison in a specific place and time to help others understand prison culture from the inside. In order to do this, he not only named the prison in the book, but also most of his participants. A work of non-fiction, the book provides real scenes and situations gathered by Conover using small spiral notebook he kept in his breast pocket.<sup>21</sup>

Conover said in an author's note that most of the individuals written about in the book were identified using their real names, though some names were changed to protect the privacy of certain officers and inmates. Because Conover was undercover—no one in the prison knew he would eventually write a book about

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<sup>21</sup> All of the guards carried these pocket-sized notebooks, though Conover notes that “unlike most of them, I took many notes” (2000, Author's note).

it—he has said it was important to protect certain people’s privacy. “At Sing Sing I worked with people who didn’t know what I was doing. I decided that if I portrayed them in any way they might find embarrassing, I should change their names. I changed about one-third of the names in the book” (Kramer and Call, 2007, p. 38).

Though ethnographic in nature, the book’s cover sleeve calls it “a milestone in American journalism: a book that casts new and unexpected light on this nation’s prison crisis and sets a new standard for courageous, in-depth reporting” (Newjack). The relationship between ethnography and journalism is a close one; ethnographers and journalists employ many of the same techniques to discover and uncover cultural phenomena. I consider this dissertation to be both an exercise in in-depth reporting as well as an exercise in ethnography. The study is an example of journalism, or in-depth reporting, because it aims to “provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007, p. 12). Learning about the role of journalism in communities—as it presently is and *as it could or should be*—is important if citizens, as well as journalists and public officials, are to support democracy and public life on local levels. This study is also an example of ethnography, in that it aims to advance scholarly knowledge and theory while taking into account the social and emotional effects the outcomes may have on the participants. I hope that it has impact in the community in some way, even if small. Conover pointed out the impact of *Newjack*:

Did my book result in any reforms in the corrections system? I like to think so, but I'm sure of only one. In *Newjack*, I describe B-Block, the immense building where I worked. Housing six hundred inmates, it is one of the largest freestanding cellblocks in the world. Horrific and very dim inside, it seemed as if the windows hadn't been washed in fifty years. I included that detail in the book. The wife of a B-Block inmate sent me an email after visiting her husband and wrote, 'My husband just wanted you to know that a month after your book came out, they washed the windows.'

So there's the power of the press for you (Kramer & Call, 2007, p. 39).

Unlike Conover, I in no way deceived any of my participants. I was upfront with them about my intentions regarding this research and our time spent together during interviews or community events. Still, I hope that the findings of this research will allow my participants and others in Laurel to reflect on the status of community journalism in their town and to make necessary changes to correct or enhance the practice of this important public service.

That is why naming Laurel is so important to this study. Naming Laurel at this moment in time not only provides an understanding of cultural and social makeup of the town as a result of certain forces acting upon it, but also marks it as being significant, special, and worthy of study. But, naming the town and its newspapers (as I also have chosen to do) also meant revealing the identities of my participants, especially the journalists and city officials, because there are so few

of them. Other studies of journalism, like that of Schlesinger (1979) and Ericson, Baranek & Chan (1987), successfully name the news organizations they are studying while maintaining the confidentiality of their participants because of the size of the newsrooms under investigation. Schlesinger studied the BBC, one of the largest news organizations in Europe; Ericson, Baranek & Chan studied *The Globe and Mail*, one of the three largest circulation newspapers in Toronto with more than 1,100 employees at the time of the study (p. 82).

Such confidentiality is impossible in a study of Laurel, Maryland's newspapers because of the small staffs; for instance, the *Laurel Leader's* entire editorial staff is comprised of only five people. Because of this, I believe that I have best protected them and the other public officials and business owners by naming them—with their complete understanding and consent. Naming them leaves no room for speculation in the community regarding who said what. In addition, those who hold an office or write for a newspaper are already public figures. While becoming involved in any research project involves some risk, even if minimal, by explaining the goals of the project and the manner in which the data will be collected and used, participants were able to make an informed decision regarding their participation in the project.

Furthermore, naming them also gives them ownership over the project. Though some might argue otherwise, it is my belief that, if done carefully and respectfully, using real names can be in line with the feminist ethical model, which values “individual uniqueness” and “celebrates personal expressiveness” (Denzin, 1997, p. 276). Attaching the participants' names to their ideas,

traditions, and perceptions—which are significant to the production of knowledge—can empower them, giving them an authority and an understanding that they are making a contribution to knowledge about the culture of community news in *their* town. Like Laurel, they, too, are special and significant.

However, I have extended anonymity to the private citizens—the residents—involved in this project. All residents’ names have been changed. Business owners/advertisers were given the option of using their real name (as well as the name of their business) or using a pseudonym and generic description of their business.

I set out with the desire to name all “public” participants, who included the journalists and government officials. All those who fall into the categories of journalist and government officials agreed to be named. I had planned to grant business owners as well as residents anonymity. Three of the four business owners, when given the choice, wished to be named; two, who were initially interviewed as “residents” were later discovered to be business people in Laurel, so they are not named. Additionally, a couple of people who fell into the resident category also agreed to be named because of a public role they fulfilled. For instance, Segundo Mir, a Hispanic pastor at the Laurel First Baptist Church, plays a very public role in helping his parishioners, and so agreed to be named. In the chapters that follow, participants whose real names are used will be referred to by first and last name; participants whose names have been changed will be referred to by first name only. For detailed information regarding the location, length of time and date of interviews, please refer to Appendix 6. Here, readers can also

see which participants are referred to using pseudonyms and which are referred to by their real name.

### **Thematic analysis**

In order to complement my participants' perspectives and perceptions of the weekly newspapers and their role in Laurel, I conducted a thematic analysis of the *Laurel Leader* and *The Gazette*, for the duration of my six months spent in the field. Studying the content of these two weeklies provided another access point to the culture of Laurel as a town and, possibly, a community. Matheson (2005) argued that “the news is not telling us something new, but reminding us of the resilience of already known structures of knowledge” (p. 18). Texts, he continued, must be seen “within their contexts, and particularly as language in action as part of social practice, rather than as stand-alone texts” (p. 19). Examining the weekly newspapers that, in many ways, strive to define Laurel as a community helped me to understand some of the values held by the citizens and stakeholders—or at least perceived values as understood by the journalists reporting on Laurel.

Each paper is published once per week, on Thursday. I began collecting the papers in January 2009 and continued until I finished fieldwork at the end of June 2009. However, I had been reading both papers frequently for nearly one year prior to beginning my fieldwork, which allowed me to ask specific questions about content as well as understand specific references made to it by my participants during our conversations. In total, I examined 16 issues of the *Laurel Leader* and the Laurel edition of *The Gazette*. I noted recurrent items in the

newspapers, such as local advertisements, editorial columns, letters to the editor, and classified ads. I also kept a close eye on the content of the news articles in search of recurrent themes, such as local events, news about local people, local government, and local business, always looking for evidence of local values, morals, and behaviors. The recurrent content of both papers is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

### **Data analysis**

In addition to the thematic analysis of the Laurel newspapers, as described above, all 29 interviews were analyzed. All but two interviews were transcribed. Those two interviews had poor sound quality; as a result, I listened to those interviews and took notes on the clear and interesting comments made by the participants where possible.

All interview transcripts were reviewed at least twice. The first reading allowed me the chance to note common themes present across all interviews. From those themes, I was able to develop a set of five to six analytical categories for my questions relating to community and community journalism in Laurel. Once the categories were established, I went back to the data, looking for more specific and concrete representations of those categories. The texts were highlighted according to category. Once the second wave of analysis was complete, I compiled the data from each highlighted categories in order to begin framing my results chapters. The remainder of this dissertation presents the results of my fieldwork. Chapter 5 provides data and discussion on my participants' views of Laurel as a community. Chapter 6 covers the role that community

journalism—specifically, the *Laurel Leader* and *The Gazette*—plays in the town. Chapter 7 deals with the future of community journalism in Laurel and, specifically, the ways in which one local blogger views his role. Finally, Chapter 8 provides discussion and conclusions about how my participants’ perceptions of these complex matters shape the face of community and community journalism in Laurel, Maryland.

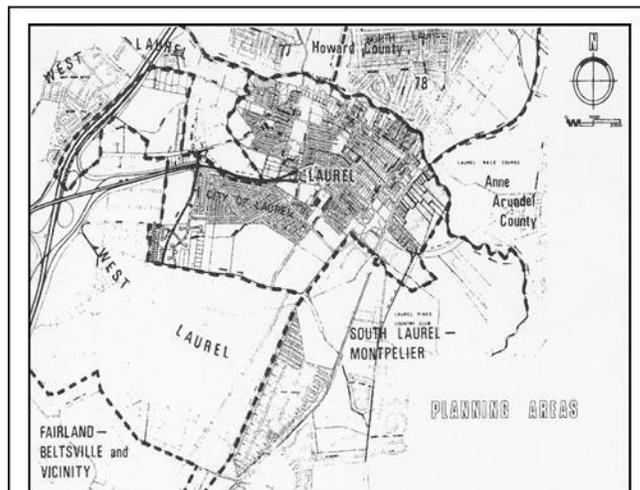
**CHAPTER FIVE**  
Results and Discussion  
Part I—Community in Laurel

For an outsider, getting to know and understand Laurel, Maryland is no easy feat. Laurel is a complicated place, with a rich history and its share of modern-day challenges. Examining Laurel through its history and especially through the eyes of its current residents—is necessary for determining whether Laurel is a community where people share a sense of interdependence, or simply a place on the map, filled with people going about their individual lives. This chapter first explores the history of Laurel since its incorporation in 1870, then takes a present day snapshot by exploring Laurel’s demographics and sections.

Finally, my participants weigh in on how they understand, operate within, and make meaning within their lives in Laurel in 2009.

### **History of Laurel**

Laurel, Maryland, spans three counties (Prince George’s—where the incorporated historic “city” lies; Anne Arundel;



**Figure 1: Map of Laurel, Maryland**

An early planning map shows the various parts of Laurel (as they remain today) including the city limits as well as its north, south, east and west portions, today often referred to as “greater Laurel.” Map courtesy “Laurel, Maryland: souvenir historical booklet, centennial 1870-1970” edited by former *News Leader* editor Gertrude Poe.

and Howard).<sup>22</sup> Figure 1 shows the various parts of Laurel. Laurel is positioned midway between Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. The MARC Commuter Train, located at the end of Main Street, extends to both of these major metropolitan areas, making travel to work in either of these cities easy for Laurel residents. Annapolis, Maryland's state capitol, is also less than twenty-five miles to the east of Laurel. The Patuxent River runs behind Laurel's historic Main Street, separating Prince George's County Laurel from Anne Arundel and Howard Counties, Laurel.

### ***“Laurel Factory”***

Laurel's roots date back to 1658, when the land that would become Laurel was owned by Richard Snowden, a Welsh immigrant. Snowden received a Colonial Manorial land grant for 12,260 acres (Bladey & Curtis, 1983, p. 25). The family, who remained prominent land owners for years to come, eventually started industry in the area. Nicholas Snowden opened a grist mill along the Patuxent River on Main Street in 1811. In 1824, the mill was converted to a cotton spinning factory. Because this factory and others were the primary industries in Prince George's county, the town became known as “Laurel Factory.” In 1870, Laurel was incorporated and by 1875, the Post Office dropped the “Factory” from Laurel's name. During the Civil War, the factories turned out war materials. But, the end of the war and the “advent of the steamship” ceased the demand for sailcloth, one of the factories' primary manufactured goods; the cotton mill closed in 1911 (Denny, 1997, p. 236).

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<sup>22</sup> Many participants argued that the tip of West Laurel stretches into Montgomery County, as well.

The things that once held residents in Laurel Factory were disappearing. Post civil-war, the job market was in decline and new transportation options made it easy for residents to find new jobs outside of their hometown. No longer were residents dependent upon a purely local economy, but rather upon “regional economic trends and income levels” (Bladey & Curtis, 1983, p. 33). Laurel was turning into a suburb.

### ***“Suburban” Laurel***

By 1888, the city of Laurel was the largest town in Prince George’s county and a prominent stop along the railroad between Baltimore and Washington, D.C—where many local people had to look for work when the factories closed in Laurel (Denny, 1997, p. 237). Railroads, trolley lines, newly paved roads and highways turned Laurel residents into commuters who left town for work. The trolley line, which extended from Main Street in Laurel to G Street in Washington, was constructed in 1902 and allowed Laurel residents to travel an hour to work in government jobs rather than locally at the mill (City of Laurel Walking Tour, 2006). In 1929, Route 1, the Baltimore-Washington Boulevard now known as Baltimore Avenue, was constructed, and Laurel was its midpoint.

Bladey and Curtis’s 1983 anthropological study of Laurel’s “human cultural history” argued that the development of Laurel as a suburb after the closing of the industrial economic markets was an attempt to “control” the “sense of place as well as the relationship of the community to the regional market” (p. 1; p. 34). At the end of the nineteenth century, when Laurel entered into a competition of sorts with other local towns for residents who would “support the

operation of civic government,” attempts were made to transform Laurel into a “spa” community, which “offered optional country homes rather than permanent residences to workers of Baltimore and Washington” (Bladey & Curtis, p. 35). However, Bladey and Curtis indicated that the concept failed mainly because Laurel became “overwhelmed by the demands for suburban/commuter housing” (p. 36).

The onset of World War II brought more and more people into Laurel in search of housing, and families were growing. Though many were leaving town for work, World War II brought many military personnel working at Fort Meade into Laurel in search of housing. Additionally, the National Security Agency moved to Fort Meade from Virginia in 1952, and the Department of Agriculture was based in Beltsville, just down Route 1, creating an even bigger population boom in Laurel (Denny, 1997, p. 241).

Between 1940 and 1950, Laurel felt the tremors of the baby boom, and the population nearly doubled, going from 2,823 to 4,482. It doubled again between 1950 and 1960, reaching 8,503 by the decade’s end. By 1970, the population gained another three thousand (County in Transition, 1970, p. 55).<sup>23</sup> The rapid growth continued, and today, the city of Laurel boasts nearly 20,000 residents; greater Laurel has more than 100,000.

During that four-decade post-war span Laurel was becoming a popular place, and regional newspapers were talking about it. A 1957 headline in *The Washington Post* read “Booming Suburb – That’s Laurel” (Gertrude Poe, 1970, p. 106). Two 1963 headlines from *The Evening Sun* heralded Laurel as “A Fabulous

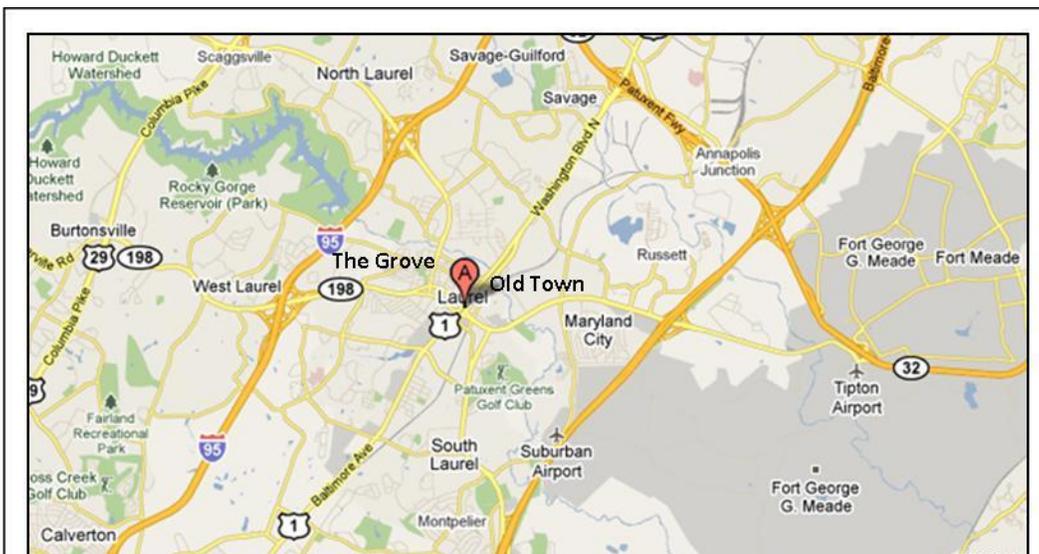
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<sup>23</sup> These figures represent the city of Laurel.

Area Where There Will Never Be A Depression” as well as the “Half-Way City of Tomorrow” (Gertrude Poe, 1970). Today, Laurel rarely makes headlines in regional newspapers, except when serious crimes, like murders, are committed there.<sup>24</sup> And, in 2009, in the midst of one of the greatest American recessions, evidence suggests that Laurel has not been immune to the weakening economy.<sup>25</sup>

### Contemporary Laurel

Though the city of Laurel—located in Prince George’s County—is only 4.5 square miles, the Greater Laurel area stretches well beyond this center and is divided semantically and perceptually into a number of different areas. In order



**Figure 2: Contemporary Map of Laurel, Maryland**

A contemporary map of Laurel, Maryland, retrieved from Google Maps on October 23, 2010. Superimposed onto the screenshot are labels for “Old Town” (also called “Historic Laurel” and located within the city limits) and “The Grove,” the historically African-American neighborhood.

<sup>24</sup> See “Md. Man Gets 40 Years for Murder of Pregnant Woman,” *Washington Post*, August 28, 2009. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/08/28/AR2009082802818.html>

<sup>25</sup> A look at the community newspapers and the decrease in advertising over the past year makes that readily apparent, as will be discussed in later chapters.

to fully understand the complexities of modern day Laurel, a chart and map have been provided here, Figures 2 and Table 2, with the various terms used by my participants when describing Laurel.

<b>Table 2: Interpretations of Laurel</b>	
“City of Laurel”	Located in Prince George’s County; city limits
“Old Town”	Located in Prince George’s County; Located within Laurel city limits.
“Historic Laurel”	The northernmost portion of the city of Laurel; often synonymous with “Old Town”
“The Grove”	Located in Prince George’s County within the Laurel city limits; a historically black neighborhood
“Greater Laurel”	All areas with a Laurel zip code outside of the city limits, including parts in Prince George’s, Howard, Ann Arundel, and Montgomery Counties
“South Laurel”	Located in Prince George’s County, south of the city limits
“Montpelier”	Located in Prince George’s County, part of South Laurel, associated closely with the area surrounding the Montpelier Mansion
“West Laurel”	Located in Prince George’s County (and some argue the tip of Montgomery County) to the west of the city limits, across I-95
“North Laurel”	Located in Howard County north of the city limits and Patuxent River, starting directly behind Main Street
“Maryland City”	Located in Anne Arundel County, east of the city limits, across Route 198
“Russett”	Located in Anne Arundel County, east of the city limits past Maryland City; bumps up to the Baltimore/Washington Parkway

The City of Laurel had 19,960 residents, according to the 2000 Census.

“Greater” Laurel (all areas surrounding, but excluding the city with Laurel postal codes, including 20707, 20708, 20723, and 20724) boasted 87,820 residents according to that Census. In total, those considering themselves members of Laurel likely tally nearly 108,000 (though the 2010 Census may show that figure is higher).

### ***Laurel city government***

Residents living within the city of Laurel elect the mayor and city council. The mayor is “the leading elected official of the City [...and] is empowered to approve or veto legislation, provide an annual budget for all city services, and have direct supervision of government administration for all citizens and businesses of the City” (Office of the Mayor). The mayor’s term is four years, while the five city council representatives serve two years. Non-partisan elections are held every two years, in March. The city of Laurel is broken into two wards. Two council representatives are elected from Ward 1, two are elected from Ward 2, and one council representative is elected “at large.” According to Laurel City’s website,

City Council members shall be persons of known integrity, experience and sound judgment, not less than twenty-one (21) years of age, citizens of the United States, shall be registered to vote in city elections and residents of the City for the one year immediately preceding the date of the election.  
(City Council).

All elections and respective city positions are non-partisan, meaning no candidates run on a party platform (Kristie Mills, personal interview, 9 June 2009). During the 2008 election, held on September 9, 2008, 11,975 Laurel city residents were registered to vote; 402 voted (Pat Haag, personal email, July 29, 2009). As shown in Table 3, voting in local elections in Laurel has been declining for the past decade.

<b>Election</b>	<b>Number of Registered Voters</b>	<b>Number of Votes Cast</b>
September 9, 2008	11,975	402
March 20, 2006	11,670	829
March 15, 2004	10,154	536
March 18, 2002	10,235	1,091
March 20, 2000	9,926	1,062

Those who live within the city pay taxes to the city, which provides them with resources, including police, rescue, and fire squads.

***“Parts” of Greater Laurel***

West Laurel starts at the western boundary of the city, crosses over I-95, and extends to the Patuxent River to the north and to Route 198 to the south. Also located in Prince George’s County, it is more rural, with mostly single family homes. G. G. Barr—who developed the West Laurel area beginning in the late fifties and early sixties—saw people from “old Laurel” relocating in order to “upgrade their homes” (Chamblin, 1982). A 1977 article from the Laurel Historical Society’s clip file said that “residents ...often refer to themselves—for simplicity’s sake—as citizens of Laurel, where they don’t pay taxes or vote. Many are hard pressed to say how West Laurel differs from other county bedroom communities” (“West Laurel,” 1977). Though it depends almost certainly on with whom you talk, many today say West Laurel is a very community-minded, neighborly place. Real estate agent Bob Mamula said in 2003, that “people let you know they live in West Laurel. They’re happy about it. They’re proud of it” (Glaros, 2003). I found this to be true of my West Laurel participants.

To the south is Montpelier, also referred to as South Laurel. Also located in Prince George's County, South Laurel extends below the city limits as far as Contee Road. This area includes a shopping center, several grocery stores, a few chain restaurants, and a furniture store. In 1983, residents of South Laurel/Montpelier held a meeting to discuss incorporating the area into a separate municipality, but it never did become incorporated. Like many other parts of Laurel, Montpelier celebrates its history. One of the most famous historical sites in the area is the Montpelier Mansion, which was constructed by the Snowden family in 1781. The site was host to many famous guests, including George Washington and Abigail Adams ("History of Laurel, Maryland").

To the east are Maryland City and Russett, located in Anne Arundel County. Maryland City was planned and developed in the early 1960s by Harvey Kane ("Maryland City," 2003; Quick, 2003). Driving east along Route 198, a brick sign welcomes visitors into "Maryland City." Like Montpelier, Maryland City also explored incorporation in the early 1990s in response to a Redskins football stadium proposed to be constructed in the area (Murchison, 1993). But, since its development the area has transformed, according to Raymond Smallwood, Maryland City's fire chief and civic association president, "from a small residential development with about 3,000 residents to a large community with a population of about 20,000" (Quick, 2003). Along Route 198, the main stretch through Maryland City and Russett, are shopping centers, including several grocery and retail stores, a Target, Wal-Mart, and Sam's Club. In 2001, a redistricting proposal from the Maryland House of Delegates threatened to

separate the two communities into different districts, but residents fought the plan, arguing that “relationships with lawmakers, constituent strength and cross-community ties 20 years in the making would suffer if the map were approved” (Vincent, 2001).

And, finally, to the north, located in Howard County, is North Laurel. North Laurel is a popular retreat for those wishing to remain in Laurel, but get out of Prince George’s County. The main reason for doing so, which will be discussed later in this chapter, is the perception (and reality) that Howard County has a better school system. Howard County, like neighboring Montgomery County, which extends west of West Laurel, has higher annual household incomes, on average, than families in Prince George’s County. Household incomes in Montgomery and Howard counties were \$89,284 and \$97,837 in 2007 as compared to \$68,410 in Prince George’s county (Prince George’s County, Maryland). These county divisions create identity issues for residents, which will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **Divisions in Laurel**

Not only because Laurel is broken up into sections, but also because it is divided by three counties, my participants had varied responses when asked to describe Laurel as if they were telling a stranger about the place. Some called Laurel a town; others, a suburb or municipality. How my participants used and understood these terms provided some insight into how they assess the quality of life (or work, in some cases) they experience in Laurel.

Several participants argued that Laurel is a suburb of the big cities closest to it—Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C. Christine Folks, 52, columnist for the *Laurel Leader* and resident of West Laurel, called West Laurel “very suburbia.” Folks said that when she first moved to West Laurel thirty years earlier, it was almost rural—very different than hustling and bustling Washington D.C. and Baltimore. In addition, West Laurel’s active civic association has fought townhouse and apartment development and maintained its single-family home make-up.

But, Hannah, 40, a resident of Russett, disagreed that Laurel is suburban, not because of culture but on the basis of physical location. “We’re not really a suburb, because if you watch the news, we’re never mentioned in the D.C. news and we’re not mentioned in the Baltimore news. We’re literally half way between both,” she said.

Either way, several participants acknowledged that Laurel has become somewhat of a “bedroom community” for both of these major cities. Craig Moe, 49, mayor of the city of Laurel, said that Laurel has experienced an increase of people with jobs in the big cities moving into Laurel: “We’re seeing a lot more people push out from Baltimore and Washington that want to live in the area and then commute back and forth that they’re getting on the rail.” Though he did not cite the following statistics, conversations with other participants suggested that possible reasons for the population influx include housing prices and crime rates. As of July 12, 2010, the median price for homes for sale in Laurel was \$249,900 (Laurel, MD Real Estate Market Snapshot). Though Baltimore was less at

\$149,000, (Baltimore, MD Real Estate Market Snapshot) the median price in Washington, D.C. was significantly higher, at \$369,000 (Washington, DC Real Estate Market Snapshot).

Crime rates also vary significantly. In 2009, Laurel had only one homicide, 74 counts of robbery and 171 counts of theft. Adult arrests totaled 1,041 for the year (Statistics). Washington, D.C. had 78 homicides in 2009, and made 1,017 adult arrests in the week of July 2, 2010 alone (District Crime at a Glance). Likewise, in Baltimore, 16 homicides were reported in the first three months of 2010, and in that same span, a total of 782 violent crimes were reported (Monthly Crime Summary). By comparison of these statistics, Laurel appears a much safer place to live than Baltimore and Washington, D.C. In fact, my primary motivation for moving to Laurel was a greater sense of safety and security. Previously, I had been living in Adelphi, Maryland, located just a few miles from the University of Maryland, and only nine miles north of the District.

David Driver, 47, sports reporter for the *Laurel Leader*, said that while he does consider Laurel to be a suburb of these two big cities, it is different than most other suburbs in that it has rich history: “It is a suburb, but at the same time, it has history to it. It’s, of course, more than 100 years old, where a lot of suburban towns, you know, are twenty or thirty years old.”

### ***An old town feel***

Many residents compared Laurel to Columbia—a planned community that began in the 1960s and is located in Howard County—describing Laurel as having more of that old, small town feel that is a result of its 1870 incorporation.

Nate, 64, resident of West Laurel, first struggled to verbalize his description of his town, having trouble finding the correct word. Then he said,

My first word was hodgepodge, but my next word is eclectic. I mean, it's sort of, [different] styles and types of properties and things and they're kind of mixed and mingled.

Brian, 21, resident of Old Town Laurel, articulated more precisely what Nate meant:

A lot of the new communities now, they're all the same communities. You've got, you know, the houses look alike. Everybody's got the same amount of land, the same backyard. The front of the houses, there's like three different styles and you got three then it starts over and you have three again. That's one of the things I like about Laurel. [...] Every house is different and, I think that kind of gives Laurel its own [...] kind of image and with it being in an historic district, [...] a lot of the house have been here since the 1800's.

Julie, 22, agreed, suggesting that planned towns like Columbia are “very synthetic and like a prepackaged city” and similar to the “prefab houses” that roll down the highway, just waiting to be plunked onto an empty piece of land.

Jan Robison, 59, a resident of the city of Laurel and a member of Laurel City Council for seven years, called Laurel a “big little town.” She explained why this was a positive assessment of Laurel:

It has some qualities of being a big town but it still has qualities of the small town feel, too. Because from here, you can get to so many places, to

the big town [of Laurel]. Laurel itself is small, but the Laurel area is a good size.

### ***Divisions create confusion***

Officially, the city of Laurel is dubbed a municipality because of its incorporation. Residents living within the city limits pay taxes to the municipality and have their own representation. They also enjoy other perks, like discounted swimming at the pool on Main Street, as well as Laurel city police and fire protection. Because of this, many of my participants who live within the city said they readily identify with the city as a distinct part of Laurel.

Those living outside the city limits are often confused and even frustrated. Schooling is divided by county, so students living in Prince George's county Laurel attend different schools than students living in Anne Arundel or Howard County Laurel. Likewise, residents outside of the city limits rely on their respective county for government and representation, law enforcement and fire protection.

Brian explained how feelings of confusion manifested at the local pool where he worked many summers.

At the pool and at all the community buildings, the city buildings, you get a resident rate so having to explain that to everybody that comes by and says, 'I live in Laurel,' and I say, 'What street do you live on?' and they give me the street and I look it up in Laurel's street book of every street that's in the city of Laurel and their street's not in there. I'm like, 'You

may live in Laurel but you don't live in the *city* of Laurel.' And they get angry. 'I live in Laurel,' but you don't live in the *city* of Laurel.

Others expressed examples of confusion or frustration about living in a place that spans four counties. Rick Wilson, 51, a resident of the Old Town section of the city of Laurel and also a local blogger, recalled:

A long time ago, [Mayor] Craig Moe and one of the councilmen did one of these magnets for your refrigerator that said, you know, here's their names, here's their phone numbers, here's all the city departments. If you have any problems, please call. So a friend of mine that lives out in Russett [...] was talking to me one day at work, and she goes, 'I'm having a problem with garbage pick up,' or something, and she said, 'I'm gonna call [mayor] Craig Moe.' And she had gotten this thing I think when she lived in an apartment here in town, kept it with her, it's been on her refrigerator, and she just never realized that she moved outside of the city, and it's a problem.

Nate, 64, a West Laurel resident and also a real estate agent in Laurel, said that his advertisements do distinguish homes in the various parts of Laurel; for example, he said he often makes reference to "sought-after West Laurel" in his listings. He said he does often discuss the different parts of Laurel with potential home buyers. Those discussions usually center on services available through the city of Laurel, as well as convenience of shopping and public transportation and schools. Rarely, though, does he "get involved in discussions regarding fire, rescue, ambulance and elected officials."

For Rick's friend, Mayor Moe would not be able to help her with her garbage problem, only refer her to her county representative, creating frustration. For others, the problems associated with Laurel spanning four counties are a bit more serious. Bob Mignon, 59, owner of Minuteman Press in the city of Laurel, elaborated on the difficulties of dealing with a handful of separate county governments.

If you're really in Anne Arundel County Laurel, [that] doesn't mean you're entitled to using the services in Prince George's County even though they might be closer to you and better or make more sense to be using them, because they're not being supported by the county in which you live. They want you to go to the county in which you're living. You can have, in a case of crime, you know, some criminal under pursuit by a Prince George's County person. What do they do, just stop at the Anne Arundel County border in a pursuit? There were days when that's happened. Now there are memos of understanding, memorandum of understanding certainly kind of working better together. If a house is burning down in Anne Arundel County and a Prince George's fire department is aware of it, should they not respond, too? But the funding says 'that's not my responsibility.'

However, Mayor Moe said that such "mutual aid systems" do exist between the various counties and jurisdictions. The mutual aid systems for fire and emergency medical services between the nearby jurisdictions have been in place for more than 50 years, he said. However, the law enforcement, public works and

shelter operations agreements are fairly recent, he admitted. For example, the Mayor provided me with documentation for a law enforcement agreement between nearby Fort Meade and the City of Laurel signed in 2006. Another law enforcement mutual aid agreement between the city and several nearby towns, including Mt. Rainer, Bladensburg, Riverdale, Hyattsville, Greenbelt, University Park and Edmonston, was signed only in 2009.

Bob Mignon recounted another example involving a couple from his neighborhood who were in an automobile accident:

They were like 60s, early 60s, and they had no family in the areas, no children. They didn't have children, and they both were in this horrible accident and then it came time for physical therapy for them [...] and Anne Arundel County was the only one that would provide transportation for them. But the transportation wouldn't take them to their physical therapist in Prince George's County. [It] would only take them to physical therapist in Anne Arundel County. But their physicians were saying you had to go to these particular physical therapists. So things like that don't make sense.

So, while some mutual aid agreements have been in place for many years, others are very new. With city and county governments acting as separate entities and serving various sections of Laurel independently, residents have no choice but to make distinctions. And these divisions, as well as other factors to be discussed in the next section, contribute to identity issues for those who live in Laurel.

## **Issues of identity manifested**

Where and whether participants lived or worked in Laurel affected how they identified with different sections of Laurel. For instance, all of the members of city council, as well as the mayor, readily identified with the city of Laurel, not only because they serve in Laurel, but also because they live within the city limits—some for their entire lives. When talking with my participants about Laurel, especially those who were residents, they often referred exclusively to their immediate surroundings or “section” of Laurel.

For some who both live and work in Laurel, their sense of identity becomes more complex. Melanie Dzwonchyk, 53, the editor of the *Laurel Leader* who has lived in the city of Laurel for 28 years, was unsure about how to answer when asked if she identifies particularly with one part of Laurel or another. Before answering, she asked me whether I wanted her answer to reflect her status as a resident or as editor of the *Laurel Leader*. I asked her to address both, and she said:

First and foremost, I think of it as the Laurel, the greater Laurel area. But, I definitely, as a resident of the city of Laurel, I very, very, very much focus on the city aspect of it. I mean, that’s, those are the people I voted for, as a resident I’m speaking, now. [...] I do think of it very much as, as city and, and a couple of counties. Well, three counties, Howard, Anne Arundel and Prince George’s. So, when I say I live in Laurel, I don’t say that I live in the city of Laurel. Now if somebody wanted to get real

specific, I'd say, 'Oh well, I live within the city, so I pay less to get into the swimming pool.'

Gwendolyn Glenn, reporter for the *Laurel Leader* but a resident of Silver Spring, Maryland, located south of Laurel and just north of Washington, D.C., showed how the distinctions between different parts of Laurel are important to her reporting. The location or jurisdiction of a happening needs to be acknowledged in a story. She said that, especially in dealing with political or public works issues, she must make clear the governing body that is dealing with the issue. For instance, a problem might be happening in Russett, which, though still in Laurel, falls under the jurisdiction of Anne Arundel County government because Russett is not located within the city limits.

### ***Maintaining a positive image***

According to several participants, such a distinction is crucial to protecting the identity of the respective parts of Laurel. G. Rick Wilson, 51, local resident and blogger described the issue as one of public relations, especially for the city.

Jimmy Collins is our public affairs officer for the city of Laurel, and it's always a bad night when you turn on Channel 4 [NBC affiliate] and Jimmy Collins is on TV because that means something bad has happened in the city. And, one of the problems we've got is that the local [television] news will come and run a story about Laurel, and it's correct, it is a Laurel mailing address, but it's not the city of Laurel. So some horrendous crime has taken place, not in the city, but it tars the city. So Jimmy's always been trying to say, he's always trying to get the reporters

to make that distinction. Of course they don't. They don't care. It's not important to them or their editors. It's Laurel.

But to the residents of the city, it is very important. Mike Leszcz, 63, echoed Rick's sentiments, understanding that as a member of city council, he and his fellow council members always need to protect the image of the city from "outside" reporters who don't make distinctions when crimes occur.

### ***Defending against negative imagery***

But residents are by and large proud to live in Laurel. Brian, 21, police officer in Laurel, talked about his need to defend Laurel to outsiders at length.

I get mad when people talk bad about Laurel because it's always the people who aren't from Laurel, that have never been to Laurel. They hear stories, which aren't true by any means. So I get kind of biased when people talk about Laurel and [say] bad stuff and I kind of nip it in the bud. Like, there is a guy ... who knocks Laurel's police department all the time. 'They don't have this. They don't have that,' and blah, blah, blah.

Brian went on to talk about the fact that people also often talk negatively about Laurel High School, which is located within the Prince George's County system. But, Brian, who is a graduate of Laurel High, argued that "there's nothing wrong with Laurel High School" or the city of Laurel. He said he feels strongly compelled to identify himself as being from the city and Prince George's County.

I do make a distinction cause then a lot of people say they are from Laurel, and I'm like, 'Oh, where?' and they say over in Howard County, 'Oh,

okay, so you're not from Laurel.' Not from *Laurel*. To me, there's a big difference.

Socioeconomically, there is a difference. Table 4 shows concretely that annual household incomes are lower in Prince George's County than in Howard and Anne Arundel Counties.

<b>Table 4: Median Household Incomes in Laurel (2000 census)</b>	<b>United States</b>	<b>Laurel city (Prince George's County)</b>	<b>20707 (Prince George's County)</b>	<b>20708 (Prince George's County)</b>	<b>20723 (Howard County)</b>	<b>20724 (Anne Arundel County)</b>
	\$41,994	\$49,415	\$53,006	\$52,149	\$67,823	\$64,626

Several participants echoed the perceptions of Laurel, its high school, and even Prince George's county, held by outsiders. Mike McLaughlin, 56, resident of the city and Old Town columnist<sup>26</sup> for the *Laurel Leader*, said that he and his family had considered moving when his son reached high school age. "It was mainly driven by my son's concern about Laurel High School, which he quickly got over once he started there," said Mike. While it may be true, as several of my participants said, that you get out of high school what you put in, the numbers, provided in Table 5 below, show that compared to Anne Arundel, Howard and Montgomery Counties, Prince George's students have fallen behind. In 2009, students in Prince George's County had significantly lower SAT scores than the other three surrounding counties. They also fell significantly below both the Maryland and National Averages.

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<sup>26</sup> As of September 9, 2010, Mike McLaughlin is no longer the Old Town columnist for the *Laurel Leader*. See Dudley, J. "New columnist is not new to Old Town neighborhood." Retrieved January 5, 2011 from <http://www.explorehoward.com/community/73233/new-columnist-not-new-old-town-neighborhood/>.

<b>Table 5: 2009 SAT Scores</b>	<b>Prince George's County<sup>27</sup></b>	<b>Anne Arundel County<sup>28</sup></b>	<b>Howard County<sup>29</sup></b>	<b>Montgomery County<sup>30</sup></b>	<b>Maryland<sup>31</sup></b>	<b>Nation<sup>32</sup></b>
Reading	438	504	542	533	500	501
Math	425	519	558	547	502	515
Writing	433	495	541	536	495	493
Composite	1296	1518	1641	1616	1497	1509

Melanie Dzwonchyk, 53, resident of Old Town and editor of the *Laurel Leader*, alluded to the fact that unlike Howard, Montgomery and Anne Arundel Counties, Prince George's (PG) County has a poor reputation. Those who live in the part of Laurel that falls in PG County reported experiencing negativity toward their part of town and county. But, she said, they stick up to outsiders much like a family sticks up for its own members.

Laurel still does have that, sort of, it's not a classy address. You know what I mean? I get joked a lot up here [at the *Laurel Leader's* new Columbia office]. 'Oh, you're from Laurel,' and I always say, 'When was the last time you were in Laurel?' I mean, a lot of us that live here, we're fighting proud. I'm allowed to make jokes about Laurel but nobody else. You know, you get away with that with your family. You know, I can complain about my parents or my cousin, but don't you say anything about them or I'll smack ya. I think a lot of people that live in Laurel, we

<sup>27</sup> Retrieved July 22, 2010 from <http://www1.pgcps.org/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=27970>.

<sup>28</sup> Retrieved July 22, 2010 from <http://www.aacps.org/testing/sat.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> Retrieved July 22, 2010 from [http://www.hcpss.org/academics/report\\_sat2009.pdf](http://www.hcpss.org/academics/report_sat2009.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Retrieved July 22, 2010 from <http://montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/sharedaccountability/reports/2009/Accountability%20Update%202009%20SAT%20Participation%20and%20Performance.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Retrieved July 22, 2010 from [http://www.hcpss.org/academics/report\\_sat2009.pdf](http://www.hcpss.org/academics/report_sat2009.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Retrieved July 22, 2010 from [http://www.hcpss.org/academics/report\\_sat2009.pdf](http://www.hcpss.org/academics/report_sat2009.pdf)

go along with it, and we complain about it; we enjoy being the underdog and ‘woe is me.’ You know, we’ll never be Howard County; would we really want to be Howard County? You know, we’re just PG County.

Well, so? It’s not that bad.

Besides being in Prince George’s County, West Laurel is far more rural and residential than the rest of Laurel. Those who live there feel as though they’re labeled, as a result. Christine Folks talked about her perceptions of Laurel growing up down Route 1 in Beltsville, Maryland. “Back when I grew up, Laurel was sort of considered really red neck. You know, it was. It’s funny, and I never wanted to go to Laurel.” But, at 21, a young and married Christine found herself purchasing a home in West Laurel, and though she came in with those stereotypes, she discovered that her neighborhood was not at all redneck. She discovered, she said, that her preconceived notions about the place were unfounded.

But Nate recalled feeling a bit different while growing up in West Laurel: I always felt like an outsider because the kids who lived in town got together and did stuff and then we had a little group that did that, and we knew folks in the West Laurel neighborhood, but it wasn’t quite the same as the crowd that grew up in town, you know? [They were] a little more, I don’t know what the word is but, snobbish? But we felt like country bumpkins kind of, or I did.

As Melanie’s Dzwonchyk’s earlier comments demonstrate, some of the more negative perceptions about Laurel persist. Doug, 76, a retiree and resident

of West Laurel, concurred. “It’s just a shame that Laurel has taken the turn over the years to go more negative as far as the way people seem to view it,” he said. Several of my participants voiced this concern. Though Doug and his wife Carol, 75, still live in Laurel, they want something better for their children. “Our granddaughter, the real estate guy wanted to take her to look at some of the houses here in Laurel to show her and we said, ‘Don’t dare, not in Laurel,’” Carol said. Their daughter moved out of Laurel because of the perceived quality of education available in Laurel, especially Prince George’s County Laurel. Had they stayed, Doug said, “they would have gone to Howard County [Laurel],” where schools are thought to be better.

But, Laurel has come a long way since Nate was growing up in West Laurel in the 1960s. And, according to participants like Brian and Mike McLaughlin, the perception of Laurel High School is far worse than the reality. Meanwhile, one thing most participants agree on was that the only constant in Laurel is change. Fredrick Smalls, 58, resident of the city of Laurel for 15 years and member of city council, summed it up when he said Laurel is “a community that has the simplicity of a small town and the pains of a more urban community.” According to many participants, growth is responsible for those pains.

### **Stability versus growth**

That it has changed from its early days in the 1870s is no surprise. As Nate remarked, “the only constant is change.” For Laurel, a place rich with history, showing reverence for that history while becoming a place in which people want to live and work has proved challenging. With improved roads and

railways, Laurel has grown in population as people from Baltimore and Washington push out and move into Laurel. And as nearby Fort Meade starts seeing the effects of BRAC (Base Relocation and Closure), reports have indicated that BRAC will have a significant impact on housing demand in Central Maryland through 2015 when several bases close while Fort Mead, located just north of Laurel, remains open (BRAC Impacts, 2009, p. 3). The report, put together by Sage Policy Group, Inc., said that approximately 55 percent of relocating households will look for housing in Anne Arundel and Howard Counties, as well as the City of Laurel.

***Embracing (and bracing) for growth***

Mayor Craig Moe knows that Laurel must brace for such an impact. He said,

A mayor said to me years ago, “There will be a day that you won’t be able to tell Laurel from D.C. or Baltimore.” This was twenty some years ago. I had no idea what they were talking about. I mean, what are you talking about? On the way it’s pushing out, you know? I’ve talked to some developers that had developed the Baltimore or Washington area and it’s getting very costly, so you’re seeing them push out. Do I want to see a Baltimore or a Washington? No, I think we’re a unique city unto our self and we’ll grow accordingly. [...] The only thing that I’ve tried to do while I’ve been mayor is to prepare for the BRAC. It really does concern me because you’re talking some 20 to 30,000 new people in this area, in this

region. And that's an impact on our schools, our transit, public safety, housing, all of those things, so we've been trying to prepare for that.

The mayor added, "We've got [...] a couple of projects that are looking just basically at attracting BRAC individuals as they start moving here." This suggests that he and the rest of Laurel's city council are looking to grow Laurel by attracting BRAC families to choose Laurel over other parts of Central Maryland. But, Fredrick Smalls, member of city council, made clear that such growth needs to be controlled and they do it mainly through zoning:

I've been on the council seven years and I certainly can remember [during] my brief time on the council now, a period when growth wasn't something that was very welcomed. Folks wanted the city to just remain a small, quaint, sleepy, as many people described it, community. But I think we've managed to do both. I really do. I think, well, through a number of development efforts, through a number of zoning initiatives that we've taken on, we've managed to maintain that quaintness but also keeping pace with smart growth and growing in a way that has been a benefit to the city.

In order to keep Laurel "small," council has taken many zoning initiatives and designated "development zones," in order to keep the "McMansions ... out of some of the smaller communities," said Smalls. In addition, through the zoning, they are able to keep larger, commercial development in the city center along the Route 1 corridor. According to Smalls, "It allows for a nice mix of residential

commercial and retail development versus our Old Town areas that is, is to remain our quaint Old Town area.”

Another development concern for people living in Laurel is Konterra, a new development in South Laurel set to break ground in 2012. According to an article in *Laurel Today*, a supplement to *Maryland Life* and a document funded by the City of Laurel and other “community partners,” Konterra will be a 488-acre town center, a “significant urban enclave” where people will live, work, shop and dine (Konterra: New Ideal for City Life). A July 6, 2010 *Washington Post* article said that Prince George’s county residents are hoping Konterra will attract some high-end department stores, like Nordstrom’s or Saks Fifth Avenue. According to the article,

When it comes to department stores, Prince George's trails far behind other Maryland suburbs. It has 1.97 square feet of department store space per household, compared with 4.7 in Anne Arundel County, 5.1 in Montgomery County and 5.2 in Howard County, according to a 2005 report prepared by McComb Group, a retail consulting firm (Wiggins, 2010).

Tom Archer, vice president of development for Forest City Washington, a development partner on the Konterra project, said that he saw “a high degree of department store interest” in Konterra at a recent Shopping Centers convention in Las Vegas (Wiggins). In a promotional material for Konterra, called the *Konterra Times*, Mayor Craig Moe said, in a Q & A article, “I believe our efforts here in the City will serve as a complement to Konterra Town Center. As close neighbors,

Konterra will take the ‘upscaling’ of the area to the next step” (Eye on Konterra). While Mayor Moe paints a public relations picture of the positive impact Konterra will have on the City of Laurel, Michael Leszcz, has a different outlook regarding the potential impact of Konterra.

We’re worried about growth. [...] Konterra is a worry. What’s going to be the impact of Konterra? They’re building as we speak. The Intercounty Connector, although we didn’t have a say in it, but it is an area, an area of concern. There’s another development right across the BW Parkway on I-98, 600 and some acres. So all those things are concerns. What’s the impact on the community, what’s the impact on the environment?

These concerns were echoed by many of my participants concerned about all of the changes taking place in and around Laurel.

### ***Resisting change***

Christine Folks, columnist for the *Laurel Leader* and West Laurel resident, said that even in West Laurel, she and her neighbors can feel the pains of development that have occurred in Laurel—development that, she said, no one asked for.

In Laurel in general, the development has just has gone so fast [and] has kind of overtaken much to the chagrin of most of us. Most people here don’t want it. The city officials and stuff, of course, they want it because it brings in more revenue, you know? Of course they want it. But most of us don’t. We like suburbia, we do.

She continued:

The development of Laurel is not what I bargained for when I first moved here, but unfortunately that seems to happen no matter where you go.

When we moved here MD 198 was a two lane highway. You didn't hear truck noises and car noises and so forth, and now it's a four lane highway and sometimes they talk about making it bigger. Like, what? You know, how can you do that how can you do that to people that live here much less across the street and the house over there, you know? How can, as long as it's for the sake of development, they don't care. They don't ask us.

*Lindsey:* Who's they?

*Christine:* The powers that be.

Dan Schwind, 26, education reporter for the *Laurel Leader*, acknowledged that these "powers that be" do exist and suggested that the push is coming from outside, rather than inside:

I don't like that there is, sort of, just because of the number of developers that are coming in that are trying to almost convert [Laurel] into this massive luxury town, like [developments such as] West Chester and Ashbury Courts. I don't think that it's the right town, just dumping these massive overpriced condominiums and luxury apartments. And, I'm not trying to say that this town doesn't deserve good apartments. I mean, there's plenty of good apartments, but I don't think this is the type of town where you want to be paying \$2,000 a month rent, you know? That's sort of the way I think, so, I like that it is a simple town. I don't like that

there's this urge or maybe, I don't want to say desire, but this push from the outside maybe to try and upgrade it into this snooty town that it's not. Several participants expressed that while the growth is coming and perhaps inevitable, there does not seem to be much serious thought behind the effects of such rapid growth in Laurel. Bob Mignon, resident of Russett and owner of a Laurel business, pointed out that such rushed development leads to eye sores in the area.

There are some places that just don't look pleasing to the eye. There is ugly development ... or lack of development. There's old structures that are dilapidated, falling down and not pleasant to look at. There are telephone poles of wires all over the place, and I think that if we're going to attract people from BRAC who are coming from Northern Virginia or other parts of the country to Fort Meade, we need to kind of spruce things up a bit. And I think that with any development that takes place, I think that's a perfect opportunity to pass those costs of making things, you know, burying phone lines and electric lines, pass those on to the people who want to build a building there. And it can be done, but you have to have the politicians and the government people who want to have that happen and I think our Mayor is making strides in that direction.

But, perhaps not large enough strides. Mignon continued:

I think we should have a high expectation of the area in which we live. And the politicians, I think the bar is too low in many ways. I'd like to see much nicer restaurants in the Laurel community. I'll say to somebody, 'I

think we need better restaurants,’ and they’ll go, ‘Oh why? We have Applebee’s.’ Their idea of good restaurant is Applebee’s. It’s not a white table cloth restaurant where you’re going to get some different type dishes. But again, in some ways maybe there is, the population is somewhat provincial and parochial and not really wanting to break out of that. [...]

Some people say why didn’t you move to Gaithersburg or Rockville or something like that, you know? That’s a valid question. You know, Laurel is not a Gaithersburg or a Rockville [two significantly larger, richer and more developed towns to the west of Laurel]. If you want that then you should have gone there.

The lack of interesting or upscale restaurants in Laurel was a topic that nearly all participants touched upon. Especially on Main Street, restaurants, cafés and bars are lacking. On Route 1, chain restaurants, such as Olive Garden and Don Pablo’s, dominate the scene. Fredrick Smalls, city council member, claimed that getting restaurants to open up on Main Street is difficult. Because many of the buildings are deemed historic, the renovations needed to bring the existing buildings up to code for such ventures often are not feasible or possible. This, he said, is one of the main challenges in revitalizing Main Street.

### ***Questioning the city’s ability to grow***

Some questioned, however, whether or not the government in the City of Laurel really does have a handle on the revitalization and growth of Laurel. In a conversation that started out about voting, Theresa, 59, and Irene, 78, longtime residents of Old Town Laurel, and Melissa, 25, a newcomer to Laurel, touched

upon some issues of uncertainty regarding the city's master planning efforts.

Irene was talking about how the population has increased since she moved to Laurel, and Theresa asked how that growth in population has really affected the way the city is run.

*Theresa:* But how many of them vote? And that's, citizens don't see that they have a stake in voting, it's like you want to pull your hair [out] cause the only way you can get real change in terms of the vision is to have good people in office. [...] [There is an] interesting disconnect, in that the basic services are really good [...] But somehow at the upper levels, trying to get a bigger vision that isn't ...

*Melissa:* It seems spotty, I mean, I don't know. This is an outside perspective, just from reading the paper and from hearing people [...] It's very spotty. Like, there's not like a strategic plan, or if there is a strategic plan, it's not very clear.

*Theresa:* There is a master plan but nobody really wants to read it.

*Melissa:* I mean, what are the goals? How are you going to really make Main Street live and sustain itself? How are you going to reach this? What are the steps to get toward that? I don't really see that. It seems like ...

*Theresa:* Right. Right.

*Melissa:* ... Oh, this came up now. We'll buy a pool and we'll dump X amount of money into it but we're not clear what having this pool is going to work us towards. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have another pool. I

just don't know what the end result is. Just more recreation? Okay. Fine, but ...

But how exactly is a new pool helping to transform Laurel into a successful and burgeoning contemporary community? Julie, 22, a college student who grew up in Laurel, agreed that the city has not done a great job of helping to bring historic Laurel into 2010:

The old parts of Laurel seem very out of place to me, and the city really hasn't found a way, I don't think, to incorporate the old charm parts of the city in a way that's not incorporated at all. So, if you go to another town, they found another way to either curate their old sections in a way that brings in revenue or they found a way to make those old parts useful and bring them into what's new and sustainable. But, as Laurel stands now, we just kind of have things, like these strange buildings and these strange traditions that have, like nobody-knows-how-they-got-there-but-we-hope-it-was-an-accident kind of thing. So we've got, like you know, the old, the old mill down by the river, but it's just sitting there, and not really ... you know, it's just an example, one of the things that makes Laurel really authentic, but it's just kind of like sloughed off.

Sam, 44, who has lived in Maryland his entire life but who has only lived in the Russett area of Laurel for the past two years when he moved there to be with his girlfriend, Hannah, acknowledged that Laurel can become a more vibrant place, but isn't sure why it has fallen short thus far.

Even though it has such great potential from its location to everything, why hasn't [the development that has taken place in Rockville and Annapolis] happened to [Laurel]? Like, you see Main Street ... eventually that could become really nice restaurants and more upscale than it is now, I would hope, and then people would understand that, you know, it has a River Walk. There's just two bars there, and that's it. That's all you can do. It needs to have more fine restaurants and just things to get people out and about, walking around, instead of strip malls. If you went to another town, say Old Town Alexandria, one street, everyone's along that one street going to the restaurants. If you go to Fredericksburg, there's one street that everyone goes to. Here, it's Route 1. But you have a Main Street; it just hasn't got that feel of community.

### ***Craving better retail***

Though housing projects are expanding in Laurel, retail is in peril. The Laurel Mall, which opened in 1979, is all but closed, though the city has been talking about revitalizing it for some time. Formerly anchored by Hecht's, JC Penney and Montgomery Ward, now Burlington Coat Factory is the only anchor store that remains (Crown America to manage Maryland Regional Mall). A Google search of the Laurel Mall yielded a link to [deadmalls.com](http://deadmalls.com), a not for profit website dedicated to promoting "the history of the malls as well as their nature, whether thriving or declining, and the impact of time and competition on these establishments" (Welcome to Retail History). The page dedicated to the Laurel Mall features two user-submitted comments which paint a picture of the state of

the mall. On December 31, 2009, William Patton wrote about his experience shopping the mall at holiday time:

The mall was as eerie and dead as I had feared it would be. At least eighty-five percent of the inline stores were vacant, their glass store fronts covered over with black plastic. Other than a GNC, Lady Foot Locker, and another sports apparel store, most of the stores were selling items which one would find at flea markets, or perhaps on a peddler's cart near a Washington, D.C. tourist attraction. Redskins hats, black velvet Bob Marley prints, anyone? (Patton, 2009).

On March 29, 2006, Arthur C. Adams wrote:

The problems would seem to be that Laurel Mall could never compete with the nearby much higher end Columbia Mall, or the much larger, low-end Arundel Mills mega-mall. Further, it does not seem to be a safe place to shop. The aforementioned airbrushed t-shirt shop that caters to "gangstas" certainly doesn't feel welcoming to most people. There's stories of at least one shooting, reputedly a drug deal gone bad, at the mall in areas not open to the public. Friends have told me I'm nuts for going there even in the daytime (Adams, 2006).

Carol, 75, retiree and resident of West Laurel, also seemed to link declining patronage at the mall to the increasing population of African Americans. "The stores changed to really providing things that black people would want to buy," she said. Brian, 21, police officer and resident of Old Town Laurel and Gina, 20, a college student who now lives in neighboring Columbia but grew up

in Laurel, expressed disgust with the condition of the Laurel Mall, which recently added a skate park:

*Gina:* And the mall, it's just trashy, I mean, now a skate park?

*Brian:* I actually went there the other day to actually to look at the skate park to see what it was all about and I wasn't aware of how it was and I walked in one of the doors and walked around the whole mall before I finally found it. And there was probably five or six stores that were open. It's horrible. The food court had like 20 places in it, the food court [now], there's maybe two that were open. And I mean the skate park is a skate park but it's small, very small.

*Gina:* It's a good idea but I don't think it's going to do anything.

*Brian:* The city has a lot of plans. They've got loads and loads of plans for the mall and they've got plans for everything. [...] They've got big plans but they just really don't know how to start with them or can't make them work and put them into action.

The fact that the Mall and Main Street are struggling is no secret in Laurel.

Melissa, 25, new resident in Laurel, said that one of the first things she tells people when they ask her what Laurel is like is that Laurel has “a Main Street that is struggling.”

Pastor Segundo Mir, a native of Cuba and 20-year resident of Laurel, cited store closings in Laurel as a sign of backward progress:

Many place, many business are going out of business. For me, every time I see a place out of business, I feel bad because this is not progress. [I] mean, this is not progress, no future. It's failing, people are failing.

But, the heart of the issue relating to the Laurel Mall seems two-fold. The fact that the Mall is failing means that it is not meeting the needs of the local residents, who must leave Laurel in order to shop. But, perhaps more importantly, many residents pointed to the fact that a lack of a prosperous mall in Laurel diminishes the available gathering spaces for people in Laurel to interact; lack of opportunity for interaction diminishes the possibility for community. Especially in a community as diverse as Laurel, interaction is important for community to exist. The growth of Laurel's population, in many participants' opinions, has also affected the area. Some welcome the diversity and find it has had a positive effect on Laurel. The next section will address, in more detail, issues of diversity in Laurel, and how homogeneity and heterogeneity contribute to community in Laurel.

### **Diversity in Laurel**

The issue of diversity in communities is also a complicated one. A community whose members have too much in common will not be able to sustain themselves because they will have nothing to share with one another. But community members must also have commonalities, or some homogeneity, which creates reasons to come together. Warren (1986) said that

it has simply been accepted [by community planners] as a value that it is better for people to live in communities which are more or less a cross-

section of the population rather than to live in economically or racially or ethnically segregated communities (p. 31).

Yet, he acknowledged that in reality, the desire for both heterogeneity and homogeneity is often wrought with contradiction. He provided the following example:

Note ... the gradual breakdown in the constitutionality of ordinances or covenants that excluded poor people by acreage zoning and exclude blacks and other minorities by collusion or covenant. At the same time, note the rise of separatism on the part of Black and Chicano minorities as well as the more longstanding separatism practiced by whites in the form of segregation (p. 32).

The tension between these two—heterogeneity and homogeneity—is present in most communities, though especially in Laurel, which has become increasingly diverse.

The median age of Laurel residents is approximately 33 years old. There are 3,242 more females than males in Laurel. The average household size is 2.5 persons. The owner/renter status in Laurel is nearly split; 23,847 housing units in Laurel are owner-occupied as compared to 19,756 renter-occupied housing units (see Table 6). Of the total population, 81,603 people identified themselves as being a part of a family living in Laurel (2000 Census).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Several of these figures were determined by my own calculations, averaging the five categories (Laurel city, 20707, 20708, 20723, and 20724).

<b>Table 6: Housing Arrangements</b>	<b>Laurel city</b>	<b>20707</b>	<b>20708</b>	<b>20723</b>	<b>20724</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Average Household Size	2.22	2.36	2.42	2.79	2.48	2.45
Owner Occupied	4,446	6,300	3,596	6,031	3,474	23,847
Renter Occupied	4,485	4,421	6,654	2,586	1,610	19,756

Many of my participants, who live and work amid this diversity every day in Laurel, noticed changes over time. Mike McLaughlin, Old Town resident and *Laurel Leader* columnist, compared Laurel of the 1960s to Laurel in 2010:

Back in the 60's, that's when I was living in Laurel [for the first time], and it's really become a lot more cosmopolitan. I don't know if cosmopolitan is the right word, but it's definitely got more international. Geez, I mean, the kids on my son's tennis team, people we play tennis with ... even recreationally, the folks we play are from all over the world, you know?

Whereas, back in the 60's, Laurel was really small, really a small town. In fact, that's probably happening in a lot of small towns around the country.

I don't think that Laurel is unique that way.

Gwendolyn Glenn, reporter for the *Laurel Leader*, has noticed the changes, too.

“Culturally it's becoming even more diverse, and it's, the people of Laurel are from all over now, you know? It's not just the, the people who grew up here and have been here all their lives,” said Gwendolyn Glenn.

***Age: A town of old-timers?***

Several participants acknowledged that a large portion of the population in Laurel is elderly, or “old timers” as many participants referred to them. Two of my youngest participants, Gina, 20, and Julie, 22, described people who live in Laurel as being

*Gina:* Slightly parochial.

*Lindsey:* Slightly?

*Julie:* Slightly.

Gina said that, for the most part, “people that live in Laurel have this, [they] stay in Laurel, [with] a few exceptions.” Brian, 21, agreed, when he said “heck, we love old timers” and recounted a story from his youth about taking cookies to his elderly neighbor, who would tell him stories about the way Laurel used to be when she was a child.

Gina and Julie’s use of the word “parochial” and later “provincial”—both of which connote narrow-mindedness or local interest or focus—suggests that many of the long-time residents are resistant to change. The word parochial also means “of or relating to a church parish,” according to Merriam-Webster (Parochial). But, this population of old timers—those who were born and who remained in Laurel—seem concentrated in Old Town, according to participants. And, perhaps for this reason, especially in Old Town, the Catholic churches have strong followings. Theresa said that while the general population is very diverse, Laurel ‘has a very strong Roman Catholic population.’

Joan agreed, but added that four parties hold all of the influence in Laurel. “In [Old Town] Laurel, there are four parties: the republicans, the democrats, the churches, and the firehouse,” she said. At least in Old Town, deep rooted, strong influences still exist, according to several participants.

Nate, 64, also talked nostalgically about the Laurel of the past and how it has changed over time:

It used to be a town where everybody knew everybody pretty much, and it's, you know, it's not like that anymore. It's grown and some of the personality ... got lost, I guess, in the town. But, it's still there if you stroll down Main Street. You run into people that have been on Main Street a long time, but the stores have changed and things, you know? They're not quite the same as they used to be in days gone by.

For others, the change is not just unfortunate, it is downright negative.

### ***Race and ethnicity***

Doug and his wife Carol have not only serious concerns about the changing population, but also fears.

*Carol:* Well, I really think the schools are better in Howard County and Columbia has that nice mall, I mean, we never go to this mall in here.

*Doug:* And we used to go there all the time.

*Carol:* So, we go to Columbia.

*Doug:* You know you hate to say that the uh, the makeup of Laurel, the change of the people is what caused it, but I don't think there's much you could say other than that.

*Carol:* And before we stopped going, we would never go after the kids were out of school, that mall was just filled with kids and you never knew what was going to happen.

*Doug:* You know, people moving here from Baltimore, and you have people moving here from Washington and the area in close to Washington and uh, I think that's affected Laurel very negatively... with their

lifestyles, and everything else with the shootings. We never really had that before.

Although they did not come out directly and say it in this passage, Doug and Carol were talking about African Americans. Several of my participants—mainly those who were over the age of 70 and were Caucasian—felt as though African Americans have made a negative impact upon Laurel. Prince George’s County has transformed in the past three decades from being predominantly white to predominantly black (Cashin, 2004, p. 133). However, there has always been a significant population of African Americans in Laurel, as evidenced by the fact that an entire section of the city is known as “The Grove” and is historically African American. This suggests that their feelings are more of a long-held prejudice or discomfort rather than the result of a rapid change in the population. But, in other important ways, especially the influx of Hispanics in Laurel in the past twenty years, Laurel has grown and changed in some significant ways.

Demographically, Laurel is fairly diverse. Table 7 below details the racial make-up of Laurel city and greater Laurel. Nearly half of the population identifies as white; black or African-American is the second most represented race in Laurel, followed by Asian (Detailed Table). Also growing is the Hispanic population, according to Segundo Mir, a Hispanic pastor at the Laurel First Baptist Church who counsels Hispanics in Laurel. Mir estimated that thousands of Hispanics live in Laurel, although they are not represented in the Census, many because many are living illegally in the United States. According to the Census language, “respondents providing write-in entries such as multiracial, mixed,

interracial, or a Hispanic/Latino group (for example, Mexican, Puerto Rican, or Cuban)” are included in the “Some other race” category. As shown in the chart below, those identifying as “other” in the 2000 Census make up just more than four percent of Laurel’s population—a number that is likely considerably lower in figures than in reality.

<b>Table 7: Race in Laurel<sup>34</sup></b>	<b>Laurel city</b>	<b>20707</b>	<b>20708</b>	<b>20723</b>	<b>20724</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Total Population	19,960	25,637	25,062	24,079	13,032	107,770
<b>Total Races Tallied</b>	20,730	26,531	25,910	24,773	13,475	111,410
White alone or in combination with one or more other races	53%	58%	39%	71%	57%	55%
Black or African American alone or in combination with one or more other races	35%	31%	51%	18%	32%	34%
Asian alone or in combination with one or more other races	7%	7%	6%	8%	7%	7%
Other race either alone or in combination with one or more other races	5%	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%

Race and ethnicity have been, and continue to be, it seems, sources of tension in Laurel. Lara recounted what it was like for her moving from Detroit, Michigan to Laurel in the early 1960s, just after she was married:

When we first arrived here I was um, [long pause, she begins to cry] I was stunned to read in the paper that the Ku Klux Klan had marched through Main Street and I think it was the reality wake up that in northern cities [from] which I had come that struggle was more intellectual and I do remember when, I don’t know, whoever went down and joined the march,

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<sup>34</sup> The percentages were calculated by dividing the number of races tallied in each category by the number of total races tallied. The total population figures are included for comparison only.

and I thought why would you do that. And here, people had done that and then I understood more.

Lara agreed that this presented a difficult transition:

My dad used to tease me because he said, ‘Oh, my gosh. You’re going to move south of the Mason Dixon Line?’ And I didn’t realize until we even we moved here, that indeed was true. And, of course, it’s just sad. You know, boo hoo. People are people. But it’s different. At least at that point it was different. You know, obviously now you don’t have the one segregated area of Laurel. We don’t have our high school students being bused down to Fairmont Heights. We don’t have all of that. We do have the discussion about the library now, [about building a new library in] Emancipation Park, [and] about the cultural and historic significance and about being, respectful and cherishing that.

The three-acre Emancipation Community Park that Lara mentioned is located in The Grove section of Laurel—a historically black neighborhood. According to the City of Laurel website, “Laurel celebrates Emancipation Day with a parade and events at the Park every year” (Emancipation Community Park).

Emancipation Day, according to the District of Columbia website, originated on April 16, 1862, when “President Lincoln signed the Compensated Emancipation Act, *For the release of certain persons held to service or labor in the District of Columbia*, making DC residents the ‘First Freed’ by the federal government” (DC Emancipation Day). At the time I was conducting research for this project, there was public discussion among different factions in Laurel about building a new

library on part of the three-acre park. Currently, the library is located next to the park. According to a March 25, 2010 article in the *Laurel Leader*,

Residents in the Grove want to keep the library in their neighborhood, so young children and older citizens without transportation can continue to walk to the library.

On the other side of the issue are residents of the city's Old Town community, who are pushing for the new library to be built just off Main Street at the site of the police station, which is moving to Fifth Street soon. One of the main points being pushed by their group, Bring Our Library Downtown, is that the library could help revitalize the city's Main Street corridor ("County funds proposed").

Also according to the same article, if the county's proposed funds for the construction of a new library are approved, work could begin as early as spring of 2011, assuming the groups can agree on a location.

As Lara pointed out, in the 1960s, segregation in Laurel was very real. Gwendolyn Glenn said that she gathered from reading past Laurel newspapers that Laurel has had its divisions along racial lines: "[The] African American community had their community and then the whites had their community, and they were very divided. And I think it's still like that to some extent today." Nate remembered being in the seventh grade in 1954 when "the first black came into the school."

Lara believes that the relationship between the African American population and the rest of Laurel has improved. Lara, said that now she "feel[s]"

better about the relationship between The Grove and the rest of the town and how [The Grove] is integral and [people] have much more respect.”

Though Laurel is no longer segregated, African Americans are still not well represented in Laurel city government. Fredrick Smalls is only the second African American to serve on the Laurel City Council. Fredrick said that first African American was elected in 1992 and in making this point also emphasized that Laurel’s history dates back to the 1870s. And, Gwendolyn is the only African American covering Laurel for the *Laurel Leader*.

Still, not all Laurel residents appreciate the racial diversity in Laurel. Ray, age 76, who first referred to African Americans as “coloreds” during our conversation, said:

I don’t like the influx of African Americans, and I should say, I don’t like that. But they’re nice folks. They come here and they are in increasing number [...] but they have their schools, they go to school together and everything else now, but we do fine.

But others, like Olivia, an 84-year-old African American who lives in The Grove, have a different perception of the relationship between African Americans and the rest of the folks in Laurel. Olivia told me that while the police used to be friendly, as of late, they are rude and unprofessional

Olivia recounted a story about police harassing her grandson, who was visiting her in Laurel. Her story is worth quoting at length:

[My grandson and] the youngsters at that time were kind of hanging out on the streets and he came and [the police] saw him. [...] So many times,

they'll come and pat 'em down and do that kind of stuff. And, [my grandson] immediately started walking and walked over to my home. I was in the house and I heard all this commotion outside of my door. So I went to the door to see what was going on because it was the summer and I went to see what was going on and that's what it was. And he kept sayin', 'I hadn't done anything. Why did I need to be on the ground?' and that kind of thing. So at that point, one of the, it was two officers, one of them start cursin' like you wouldn't believe. I mean some really bad, so I, at that point I said, 'Excuse me. I don't know what the problem is. And I don't mind you doing your job,' I said, 'But, I really would prefer that you didn't use that kind of language.' I said, 'because as of right now, I don't see any reason for you to use that kind of language.' And he kind of paused, one of 'em, the one that was really trying to get him on the ground and he paused and he said, 'Well this is all some of 'em understand.' And I said, 'But you are the professional. And if you use that kind of language, what do you expect out of them?'"

After Olivia pointed out that there was no need to speak to her grandson in that manner, the other officer took over and tried to smooth things over. She said that the incident made clear to her "why there are so much problems with the citizens and policemen" and also why such confrontations can lead to the point of shooting. Though Olivia never addressed the incident directly with the mayor, she said her minister brought it to his attention at one of the mayor's meetings in the park. However, she was unaware if anything came of the conversation.

Olivia's friend, Ellen, who is also African American, said that she has seen police harass African American kids in The Grove and suggested that they "fish" for them in order to make their quotas at the end of the month. But, Olivia argued that the black kids are not the only ones causing trouble in Laurel. "Most of the high crimes here in Laurel, it's not the black kids. It's the Hispanics, the Mexicans, but it seems like [the police] target the black kids," she said.

Of course, Laurel is not immune to crime, but most participants said that compared to other surrounding areas, the crime in Laurel is not as bad. Dan Schwind, education reporter at the *Leader* said,

There are gangs in Laurel but it's not something like D.C. or some of the area inside the beltway in Prince George's County where you have MS13 running all over the school, graffiti in the school complex and things like that. I mean, there's gang problems, but not nearly to the same degree, you know? The crime is, I say, a little more toned down in Laurel than it is say in the rest of Prince George's County.

Laurel has seen a large increase in the number of Hispanic people in the past twenty years, according to Pastor Segundo Mir, who came to Laurel twenty years ago from Miami, when he said God called him to join the First Baptist Church in Laurel as a Spanish pastor. A native of Cuba, he has been helping the Hispanic people living in Laurel ever since. Pastor Mir said that he has seen tensions between African Americans and Hispanics in Laurel, but cannot understand the source of the tension. He said that there has been no history of tension between blacks and Hispanics, and he cannot understand why black

people might see Hispanics as enemies. In his native Cuba, he said, 40 percent of the population is black.

***The uncounted: Illegal Hispanic and homeless populations***

Mike McLaughlin, columnist for the Laurel Leader and resident of Old Town—and Pastor Mir’s neighbor—acknowledged the tension in Laurel about the increasing number of Hispanics:

As far as the redneck aspect, yeah, I think there a lot, there are probably some old timers clinging to that especially with, you know, the strong, heavy influx of Hispanics. I’m sure there’s some folks that have a resentment to that, but we haven’t experienced it.

These feelings toward Hispanics may be because so many of them are illegal immigrants. Indeed, looking at official Census numbers, Hispanics are barely represented. Pastor Mir, however, said that he has made upward of 20,000 friends—likely Hispanics—as a result of his work with the church. He talked about the challenges of working with a population of illegal immigrants.

Most of the Hispanic, there are a lot of Hispanic, they are in, they are not legal. They are illegal. They don’t have a permit to work, so I need to find job for them, but at the same time they are illegal. It’s a problem and I need to help them because they are human beings. I need help them. They need insurance. They have medical, they need doctors, medicine. Some people die because they don’t have insurance. They don’t have money to go to the doctor, so I have been for 20 years, helping people with looking for jobs, looking [for] lawyers for immigration, looking for doctors and

medical insurance. They need education, at least help them with English as a second language, GED, go to college and help them find some career, helping them [find] housing, different housing.

Besides Pastor Mir and Ellen, few participants brought up Hispanics. Though they are visible throughout Laurel—and growing in number, according to Pastor Mir—they seem largely overlooked. In the next chapter, Pastor Mir points out how the *Laurel Leader* was not supportive of his idea for a column written in Spanish and geared toward the Hispanic population.

My participants' discussion of another population in Laurel—the homeless and addicted—presented an interesting contrast to the population of illegal immigrants in Laurel. A few participants talked about the number of homeless in Laurel, and about all those who, while they may not be homeless, are in need of assistance in some way or another. Bob Mignon, a resident of Russett and owner of Minuteman Press in Laurel, called these people “broken,” saying that they are “visible” throughout Laurel. Unlike the population of Hispanics, who Pastor Mir said need help for a variety of reasons though few outside of the church reach out to them, there are several agencies in Laurel for the homeless and addicted. But, Bob Mignon, rather than focusing on the challenges that the homeless and addicted bring to a community, talked about how much help exists for them in Laurel. “These are what I call broken people that we need to help. It seems like we have a lot of that and it is part of the community,” said Mignon.

The Laurel Advocacy and Referral Service (LARS) is “a non-proselytizing ecumenical ministry serving the Greater Laurel area by assisting

homeless and low income individuals or families experiencing crisis with emergency and long-term services designed to promote self-sufficiency” (Laurel Advocacy and Referral Service). Elizabeth House, located at 308 Gorman Ave., is “a non-profit 501(c)(3) all volunteer organization that exists to help our needy neighbors in the greater Laurel area.” It operates “entirely from private and public donations of food, money and volunteer services.” (Elizabeth House, Fish of Laurel, Inc.). And, Reality House, located on Main Street, is a substance abuse treatment facility. Laurel seems to have taken responsibility for these broken people by providing services to help them. These three organizations are well-known throughout Laurel. LARS reported serving approximately 1,500 individuals or families throughout the course of one year (Frequently Asked Questions).

While some participants clearly struggle with the diversity present in Laurel, others have a more open-minded point of view about what the different types of people contribute to their experiences in Laurel. Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor of the *Laurel Leader* and Old Town resident, said that she saw the benefits of Laurel’s diversity when her children left Laurel to attend college.

Especially the two college graduates, they say, ‘Wow. Growing up in Laurel, I dealt with so many different things and so many different people, socioeconomic groups and religious and any kind of cross cultural or whatever.’ They’ve seen it all, you know? They’ve dealt with it all. Private school, public school, and they say, ‘I understand other people better, Mom, because when I grew up, I had a friend that was like this or

we had a neighbor that was like that.’ So many other people don’t have that, that bounty of, I guess you would have to call it, diversity. So that’s definitely a plus.

Dan Schwind, reporter for the *Laurel Leader*, agreed that one of the best things about Laurel is its sense of inclusion.

It’s a really broad spectrum, and I think that kind of would make this town pretty cool, is that, you know, you just don’t have some insular community that is just, you know, got their spears out trying to defend it, try to keep outsiders out of here, or anything like that. I think it’s kind of cool like that.

### **Challenges facing Laurel**

Laurel is not unique in the sense that it faces challenges much like any other American city or town. Residents and elected officials of the city struggle to find ways to respect and restore its historical aspects while carrying it forward in a way that keeps it alive and flourishing. Participants often had conflicting ideas about progress and development in Laurel, suggesting that finding a balance between *the way it used to be* and *the way it could be* will require much discussion and, likely, compromise. Examples of these tensions were provided by my participants in their discussions of the lack of upscale restaurants and shopping districts, as well as in discussions of new housing and apartment developments, like Konterra. Growth—especially in the next ten years as BRAC brings more and more military families into Laurel—poses significant challenges as well as opportunities.

Yet it seems as though the challenges are worth tackling, since so many residents desire better dining, shopping and recreation in Laurel, and because Main Street provides a wonderful foundation for such possibilities. And, such spaces would create more opportunities for residents of Laurel to interact with one another in ways that could promote sharing and relationships, grounded in place—the conditions which are necessary for community. Furthermore, the fact that Laurel does have a longer—and some might argue richer—history than most of the neighboring towns or municipalities presents an ideal condition for a strong sense of community among residents (Selznick, 1992; Fowler, 1995).

Issues of identity in Laurel also manifest themselves in instances of crime and low graduation rates. Geographical divisions and boundaries only intensify the residents' desire to maintain a distinguishing image or characteristic, whether it is based on the quality of schools, amenities, representation, or history. And identity is an important part of community life for residents (Hummon, 1990). They want to be proud to tell someone that they live in Laurel, because often, “questions about where one lives become queries about who one is” (Hummon, 1990, xiv). Debating which part of Laurel has a superior identity creates divisions rather than connections among those who share a Laurel zip code.

But, perhaps the most significant challenge facing Laurel is its diversity, and especially its growing population of Hispanics, many of whom are also illegal immigrants, according to Pastor Mir. Though they are visible to those living in Laurel, the Hispanics are largely invisible, in that they are not accounted for in the census, and they are not readily brought into the fold of the community life in

Laurel, often because they do not speak English. The Hispanic populations as well as the homeless are in need of community support, in many instances for basic needs—like shelter, employment and health care—to be met. Yet each population seems to be viewed and treated differently because of preconceived notions and prejudices.

In order to rise and meet these challenges as a community, the people of Laurel need to communicate with one another; they must share an open and honest dialogue and a willingness to work together. The next chapter deals with one very important community communication tool—the weekly newspapers.

**CHAPTER 6**  
Results and Discussion  
Part II—State of community journalism in Laurel

Community journalism has a long history in Laurel, Maryland. And, presently, the two-newspaper town still looks to its papers to get Laurel news—something difficult to find through other media. This chapter explores the history of newspapering in Laurel, provides a view of contemporary community journalism there, and highlights the benefits and challenges of covering this place where more than 100,000 diverse people live and work.

**History of newspapering in Laurel**

Laurel has a long history of newspapering. Table 8 lists all Laurel newspapers documented by Maryland State Archive’s Newspaper Collection. Other newspapers said to have existed, but not listed in the State Archive, include *The Laurel Beacon* (established 1858), the *Laurel Herald* (est. 1882), the *Laurel Enterprise*, the *Laurel Review* (est. 1885), and *The Laurel Journal* (no date available) (Poe, 1970; Dickerson, 1987). Also in operation today is *The Gazette—Laurel Edition* (one of the papers under examination for this study) as well as the *West County Gazette*, which is published by an Annapolis-based company, the Capital-Gazette, and covers news happening in Maryland City and Russet—considered to be parts of Laurel as designated by zip code.

<b>Table 8: History of Laurel Newspapers*</b>			
<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Publishing Dates</b>	<b>Years available in collection</b>	<b>Type</b>
<i>Laurel Beacon</i>	1858-?	1858	Weekly
<i>Laurel Free Quill</i> (continued as <i>Free Quill</i> )	1884?-?	unlisted	Weekly
<i>Advertiser</i>	1889-?	1889-1890	Weekly
<i>Laurel Democrat</i>	1889-1931 ?	1891	Weekly
<i>Free Quill</i> (continued as the <i>Leader</i> )	? - ?	December 20, 1894	Weekly
<i>Leader</i> (continued as <i>News Leader</i> )	1897-1946	1897-1939	Weekly
<i>News Leader</i> (continued as <i>Laurel Leader</i> )	1946-1981	unlisted	Weekly
<i>Laurel Advertiser</i>	1946-1948	1946-1948	Weekly
<i>Prince George's County News</i> ( <i>Laurel edition</i> )	1966-?	unlisted	Weekly
<i>Sentinel Laurel</i>	?1977-1982	unlisted	Weekly
<i>Laurel Leader</i>	1981-present	unlisted	Weekly
<i>Laurel Advertiser News</i>	? - ?	1984-1985	unknown
<i>Laurel Today</i>	1985-?	unlisted	Monthly
<i>Corridor Today</i>	? - ?	1987-1990	Biweekly
*Information courtesy Guide to Maryland Newspapers Featuring the Newspaper Collections of the Maryland State Archives			

### ***The Laurel Leader***

The *Free Quill* (est. 1884) was the predecessor of the *Leader* (1897), *The News Leader* (1946), and finally the *Laurel Leader* (1980).<sup>35</sup> In 1897, twenty-six year old lawyer James P. Curley and F.C. Dezendorf purchased the *Free Quill* plant and changed the paper's name to *The Leader* (Winchester & Webb, 1905, p. 137; Murchison, 1997). Curley became the paper's first editor. A prominent politician in Laurel, Curley used the *Leader* first and foremost to serve his Republican interests (Dickerson, 1987). He was elected to the House of

<sup>35</sup> The Laurel Museum did not have files or information on the *Free Quill*. There is no formal record of how long most of these newspapers survived, hence the lack of end dates provided.

Delegates from Prince George's County in 1901, and also became Laurel's mayor in 1928. According to Dickerson, "No one, in those days, seemed to think there was anything odd about a serving politician also acting as the editor of the supposedly 'objective' city newspaper" (1987). This conflation of journalism and politics was not unusual in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. According to Elliot King (2005), a journalism historian, while newspapers of this era were beginning to embrace values like truthfulness and accuracy—known to be some of the values commonly associated with objectivity—they were still closely tied to politics. Just as important as objectivity was the idea "that the press had the duty to be politically active, to lead popular opinion, to originate causes and to achieve political ends" (p. 117).

Curley ran the paper for forty-two years before handing it over to G. Bowie McCeney, a prominent local lawyer who acquired it from Curley as payment of a mortgage debt (Murchison, 1997). After scraping by as editor for six months, he hired twenty-four year old Gertrude Poe, a lawyer fresh out of law school, to take the editorship in 1939 (Murchison, 1997). Poe returned to McCeney's office—where she had worked previously as a legal secretary—upon graduation and expected to be offered a partnership in the firm. Instead, she was surprised with an opportunity to run the newspaper. With absolutely no newspaper experience, Poe was, at first, "very indignant" at the offer (Poe, personal interview, November 30, 2007). Poe "never dreamed of being editor of a newspaper," but "did dream of practicing law" (Poe, personal interview, November 30, 2007). Perhaps because she respected McCeney, she took the

position (though she did not make this clear in my (or previous) interview(s) with her). A one-woman show for nearly the first ten years, Poe was responsible for all aspects of publishing the newspaper, from writing and editing content, to layout and design, as well as selling the advertising to keep it afloat. She scrapped the canned copy that had previously filled the pages and traded it for original, local news (Murchison, 1997). WWII educated her on the importance of a community newspaper:

It was the War itself that made me realize how important the community newspaper was because it was the main connection between local men in the service and their hometown and they would write to me and I would respond in a special columns that I had established for them from their letters and you know they communicated and it was a very personal—the paper itself became a very personal instrument to both the service men and to the town of Laurel and so, you know, I just I grew with the newspaper (Poe, personal interview, November 30, 2007).

In 1946, *The Leader* merged with the *Beltsville Banner*, the *Bowie Register*, the *College Park News*, and the *Laurel Advertiser* to become *The News Leader*. Poe continued to produce the paper on her own until 1980. Poe's *News Leader* of the mid to late 1940s was drastically different from today's *Laurel Leader*. Filled with "people news," readers could often find photographs of returning soldiers, wedding announcements, and Poe's personal column all on the front page of the eight-page broadsheet. Poe was a self-described conservative, and her newspaper reflected those beliefs. She became known around Laurel as

“an institution” and the “chronicler of Laurel history” (Reynolds, 2004). Her longevity led to those designations, but also the fact that “she loved and championed her community” (Murchison, 1997). Poe believed that news media, generally speaking, focused too much on bad news. “There are so many good people. That exposure in the paper means so much to them and their stories can inspire others,” said Poe (Murchison, 1997).

Poe, who had become third owner of *The News Leader* after McCeney’s death in 1978, retired in 1980. In 1980, after 41 years at the helm of the newspaper, Poe sold it to Patuxent Publishing Company, which was owned at the time by Whitney Communications Co. in New York. Patuxent was owned by publisher (and lawyer by training, in keeping with the newspaper’s ostensible tradition) S. Zeke Orlinsky. Joe Murchison took over as editor. The paper’s name was changed to the *Laurel Leader*. In 1993, Orlinsky announced significant changes to the *Leader*, including a transition from broadsheet to tabloid style, and from subscription distribution to free distribution. With this switch to free distribution, he argued, the *Leader* would reach the entire Laurel community, “enabling us to serve that community better and giving Laurel’s people and institutions their first chance to communicate with all their neighbors on a weekly basis” (Orlinsky, 1993). Orlinsky said that the changes would “make the *Leader* a better paper” and help to “make Laurel a stronger community” (Orlinsky, 1993). After more than a century of service, “your newspaper has never been more dedicated or more prepared to play a valuable role in community life,” Orlinsky claimed.

In 1997, Patuxent Publishing was sold to the Baltimore Sun Company, which was owned by the Times Mirror Company. S. Zeke Orlinsky, then president of Patuxent Publishing Co., said he was optimistic about the change in ownership, saying, “I’m confident that we will continue to operate autonomously and to speak out independently” (Orlinsky, n.d.). Murchison acknowledged that newspapers “have to change to stay healthy” (Murchison, n.d.). He noted the various changes the *Leader* experienced throughout its 100 years, concluding “I’m not promising a golden age [as when Poe was editor]. I’m just expecting the *Leader* to continue as a solid and vital institution in this community” (Murchison, n.d.). In 2000, both companies merged with the Tribune Company, whose most notable paper is the *Chicago Tribune*.

Founded in 1847, the now-troubled Tribune Company has a long history in newspapering, radio and television. Like the rest of the newspaper industry, the Tribune is facing serious financial difficulty. Since its conversion to a private company upon purchase by real estate mogul Sam Zell in late 2007, the Tribune Company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection just one year later (Gomstyn, 2008). The trickle-down effect of these financial woes is immediately noticeable for anyone following the *Laurel Leader* with consistency. In just the last year (2009), the tabloid’s size shrank by one inch. While it regularly furnished 36-48 pages each week in 2008, in 2009, it averaged 24 pages. The news hole and the staff—through attrition—have shrunk as well. The *Laurel Leader* appears, to many participants, to be struggling.

Compared to its fairly steady and stable early years, the *Laurel Leader* has had four editors since it was taken over by Patuxent Publishing in 1980: Karen Yengich, Joe Murchison, Pete Pichaske, and Melanie Dzwonchyk (the editor at the time of this research). Yengich began as a reporter working under Poe at the *News Leader*. On her first day, she covered one of the most infamous Laurel news stories—the shooting of 1972 presidential candidate George Wallace at the Laurel Shopping Center.<sup>36</sup> When Poe retired and the *News Leader* changed hands, Yengich was named editor, and held the post for ten years before leaving to take another editor position within Patuxent Publishing, with the *Owings Mills Times* (Murchison, 1997). Joe Murchison was then named editor, after serving as a reporter at the *Leader* since 1985, and remained at the helm until 2007, when Pete Pichaske, who had also been working at the *Leader*—first as a reporter and then as assistant editor—took over. Less than two years later, he moved on to edit two other publications under the Patuxent Publishing umbrella—the *Howard County Times* and *Columbia Flyer*.

In late 2008, Melanie Dzwonchyk, 53, a long-time resident of Laurel who began her tenure with the *Leader* as the Old Town neighborhood columnist, stepped into the editor role. Dzwonchyk has served in many capacities at the *Leader*, including editorial assistant, and features editor. With no formal journalism training but an early career in publishing, Dzwonchyk brings to the paper nearly 30 years of life experience as a resident of Laurel. Today, in 2010,

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<sup>36</sup> One of the bullets lodged in Wallace's spinal column, leaving him paralyzed from the waist down. Three others were wounded in the shooting and also survived.

the entire *Leader* editorial staff consists of five people: an editor, editorial assistant, one part-time and two full-time reporters.

The newspaper has seen significant change—in organization, look, content and size. Unlike the days when Poe ran all aspects of the newspaper—from ad sales, story writing, and design—today’s *Leader* staff is more specialized. Editors edit. Reporters write. Patuxent photographers take pictures. Patuxent designers lay out the pages. Patuxent ad reps sell ads. Everyone sticks to his or her duty, without much overlap.

### **The Gazette—*Laurel Edition***

*The Gazette* is a newcomer to Laurel, but has operated in Maryland since 1959. The newspaper began in Gaithersburg, Maryland at the hand of Rockville resident Earle Hightower. During their housing search, Hightower and his wife struggled to “find a newspaper with Gaithersburg real estate listings” (*The Gazette—A history*). So, they began the four-page newspaper to fill this information gap shortly after moving to Gaithersburg. After one year, Hightower turned the paper over to business partner Nat Blum, who doubled its size and later sold it to private owner John Panagos—“a media-savvy advertising veteran of the now-defunct Washington Daily News”—in 1966 (*The Gazette—A history*). Coverage and distribution area expanded, as did local content, to reach Rockville, Potomac, Poolesville, and Damascus. In 1979, however, after many successful and profitable years, Panagos “burned out,” and again the paper changed hands, this time to Davis L. Kennedy. Kennedy saw an opportunity to expand *The Gazette*, by creating “distinct Gazette editions” for Rockville, Germantown,

Potomac, Bethesda, and Chevy Chase. Kennedy also dropped the subscription fee, distributing the newspapers free to readers, which exploded their circulation numbers from 38,000 to 200,000 and allowed for more advertising revenue, which meant thicker papers. In 1992, Kennedy sold “an 80-percent stake” in the newspaper to the Washington Post Co., which bought him out completely just one year later (The Gazette—A history).

Under the Post, *The Gazette* continued to grow and change. Color pictures began gracing front pages of all editions as early as 1994. The company consolidated newsrooms in Gaithersburg and bought Comprint, a printing company. It launched additional editions in Wheaton, Kensington, and Takoma Park. Today, Comprint has relocated to Laurel. *The Gazette* continued to grow, and in 1996 stretched into Fredrick County. In 1997, the Gazette moved into Prince George’s County, establishing even more editions of the weekly newspaper, which have more than 200,000 circulation at present (The Gazette—A history). According to its publisher, Frank Abbott, Prince George’s county presented a unique market for community newspapers; many of its towns were not being served (Abbott, personal interview, April 29, 2009). In 1998, the *Post* began publishing the Laurel edition of *The Gazette*.

Editors and executives at *The Gazette* were not interested in participating in my research. An interview with its publisher, Frank Abbott, provided only a small, partial glimpse into the history and mission of the newspaper. Nor do clip files exist on the history of *The Gazette* at the Laurel Historical Society. As a result, many details surrounding the start of the Laurel edition and its staff are

unknown. The information listed above comes largely from *The Gazette's* website. The Laurel edition does have an editor, as well as several steady reporters who cover business, education, and other community news. The paper also has a few community columnists. Abbott admitted that there is some turnover with the entry level journalists who cover the town, but the editors remain more consistent. Vanessa Harrington, the Prince George's County editor, has been with *The Gazette* since it moved into Prince George's County in the late 1990s (Abbott, personal interview, April 29, 2009). Unlike the *Laurel Leader*, *The Gazette* infuses county as well as local news into each of its editions. So, each week, readers who pick up the Laurel edition of *The Gazette* will see some Laurel stories, but will see many stories from surrounding towns as well. *The Gazette*, at least during the time of the fieldwork for this study, did not publish any content from Laurel community columnists, though they did consistently publish a community column from a writer from Savage, just north of Laurel. According to Abbott, people reading any edition of *The Gazette* are not only interested in news local to their town; readers are also interested in what's going on in the towns nearby, as happenings there can impact them. Plus, it's a profitable business model; *The Gazette* can share stories, using fewer reporters and generating multiple editions.

According to its website, "what makes *The Gazette* unique is that every community in the counties we cover has its own hometown newspaper with its own editor and reporters" (Welcome to *The Gazette*). According to CEO Chuck Lyons, *The Gazette's* mission is "to provide the community with great

journalism” and “to practice community service.” “[A]s long as we do that well, there will be a need for us to exist” (*The Gazette—A history*).

### **Other media in Laurel**

Laurel does not support its own news radio or television stations, and most of the existing television news coverage is regional. Five participants reported listening to WTOP, Washington’s only all-news radio station. Nine participants reported watching television news, though few specified if that news was regional or national. The Laurel Cable Network Foundation, Inc. has served Laurel with public access television for the past 22 years; residents of Laurel can access it from channel 71 on Comcast and 12 on Verizon FiOS (History of the Laurel Cable Network Foundation, Inc., 2009). Only six participants reported watching the Laurel Cable Network channel.

In addition, both the *Washington Post* and the *Baltimore Sun* are considered “local” papers; twenty-nine participants reported reading the *Post*, while 16 reported reading the *Sun*. In all, 16 participants reported reading both the *Post* and the *Sun*.

### **State of community journalism in Laurel**

Both the *Leader* and *The Gazette* have been operating in Laurel as competitors for more than ten years. The *Leader* holds the reputation of being the “hometown” newspaper, as many of my participants put it. *The Gazette* is certainly a newcomer, but many Old Towners, like G. Rick Wilson, who grew up with the *Leader*, refer to it negatively as a “Johnny come lately” newspaper. Both papers have audiences, though *The Gazette* has gained a larger audience as the

*Leader's* editorial content began diminishing. Many participants cited the *Leader's* transition from independent ownership to corporate ownership as the point of “change” for the newspaper. Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor of the *Leader*, acknowledged the perception among community members that the paper has changed: “People will say, ‘Oh, it’s so different from the days in the 60s and 70s when Gertrude Poe was the editor.’”

I heard this perception from several of my participants. Lara, 67, a resident of South Laurel for 31 years, recalled the transformation: “It was interesting to see the newspaper change. Gertrude was very much of a lady and the news was presented in a very lady-like fashion.” Mike Leszcz, 63, Old Town resident and city council member, said that the *Leader*, for the past twenty years, has been lacking in objectivity: “Sometime I think in the *Leader* they tend to take sides. Or they take the side that’s going to create the most commotion.”

Regardless of where my participants fell—on the side of the *Leader* or *The Gazette*—they had strong feelings about the state of community journalism in Laurel. The remainder of this chapter explores issues of editorial content and advertising, along with one of the most pressing hot topics in Laurel that emerged during my research—the *Laurel Leader's* move from its Main Street office to a consolidated Patuxent Publishing office ten miles north in Columbia, Maryland.

### **Content important measure of “community” in community papers**

My participants had a lot to say about what they like and don’t like about what they see in their two local papers. And, Paul Milton, 49, Executive Editor of

News Operations for Patuxent Publishing, is often the one who hears about things that people don't like.

There is a certain affection that people have for their community papers; in fact, I'm willing to bet that. ... If we do something wrong, someone will call me up to yell at me, but they'll scold me like I'm their child, and they'll do that because ... like you would say to your child, 'I expected more out of you.' And it's because they feel ownership in the papers that we have and they don't believe that it's owned by anybody. They believe that it's the community that owns it.

Depending on their point of view—local or regional—participants had varying tastes when it came to preferring one paper over the other, though 36 of my participants reported reading both publications either in print or online.<sup>37</sup> Often, one of the first distinctions they made during our conversations was that the *Leader* was the “hometown” paper, focusing only on Laurel news, while *The Gazette* was a “county” paper, and had only a few pages of news focused specifically on Laurel, while the rest of the paper focused on Prince George's County news. According to Frank Abbott, publisher of *The Gazette*, reporting only Laurel news was never part of the strategy when they began their venture in Laurel. He also called *The Gazette* a “county” paper.

We never considered [cutting the regional news] and upping [the Laurel news]. That was the *Laurel Leader's* business decision, but we, I don't

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<sup>37</sup> One participant, Elizabeth Leight, community columnist for the West County Gazette and Russett resident, reported reading neither the *Leader* nor *The Gazette*. The three remaining participants did not complete the pre-interview questionnaire. Therefore, the overwhelming majority of my participants reported reading both newspapers on a weekly basis.

think we'd give that up. [...] What happens in College Park, there are people that care about that in Laurel, or what goes on in Bowie. [...] That's part of our structured newspapers. We apply that in all the county newspapers we do.

Even *Laurel Leader* community columnist Mike McLaughlin acknowledged that for reporting county news, *The Gazette* does a better job. And, such reporting is important because "the county decisions affect us all," he said. Donna Crary, 50, city council member, said that the county news *The Gazette* provides serves as a way to connect Laurel to surrounding areas on which it reports. Sam, 44, of Russett, agreed that more tri-county news would be relevant to residents of Laurel, as Laurel stretches across three counties.

Executive Editor for Patuxent Publishing, Paul Milton, explained that the *Leader's* mission is provide local, community news that readers can't get from any other source.

If we drill down to the Laurel level and probably even deeper and in the content in Laurel, we understand that people in Columbia probably don't care a whole lot about Laurel in the community sense or at least not to the level that we think the people of Laurel do. So you drill down to that level so that we sort of weeded out the stuff that's not pertinent to your day to day life and that's the mission of these papers, is to make sure that we can provide that level of detail that you're not going to get from a major metropolitan daily or that you're not going to get from a regional newspaper.

Christine Folks, who lives in West Laurel and who is also a community columnist for the *Leader*, confirmed Milton's comments when she told me that she simply doesn't care for a county perspective.

[*The Gazette*] is a bit of a thicker paper, but like I said, it's not all about Laurel and I don't care about that other stuff. I just don't and I don't think other people do either for the most part, I don't think, maybe there's a few people but most people don't care about it.

Other, more staunch local news junkies, like G. Rick Wilson, made no qualms about expressing their dislike for *The Gazette*.

We all kind of laugh at [*The Gazette*]. Cause it's really county news with three articles about the city thrown in, so people are just offended by that, you know? They would rather it be Laurel news with a little bit of county news.

Others, like Pastor Segundo Mir, said he sees value in both papers, and compared reading the two to watching CNN or MSNBC. "I think both are good resources ... each one gives different emphasis on news," he said. But, before taking a more in-depth look at what participants had to say about the weekly content, a look at the average make-up of the paper in 2009 is in order.

### ***Content in the Leader***

Laurel residents with keen observation will have noticed that the paper is literally shrinking. During the time this study was conducted, the size of the paper on which the news is printed was reduced by one inch. The paper carried fewer and fewer stories. According to Melanie Dzwonchyk, the weekly target

split between news and advertising is 45% news, 55% ads, though she admitted that at times, ads have comprised nearly 70% of the paper. Most weeks, there are few, if none, of the “people news” staples that were once the “top news” during Poe’s tenure, like engagement, wedding and birth announcements. Obituaries, however, are published in every issue, usually taking up an entire page of the newspaper.<sup>38</sup> The opinion page rarely has space for both an editorial and letters to the editor because of ad placements on those pages, so readers usually receive one or the other. The front page is usually graced by a large photograph with a caption that teases an inside story; the top news story and a sidebar of teaser headlines also appear on page 1. Two or three news stories are included in the paper each week. Usually, these stories focus on city government news or education, as those are the two beats the two *Leader* reporters cover most regularly. Often, feature stories are mixed into the bunch, showcasing the residents of Laurel who are doing things in the community or beyond. Shorter news, city, education, and business briefs are also included, ranging from two to twelve column inches, on average. A crime log, which reports crimes reported within the Greater Laurel area, is a weekly staple. Neighborhood columns, written by six paid correspondents living in the six sections of Laurel, are included each week, though not from every neighborhood; on average, two to three are published each week. These stories include the most “people” news. Each paper has at least one sports story with a photograph in the center of the paper, along with local high school and pee wee sports scores. The community section of the paper includes a

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<sup>38</sup> Upon review of a draft of this work, Melanie Dzwonchyk noted that “In 2009, death notices began being handled by the classifieds department as paid inserts and there are [now] fewer obits than when they were free.”

calendar of Laurel events, as well as the week's "Best Bets," and births, engagements and weddings when available. The rear of the paper is filled with real estate advertisements and classifieds.

### ***Content in The Gazette***

*The Gazette* looks like this: now a broadsheet, the weekly features two sections, one that houses local and regional news and editorials, the other typically either a guide to arts and entertainment or a local sports section.<sup>39</sup> Page one of the front section, which makes clear that it is the "Laurel" edition directly under *The Gazette* masthead, usually features a large color photograph and three to four news stories. Most weeks, at least two of those stories are local to Laurel; the others are often news from Prince George's County or one of the towns surrounding Laurel, like Savage.

Inside the paper, regular features of the front section include a community calendar, which lists upcoming events and "best bets." Page three features the "community notebook," which is written consistently by staff writer Timmy Gelles. Here, news briefs include mentions of honor rolls and dean's lists, award winners, students of the month, local contests and high achievers. These are usually specific to Laurel, though some County mentions do sneak in. Pages four and five follow with more "Community News," though here articles are longer and again, are a mix of both Laurel and surrounding towns' news. Also included here are the Laurel and County police blotter and, sporadically, a column from a

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<sup>39</sup> The order of these parts, however, varies from week to week. For instance, one week, local news and A&E news may appear in the front section, while sports and regional news appear in the second; another week, local and regional news may appear in section one, sports and A&E in section two.

community columnist.<sup>40</sup> The “Community Forum,” includes editorials and letters to the editor.

The remaining sections of the paper, in any given week, may include “Regional News,” “Arts and Entertainment,” “Business Watch,” “Home,” “Community Spirit,” “What’s Up” (which includes club activities and volunteer opportunities) “Dining,” “Movies,” and “Sports” (though it should be noted that a section might encompass only one page). In all cases, a majority of these stories are regionally focused. The youth sports tend to be more locally focused, and every now and again, one of the stories in these back sections will have a Laurel focus; usually, though, they are about surrounding communities in Prince George’s County, such as Bowie, Beltsville, and Savage, or take a broader county angle. The paper is rounded out by several pages of classified ads, which are regional as well.

***Desired local content—or lack thereof***

While nearly all of the journalists, editors and newspaper executives I spoke with agreed that they do not see themselves in competition with one another, readers clearly thought otherwise, as most talked about one newspaper in comparison with the other. Council members Mike Leszcz and Fredrick Smalls, said they read *The Gazette* for the news content. Ellen, 80, and Olivia, 84, both lifelong residents of Laurel, said that as of late, they find more news content in *The Gazette* rather than in the *Leader*, though they read both cover to cover each week. Doing so, they said, gives them the most accurate picture of what’s

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<sup>40</sup> One of the most regular columns is from Savage, which is a town north of Laurel.

happening in Laurel, because when a mistake arises in one story by one paper, it is often corrected by another in the other paper.

Ellen and Olivia find the obituaries in both newspapers among the most important local content. Several other participants, including council member Jan Robison, 59, Main Street Pharmacy owner Joan Kim, 39, and Toucan Taco owner Ginger Reeves, 46, agreed. Both Joan Kim and Ginger Reeves cited using the obituaries to learn when regular customers passed away so that they could send flowers and condolences to the families. Lara, 67, reported collecting the unread newspapers lying around town so that she could clip out obituaries or stories and send them to friends.

Other participants found the crime logs useful. Brian, 21, a Laurel police officer, uses the crime log to help him with his job:

I'm going to see where a lot of crimes are happening so when I'm on the street and if it's a slow night or something or a slow day I can kind of hang out in that area and try to do some proactive policing.

But, in all, most of my participants complained about the *lack* of content in the *Leader*. In fact, participants seemed most anxious to talk about the *Leader* rather than *The Gazette*. Many expressed their disappointment in the current state of the paper. When I asked Jan Robison, city council member and Old Town resident, how long the *Leader* stays around her house after it arrives on Thursday morning, she told me that it's usually into the recycle bin by Friday. She said, in a whisper, as if she didn't want others to hear, "It doesn't take a whole lot to read it." *Laurel Leader* community columnist Christine Folks referred to it as being "scrawny."

G. Rick Wilson compared the present day *Leader* to its state in the early 1900s, when Francis P. Curley was editor. “I don’t know how he paid for it, but you know, it was just massive ... We’ll never get back to that,” he said. Clearly an advocate of the *Leader*, he did say that, given their resources, the *Leader* is doing a great job, but they simply don’t have enough resources:

We don’t get enough stories in a given edition of the paper. There’s just not enough there. [...] They’ve only got a couple reporters and one editor. They’re down to one editor with the latest changes and it’s amazing that the dog is dancing at all at this point.

Rick is referring to the downsizing of the staff as a result of attrition, as mentioned earlier. Husband and wife Nate and Anne, 64 and 62 respectively, also acknowledged reader’s affection for—and also disappointment with—the *Leader*.

*Anne:* A lot of people tend to look for the *Leader* before they look for *The Gazette* because the *Leader*’s been around for much longer, and I’m hearing comments from people in my office, you know, they just think it’s terrible, you know, the *Leader*, which is sad.

*Nate:* A sad joke ... masquerading as a newspaper.

Nate—who is somewhat of a local history buff—brought many old copies of the *Leader* to our interview. He leafed through them as we talked, and concluded that one of the biggest things missing from the *Leader* and *The Gazette* is the human interest stories. Fredrick Smalls, city council member, agreed.

There are a number of what I would consider sometimes human interest stories, they just get ten lines of print in the local paper where some stories

that don't necessarily deserve a half page will get that half page because they're the stories that will cause people to stop and read.

Jan Robison, 59, city council member, described wanting more “hometown news,” which she described as “things going on with the kids and the schools” and the sports teams.

Anne, 62, suggested that the *Leader* is more likely to report negative news than positive, human interest news.

They're not getting as much attention basically, the human interest stories. I mean, things happen in the community instead of [reporting that] on the front page they might dwell on something negative and you have to look really hard to see if they wrote anything about maybe a community event that happened. [Community events are] a good thing and they should've had pictures or at least more coverage on it.

My participants, then, expressed a tension regarding the role of the community newspaper—as a *supporter* of the local community or as a *reporter* of the news. The next section explores these tensions.

### ***Community paper as PR tool or newspaper?***

As expected, my participants had differing views on the role of the community newspaper when it came to supporting and reporting—especially the local politicians and journalists. The majority of local Laurel city politicians I spoke with seemed to agree that local papers should promote the good happening in the community, though at present, they said the negative news outweighs the

positive. Fredrick Smalls said that because the *Leader* is the hometown paper, readers expect positive news.

It [the *Leader*] started out as a small town newspaper and thus you would like to read stories that are talking about some of the positive things, for example, [that] are going on in Laurel High School, not the story that the principal reported that 50% of the students are failing. That's fair reporting. I'm not saying that that shouldn't [be reported], but to balance that ... talk about some of those kids that are doing extraordinary things in high school.

Smalls acknowledged that this type of reporting may not sell the papers, but those positive stories are the kind people like to read. Jan Robison agreed, but went further to suggest that *Leader* reporters seek out negative news to put into that paper.

I hate to say this about Gwen, because I like her, and Melanie and I are just very good friends, but I think they look for bad and promote [it]. It's better since Melanie's been [editor]. [...] Nothing against Joe [former editor] but Joe wanted, how can I say, he wanted to work for *The Post*, I think. I don't know.

Jan's reference to *The Post* had a negative connotation here, suggesting that big city daily newspapers tend to report more negative than positive news. Craig Moe, mayor of Laurel, said that much good is happening in the community—good that is the result of the work of Laurel city government—doesn't make it into the newspaper.

It's the old saying, the good stuff, they don't put it in, the bad stuff which is what sells. And, I think we do a lot of good things here and I don't think they put in it. ... When I was growing up... I remember getting a trophy and the *Laurel Leader* and others would come and take their picture ... They don't do that, you don't see that, or a check passing, as they called it [...] They don't do that. It's all changed.

When I asked Mayor Moe why he thought that this kind of news was diminishing in the local papers, he cited money and the bottom line as the reason such news was cut from the paper.

But journalists at the *Leader* maintained that their mission is twofold.

Melanie Dzwonchyk explained.

The *Leader* is known to champion and promote the good, the accomplishments, the good things that are happening in our community, which are many, and to also analyze and present the more conflicting things that are happening to help people better understand some of those conflicts— because you can't hope to solve the conflicts and make them go away or whatever without really defining them—and to present both sides.

Dzwonchyk continued, saying that the biggest part of her staff's job is to hold up a mirror to the community and reflect what is happening from week to week. But, she realized that often times, people want to look away from that mirror when they see bad things reflected.

You know, it's just like anything, people will look in the mirror and they don't like what they see and say, 'Oh, bad hair day. I'm just not going to look in the mirror and I'm not going to worry about it.' Or people will read something and they will focus on ... the negative aspect of an issue. [...] It's perception. It's terrible, that perception and I understand it very clearly. That is human nature. And does that worry me? No. It really doesn't because I know, I mean, if we went inch for inch, I know we have more positive news than negative news. That's not our mission to dig up dirt or anything.

Dan Schwind, 26, reporter for the *Leader*, agreed that community papers should contain positive news, but sometimes, the good isn't as newsworthy as the bad.

He explained:

Sometimes good news is soft news, you know? It's features and there's nothing wrong with those, but that's not always a lead story. I mean, if a school is having a science fair or a carnival, that's fun and that's cool, but if there is a shooting in that same week, what do you think people need to know more about, that there's a shooting in their neighborhood or that there was a carnival? So, I feel like our obligation is to, regardless of what people necessarily want we're supposed to provide what the big story is.

Schwind recalled a time when a resident lashed out at him while he was working to cover a murder investigation in Laurel.

I went down to talk to some folks in the neighborhood around where the body was discovered and one of the guys was absolutely disgusted with

my presence. He was like, ‘You are the reason why this country is still afraid.’ You know, ‘you come down here to cover this and the city sends like 20 police officers and that just scares the crap out of people and all that does is continue that cycle of fear.’ And, ‘why don’t you talk about the positive news? That’s why this town gets a bad reputation.’ Well, I don’t know if it has that reputation, quite frankly. That was obviously frustrating. A murder in any town is news.

Schwind went on to say that the best place to report good news is in the neighborhood columns, which are written by people like Mike McLaughlin and Christine Folks, who are living in Laurel. And, both of these columnists acknowledged that the content within their columns is less than hard-hitting news. McLaughlin referred to the content of his column as “fluff.” Folks said that the majority of her content is good news about people, because “people care about people.”

They want to see something that they recognize. They don’t care if it’s just a bunch of dates and times. Those things are important too, but they also like to see their children’s names, so and so became a grandparent, and I don’t put a lot of that in there, but it does get sprinkled in there. I like it to be homegrown. And friends used to tease me; they used to call it my gossip column. There’s absolutely no gossip in there, not even an ounce of gossip, but they used to tease because it was homegrown.

David Driver, sports reporter for the *Leader*, also acknowledged that readers want positive news, but he was a bit more direct about his perception of

the newspaper's role. "We're not a PR firm for Laurel. Our job is to report the news, whether it's good or bad," he said. Having been a community journalist in Laurel for nearly fifteen years, Driver has learned ways to skirt around the negative news.

I think sports is one of those areas where you can sort of, you don't ignore the negative, but at the same time you can accentuate the positive. [...] I think it's only natural to focus on the winning teams or a player who is good. I mean, you're probably not going to want to have people read about a team that is 0 and 20. I mean, would you have to report their record at some point? Sure, to be fair, but I mean if we have limited space, we're going to probably be reporting more positive than negative when it comes to sports.

Executive Editor of Patuxent Publishing, Paul Milton, said that Patuxent's mission is to produce newspapers people need to live in their communities.

The vision for the company is to be that friendly critic, the advocate for certain things in the community. We used to call it the indispensable alternative. [That] was the buzz phrase around here for the longest time, and what we mean by that is that we want to be something a good citizen in the community can't live without. If you want to know what's going on in Laurel, you know, you read our newspaper.

As "friendly" as the newspapers may claim to be, as Milton said, one of their primary roles remains that of the "critic." Often times, when negative news is reported, it is often viewed as inaccurate by sources and community members

alike. Getting the story “right” is important, especially when newspaper articles become historical records for towns like Laurel. Theresa, 59, pointed out that early editions of the *Leader*, which focused on mainly positive news, were likely leaving out important, though perhaps negative, stories that may have impacted the town. Those stories are now lost. So, comprehensive, accurate coverage is crucial in community journalism. The next section deals with the perceptions of accuracy in reporting held by Laurel city government officials and Laurel journalists, alike.

### ***Accuracy in reporting***

*The Gazette* seemed to fare better on accuracy than did the *Leader*, according to the members of Laurel city government. According to Fredrick Smalls, city council member, there have been fewer issues with *The Gazette* when it comes to getting the story “right.” All of the members of Laurel city government reported being misquoted at one point or another by members of the local press. Jan Robison said she’s usually anxious to pick up the newspapers, especially if she thinks they may have quoted her. “I’m always anxious to see what I said,” she said with a laugh. “Sometimes, it’s not even recognizable.” Kristie Mills, 60, called the coverage “sporadic in terms of content and accuracy.” She went on to say that, “sometimes, you’re not sure they [reporters] were at the same meeting you were at.”

Gwendolyn Glenn, reporter for the *Leader*, recounted an instance when she broke a story about a TIF (Tax Increment Financing) for the Laurel Mall

redevelopment before city government officials were ready for it to become public knowledge.

[The mayor] was upset that we broke that story because residents were upset because they didn't even know that they were going to ask for the tax break. [...] So, then he wrote a long letter to the editor and we printed it. But to me, it's not personal. It's just professional.

Donna Crary, 50, city council member, agreed that her relationship with the local press is professional, but she said that members of city council should feel comfortable interacting with the press and vice versa.

I try to treat the journalists as people. I think that is very important. I think in a small town, you need to be able to discuss things with them. [...] I think it's enjoyable and there should be a level of relaxation, and I think that you should be able to have a conversation with them and say, 'You know, so and so, print the pertinent part.'

Gwendolyn Glenn touched on this issue, citing times when she has written stories that upset members of the city government, who then became less accessible to her. While the mayor is sometimes difficult in this regard, she said she finds city council and the rest of the city's department heads to be very accessible, even in the face of coverage with which they may disagree or be upset about.

Mike Leszcz, councilperson at large, however, mentioned times when he's been so upset by a story that he has refused to talk to journalists. When he feels they've taken sides or presented a biased or skewed view of a situation or meeting, he has been curt with reporters.

I'll answer a question but that's it. Look, if you call me, if you're a newspaper reporter—and if you ask them—I'm pretty forthcoming. Ask me a question and I'll give you the answer. I'll give you my reason why. But there have been times, when I felt that they weren't doing the right thing for the council, the mayor, the administration, and for the citizens of Laurel. [...] So, there have been times when I have not spoken to the paper, other than to say yes or no.

He will always say “yes” or “no” because he said he feels by not talking to the press, he would be “abusing the public” who wants to know how their councilperson feels on a particular issue.

In order to communicate more directly his thoughts, feelings and agendas to the citizens of Laurel, the mayor writes a blog called *Laurel Straight Up*. City council members have started an online newsletter. Fredrick Smalls said that they decided to start the newsletter when they heard reaction from citizens claiming they were uninformed about candidates for Laurel government positions.

We've realized that there is a need for us to communicate and this is not an effort to get votes the next time we run for election, but it's an effort to honestly get information out. ... It's strictly focused on what's happening in the city and the activities of the council. This is a direct response to the comments/criticism that we actually got after our last election when people said, ‘We didn't know who the candidates were. We didn't know who was running. We didn't know when the election was, where.’ ... So

we decided that it was our responsibility to share as much information with our community as possible.

Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor of the *Leader*, described the blog and newsletter as efforts at positive PR.

I think that often the city thinks that they should have more control over what is reported about their city, because they are very much into image control, which rightly they should be. Who else should care more about the image of the city? Whereas, we may not agree with that, and we think our citizens need to know the good, the bad and the ugly. If you were to compare the newsletter that maybe the mayor would put out, of course he's going to champion all the positives and we do, too.

She continued, saying again that the role of the *Leader* is to report the news fairly and accurately.

I think in the eyes of the city government they have felt that the paper probably hasn't supported them, but the paper does not exist to be their mouthpiece or to be their friend. That's not what we do. Contrary to popular beliefs, we do not accept bribes, we do not sit down and decide based on our personal desires or prejudices what we're going to do. I know people will attribute that to all media. And that very much is not the case at all. I have to tell people point blank, this is not the case. We run into that a lot.

And, though the Mayor may not like the coverage, he said that he understands the newspapers role and that journalists have a job to do. "No politician is going to

tell you it's [the coverage] great," said Craig Moe. "But, I think ... that they got a job to do and I may not like it sometimes, but I understand."

Indeed, many of my other participants agreed the checks and balances, or watchdog role, of the two local newspapers is important. Theresa, 60, Old Town resident, pointed out just how important the watchdog role of the newspaper is:

When the newspapers disappear in the community, there's nobody holding your elected officials accountable. There's no one to look at the development ... nobody looking at those developers and saying, 'Is there a financial tie between so and so and so and so?' [...] You can have Sunshine Laws from here to next year, but as a citizen, I don't have the time to do the work of a reporter; I have another job. And, I worry that the whole issue of accountability is going to disappear and the blogosphere is not quite there to take that role.

But, community newspapers do more than watch over city government—or, at least they should, according to participants. Chapter 7 has more on the blogosphere.

### ***Content falling short, audiences ignored***

Several of my participants suggested that the newspapers are not living up to their potential. For some, the content is lacking in a big way. According to Julie, 22, college student and resident of Old Town Laurel, she finds little in the newspapers that is relevant or interesting. She told me that she tends to look at the front page story of the paper and then "make[s] fun of it." When I asked her why she makes fun of it, she explained:

Sometimes I just drive around and I think about all the things that aren't being covered. It's just frustrating. So there's developments ... Laurel is a growing city and a lot of that, I think, is happening without really a close eye being taken to it.

Brian, 21, agreed with Julie and she continued, "It doesn't seem like they try to make the connection for you across departments and things like that ... There's not a whole lot of follow up with the story."

Lara, 67, resident of South Laurel, said that she has seen the quality and size of the *Leader* diminish, adding "I don't know who's writing the editorials but they don't seem as thoughtful." Nate, 64, Old Town resident, has been reading the *Leader* since he was a boy. He said that compared to stories written by former editor and owner Gertrude Poe, the articles today don't seem to have a great deal of "substance."

Sam, 44, a Russett resident, said that he reads neither the *Leader* nor *The Gazette* with any consistency. "Everything that's in there is not something that relates to me at all ... None of the stuff that's in there interests me," he said. Not having children or any connection to the schools, he said that for him little of the content related to local schools and sports is of interest. Julie, 22, held the perception that the *Leader* is geared more toward an older audience. "It's written by older people; it's not written by young people yet." She continued, "I think it's great for an older audience, and it's kind of fuddy duddy." Gina, 20, said that she'd like to see more content geared toward younger Laurel residents, like a "What's Hot" or a "What's Happening" section, which highlights restaurants or

entertainment venues appropriate for a younger audience. Sam, 44, agreed that neither newspaper carries enough of this type of content.

For other residents of Laurel, the lack of relevant content is more significant. Pastor Segundo Mir pointed out that there is really no local print media geared toward the Hispanic, non-English reading population. He said that when he came to Laurel, back in the 1989, the only Spanish media was radio. Mir hosts his own radio show, “Donde Viva Lamore,” or “Where the love lives” on AM 900. But, still today, no local Laurel print media provides content for the Spanish speaking audience. “I would like to have a Hispanic corner [in the newspapers] and every week, to write a small article,” he said. He even provided me with a long list of topics the articles could cover. The list is available in Appendix 9. He continued, saying that the large population of Hispanics do not read the newspaper, many because they cannot read English.

Most of the people take the *Laurel Leader* and *The Gazette* and go to the trash. They’ll never read it. Some people have time, most of the people, my Hispanic people are working too hard. Many of them don’t read English, so what they do with it? ...When they come home they are very tired. They prefer to sit down and watch the movie, watch the news, and they [television news] don’t talk about Laurel. They are talking about everywhere. I know what is going on everywhere but in Laurel sometimes. He said that the newspapers need to do better and they should “write in the language of the people, in a language they can understand” because they are

essentially “ignoring [a] sector of the society who live here, thousand of thousand of thousand of people who live in the area.”

Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor of the *Leader*, said that reaching all potential audiences is something that is always on her mind.

I’ll be standing in line at the grocery store and I’ll think, wow, we spend so much time researching news, this issue or a particular news items, I felt like it was so important that people know, but I wonder if they would just rather know what churches are having the bizarre this weekend or why they are knocking down part of the school or what is that new construction going on. You can’t, you can’t bring everything to everybody.

Gwendolyn Glenn agreed that you cannot reach every person in the audience.

She cited the public journalism movement, where newspapers more actively work with the community to bring them the news they desire. She said she never “jumped on that bandwagon” because she “didn’t think that ... coverage should be led by what people [want].” She continued:

You’re not going to reach everybody, and number two, some groups are going to feel left out and you may miss stories because people don’t want to hear about that. Just because people don’t want to hear about that doesn’t mean it’s not news.

Many of my participants, however, were vocal about the state of the *Leader*, especially since it packed up and moved its office ten miles north to Columbia.

### **The *Leader*'s move to Columbia poses challenges, alienates some readers**

On December 11, 2008, the *Leader* announced to readers that its office would relocate to Columbia, MD, on December 15, 2008. Trish M. Carroll, president of Patuxent Publishing and Timothy E. Ryan, president of The Baltimore Sun Media Group, which is owned by the Tribune Company and publishes the *Leader*, announced in a letter to readers that the Tribune Company had “filed to restructure debt obligations under the protection of Chapter 11 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code” (“A note from the company president”). The day before, on December 10, 2008, Melanie Dzwonchyk posted a brief article online announcing that the *Leader* would relocate its office to the Patuxent Publishing headquarters in Columbia (“New location, but same commitment to readers”). The same article appeared in the print edition the next day, on December 11, 2008 (“Leader office relocating”). In that article, Dzwonchyk said:

Though the mailing address and production facilities will be changing, reporters, photographers and editors will still be in the community every day, covering the kinds of news stories and neighborhood events that *Leader* readers and advertisers have come to expect. We know how important it is to keep a connection with the community and we pledge to continue it (“Leader office relocating”).

During my conversations with participants, most either brought up the fact that the *Leader* had recently relocated or were eager to discuss it when I brought it up. Some did not even realize that the office had relocated—and part of the reason was that the announcement came immediately ahead of the move. Even reporters

at the *Leader* felt uneasy about the way the move was handled. Pat Farmer, 65, part-time editorial assistant at the *Leader*, confessed that she was upset by the quick announcement.

The thing that bothered me the most, and I'll go out and say this, is that everything was kept so quiet and like the mayor and the other government officials didn't know we were going to be moving until the paper came out. [...] Gwen, Dan and I were trying to talk Melanie into having a meeting with the mayor to talk about it, because we thought that he maybe would offer us a space in the city. We were hoping that something like that would happen and even an office for them to go to when they're in Laurel.

Mike McLaughlin, 56, Old Town resident and community columnist for the *Leader*, also criticized the handling of the announcement.

I wasn't happy with it and the way it was pulled off, you know? It wasn't like taking the Baltimore Colts in the middle of the night, you know, that kind of thing but I think Laurel, taking the *Leader* out of Main Street, it's just devastated a lot of people.

Bob Mignon, 59, Russett resident and owner of Minuteman Press in Laurel, is one of those people. He was not shy about expressing his disappointment with not only the *Leader's* move, but also its performance.

The first few issues after that move were really weak and now it seems like it has gotten a little stronger in the last six or eight weeks, so maybe somebody is getting a message that because we are away [in Columbia]

we have to work even harder to be in touch with what's going on and in their case I think it might be good because they weren't doing anything when they were there on Main Street and maybe they'll do a little bit more because they think that they're now one step removed, but it's really a classic destruction of a newspaper. It's horrible, then they wonder why people are going other places and the reason they're going other places is that these people aren't providing the content to make themselves successful.

Melanie Dzwonchyk acknowledged people's frustration with the relocation of the *Leader*; some even questioned whether or not it had closed altogether. She recounted a phone call she had taken just a day before our conversation in February of 2009, when a woman from South Carolina, formerly of Laurel, called looking for someone at the *Leader*. When Dzwonchyk answered and asked if she could help the woman, the woman told her that the *Leader* had gone out of business. When Dzwonchyk told the woman she was speaking with the editor, the woman continued to insist that they had gone "belly up," or so her friends had told her. Dzwonchyk also recalled several instances when people in Laurel had approached her husband, asking him what she is up to now that there is no more *Leader*. She said that in reply, he said, "She's working 14-hour days. I don't know what she's doing. But, putting money in the bank." The perception that the *Leader* has gone out of business now that it has relocated to Columbia is very real, as Dzwonchyk's examples show. But, she said that in reality, the journalists

are still very present in Laurel—covering sporting events, schools and city government.

Still, being located ten miles from the place you aim to cover provides challenges that even readers recognize. G. Rick Wilson, 51, Old Town resident, was also upset to learn that the *Leader* left town. He speculated that the move must have affected the *Leader's* ability to cover Laurel.

Geography is important. Geography is terribly important because it's news. So now you're a reporter working a story here in town, and you came in to cover [a story] and normally you would have gone back to where Red, Hot, and Blue is, right to their offices there [on Main Street] and you sit at your desk and you do whatever you're going to do. But now you have to drive back to Columbia. While you're driving back to Columbia another story comes up. How likely are you to be turning around and driving the 20 minutes back to Laurel to cover that story? It's got to affect it. I appreciate why they did it but it's got to affect it.

Fredrick Smalls, city council member, agreed that “whether real or imagined . . . for a local paper not to be located locally you're losing something.” By the time journalists arrive to cover spot news, the newsworthy happening could have concluded, according to Smalls. “I think in some cases, the reporters are relying more on when covering city council kinds of things are relying more on the video tape review than actually being there at meetings,” Smalls said.

And, *Leader* journalists Dan Schwind and Gwendolyn Glenn confirmed the challenges in our conversations. When I spoke to Schwind in mid-March

2009, he was still sorting out his weekly routine since the move to Columbia. He said that he had decided he would spend Thursdays and Fridays in Laurel and Monday through Wednesday in Columbia. But, this plan could become complicated, he said, without access to the tools of his trade—a business cell phone and laptop computer. He cited the Chapter 11 filing of the Tribune Company for the lack of availability of these tools.

For right now, honestly, I spend just about every day in Columbia. You know, I come down here for interviews that I have scheduled, and usually when I'm down here I'll swing by and talk to one or two other people, just to get a couple of other things knocked out of the way at the same time, but, a lot of times I just go back to Columbia because that's where my email is, and that's where my voicemail is.

Though he said the company has offered to pay him for use of his personal cell phone minutes, he prefers not to give his personal phone number out to sources. In offering to reimburse him, he said the company is “missing the point”—that the journalists do not wish to use their personal phones for business purposes. “As much as I love the people of Laurel, I don't want to give my cell phone out to everyone,” he said.

Gwendolyn cited a time when she missed a deadline because a report from the Economic Development office had been released and it could not be emailed to her. Because she was in Columbia and on a deadline, she was unable to get the report in time; the story was published that week on the web and not in print until

the following week. She said that she suspects the *Leader* is also missing out on potential news by not being in town five days a week.

I think we miss things that we would see a lot just in walking around, [like] most of the crime things, accidents. Because sometimes I've been down there and have run into, 198 is blocked, there's a major accident and I'll call back up and Dan has to leave from [Columbia] and go all the way down there whereas before if I was just driving around in my working and then I would call Dan he could be on the scene in five minutes because that's his beat.

She also said that since the move, the journalists have been allowed more flexibility about working from Laurel or from the Columbia office. Some days, she said, she spends all of her time in Laurel. But, without office space, it is difficult to do her job. She frequently uses the Laurel Library to write and email stories back to the newsroom, but this is not always the most efficient solution, especially in the evening, when the library fills with teens who occupy all of the available computers. She recalled a recent instance when she had to call Melanie, her editor, because she had to wait twenty minutes to gain access to a computer at the library. While she waited, she hand drafted the story and then typed and sent it once she gained access.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Upon review of a draft, Gwendolyn Glenn noted that since the move to Columbia, the Tribune Company has provided *Leader* reporters with the much needed resources to work in the field. "Tribune has given us laptops, video cameras, air cards and business cell phones so we can work in Laurel more or at home. I rarely come into the Columbia office these days, although I have a work station there. This way, we have a greater presence in the city and I've been able to be on the scene of breaking news stories and am able to observe changes in the city, such as a new restaurant opening, a business opening or closing, construction work, road closures that help commuters, etc."

Schwind said that the move has definitely affected the way he goes about his job—the education beat in Laurel.

It's a lot harder to cover them when you can't just go to the school.

Dwayne Jones is a great principal, and part of the reason he is a great principal is because he doesn't tie himself to his phone. He's constantly running around the school, putting out fires left and right. As a result, he can't be sitting at his desk. Well, when I was at Main Street, it was four miles between the office and the school, so if I needed to talk to him, I just hopped in my car and drove over real quick and I was done. Now, it's a twenty miles a ride, so that's not something I can just hop in the car and do.

For David Driver, 47, part-time sports reporter for the *Leader*, the move hasn't really affected his work, as he covers pre-scheduled sporting events most frequently. But for full-time reporters Schwind and Glenn, the move to Columbia meant more than just a change in location. With all Patuxent Publishing papers working under one roof, the company has begun pooling reporters, and asking them to cover stories for several different Patuxent papers. Schwind, who said at first he enjoyed the hustle and bustle of a bigger newsroom, quickly realized the challenges.

It's kind of cool, because, like, wow, this is a newsroom, wow. But at the same time, this person is talking about Westminster, and I don't know what the hell they're talking about, and you know, I'm trying to deal with Laurel. But, the other thing is that since we're all pooled, they're trying to

pool the stories, too. The last couple of weeks I've had to help out with some Howard County stories, which I don't necessarily mind; I just feel bad because I don't know squat about Howard County outside of North Laurel. And, Gwendolyn, I know she's been working on some economic stories of Howard County. So, that's also obviously pulled me away from [reporting on Laurel].

Pat Farmer, 65, part-time editorial assistant and South Laurel resident, agreed that the move has made her job a bit harder, but not necessarily because of the removed location. She said that as a result of the move, they are also pooling editorial assistants, and she's no longer part of editorial meetings she once was when the *Leader* maintained its own office in Laurel. "I think it could be detrimental to the paper, because, you know, I have this investment in the community, an investment in the paper," she said. Farmer lives in Laurel, as does editor Dzwonchyk, and community columnists Christine Folks and Mike McLaughlin. As residents, they have a different relationship with Laurel and the *Leader* than do Schwind, Driver, and Glenn, who do not live—and never have lived—in Laurel. The next section deals with issues of insider/outsider status and its effect on the coverage of Laurel.

### ***Journalists as insiders or outsiders***

Since moving to Columbia, some participants now consider *Leader* journalists as "outsiders," even though some of them actually live in Laurel. But, even before the move, several participants said they perceived many of the *Leader's* journalists to be somewhat "detached" from Laurel. Bob Mignon, 59,

owner of Minuteman Press, has been upset with the *Leader's* performance ever since it switched from independent to corporate ownership.

After Mrs. Poe sold [the *Leader*] to Patuxent Publishing, [it] really seems to have become less of a community newspaper and more of, everything is dollars and cents, I guess. And these things have to pay for themselves, but I expect certain content about the community in my newspaper and the *Laurel Leader* simply doesn't care that much about community content. They don't send reporters, they don't report on many of the activities that take place in the Laurel community. *The Gazette* does more than the *Laurel Leader* does.

Kristie Mills, 60, Laurel city administrator, agreed that the journalists from both papers are somewhat removed from the day-to-day activities of Laurel. She cited a recent Martin Luther King, Jr. event, held on a weekend. While Gwendolyn Glenn wrote a personal story about her experience with MLK day, she said none of the local reporters—from either the *Leader* or *The Gazette*—actually came to the event to cover it. Mills said that when events are held on weekends, reporters generally don't come out—but they should. Covering Laurel, she said, is an around the clock job, and the journalists need to be available whenever important things are happening in town. “Like me,” she said, “they made a career choice.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Upon review of a draft, Gwendolyn Glenn responded to Mills' claims that the *Leader* doesn't cover many of the community events that they organize. She said, “One reason [that we don't cover the events] is that we are not made aware of many of them, even though I call their offices regularly to ask what's going on and have asked to be kept in the loop of events, especially where the mayor's schedule is concerned. Unlike the new Prince George's County Executive, Rushern Baker, who sends out his daily itinerary, the mayor does not, even though we've made this request over the years I've been here. Often we are not informed of speeches he's making, testimony he's

Lara, who works with several local volunteer organizations, including the Friends of the Laurel Library, said that she has a difficult time getting reporters from the *Leader* to write stories about her events. *The Gazette*, she said, is much more likely to contact her. Anne, who works in one of the Laurel city government offices, said that she's no longer sure who is covering what's happening in her office because Melanie Dzwonchyk, who is now the editor, used to be the journalist who contacted her regarding various happenings before shifting, attrition, and the move took place. But, the issue of journalists as insiders or outsiders has long been an issue for community journalists and was addressed most notably by scholars and proponents of the public journalism movement. Merritt (1997) contended that journalists should worry less about the need for separation from public life, and think more about the important connections they have to it.

Gwendolyn Glenn, who came to the *Laurel Leader* after working stints at NPR, CNN and the *Washington Post*, doesn't see her role as a reporter any differently now that she works for a small, community newspaper. She said that her job is "no different from anywhere else I've ever worked [at the] national level, international level; it's to do the story. Do an objective story, check the validity of the story. That part I think is always the same." Gwendolyn, who lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, just north of Washington, D.C., said she doesn't consider herself to be part of the community in Laurel.

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giving on legislation elsewhere, etc. That would be good information to have in advance so we could send a photographer, which is also another reason we sometimes are not able to cover city events—photographers are not available, especially on weekends when they are often shooting sports events."

I don't live here so, no. I think if I lived here that would be different but I'm known in the community. People know me, people say hi and people call me with ideas but I just feel to be part of a community you have to live there. [...] I don't know how you can really be a part of a community if you don't live here. And that's not to say you can't do your job well. I don't think you have to live here to be a reporter.

Melanie Dzwonchyk said that being involved in various activities and organizations in Laurel—and being neighbors with some of the city council members—puts her in a somewhat difficult position as the “friendly critic,” as Paul Milton described. Many of the local people I talked to referred to Melanie by her first name and knew she was the editor of the *Leader*. Several reported being friends with her and feeling very comfortable talking with her. But Donna Crary, 50, city council member, said that, while she feels comfortable interacting with Melanie, she finds some of the other reporters from the *Leader* and *The Gazette* to be “somewhat detached.” She said: “I think that the reporters can go to certain people all the time for comments,” adding that she is not one of those people. But, she said, she does pay attention to the dynamics among the other council members and who the reporters ask for comment. Her fellow council member, Jan Robison, pointed out that turnover among community reporters proves challenging for the coverage, because when new reporters come to cover the city government meetings, they are not aware of the “dynamics” and “who to go to and who will talk to you if you want.”

Dan Schwind agreed that learning these dynamics and other intimate details about covering the community are not only difficult to learn, but take time and effort. He explained:

If you want to learn what's going on, you know, with the Laurel city council, you can't just go to the council meetings and the work sessions. You've kind of got to go to those, the barbecues they do and things like that or any of their events because that's when you get to talk to the city council members out of their element. And with schools, you can talk with teachers in the class but it's better to sort of, I found with this community, [to] talk to them when they're doing their sort of actual activities with their kids or you know, the way I really got to know how to work with [a local principal] was doing that Principal for a Day series, where you get to see exactly what they are doing all day, every day.

He said this kind of casual interaction with sources helped him to learn how to time difficult questions—who would rather answer them first and get them out of the way, and who he needed to talk with for a while before he hit them with a hard question.

Paul Milton, Executive Editor of News Operations for Patuxent Publishing, agreed that having journalists inside of the community is important for the *Leader* and the type of coverage they wish to provide readers. This doesn't mean, he said, that journalists need to live in the town on which they report, but getting involved in the community in some way is important.

We certainly know that ... we make better newspapers by having people that are in the community, that are experiencing the same thing as our readers and advertisers are experiencing. We figure it makes a better newspaper. We try to do that [get involved] whenever it's possible but it's not necessary. And we hope our editors are immersing themselves and our reporters are immersing themselves in the community and become part of it one way or the other.

But, he added, that being involved—or living in the community—can prove difficult because “you have to be able to kind of, basically [have] the intestinal fortitude to criticize your community when you need.” While no formal policy forbids reporters from participating in the community, there are some precautions they take, like making sure editorial staff is not sitting on local board of directors, or even placing bumper stickers on their cars.

During election times, I will go out and survey the parking lot and make sure nobody has any bumper stickers on their cars that say, ‘vote for this person, vote for that person.’ We do have policies to that extent and we also—this is a Tribune policy—we discourage people from contributing politically to any campaigns, because their name could show up at a finance campaign list and we don't want our reporters showing their biases that way.

Though he knows that on election day, journalists will go into a booth and cast their vote in the same manner as all other citizens, they should refrain from

“shouting” their political preferences in order to “remain as neutral as possible,” he said. He added:

Editors or reporters who are in a community and their kids have to go a local school and that local school gets more attention than another one, you have to be careful. So you just have to have your antenna up to make sure that you’re not doing it but keep the balance and I think, I’d say 98% of the time we do and when we’re called on it then I think it’s always unconscious and we rectify.

Frank Abbott, publisher of *The Gazette*, also said that *The Gazette* does not have a policy regarding a journalist residing in the community on which he or she reports, but added that none of the *Laurel Gazette* reporters—at the time of this research—lived in Laurel. But, he said that living outside of the community is usually better “because you know they are more neutral not living there.”

But, Pastor Segundo Mir compared being a journalist who is an “outsider” to being a Catholic priest—a strange comparison, I thought, until he elaborated. How could a Catholic priest counsel couples on marriage if they, themselves, have not experienced and lived it, he asked. Journalists, like priests he argued, need to be a part of the community in which they work in order to be able to help the people they serve. He saw it as a journalist’s responsibility to help and serve the public much in the same way that he is expected to help and serve the parishioners of his churches.

However, a lack of investment in the community on which one reports could also lead to another challenge—high turnover among journalists. When I

asked Dan Schwind, 26, if he saw himself continuing to work at the *Leader* long term, he said that he was unsure for a number of reasons.

I do like this place, I do. I like the job. I like working with Melanie ... Woody (copy editor) ... Pat ... Dave. I like the people I work with in the community. That said, I'm getting married and \$26,000 is not a hell of a lot of money. I hate to always harp on that [but], when you've got \$17,000 in student debt and you're paying off a car loan and right now you're only doing okay cause you're living at home with your parents and you're getting ready to move in with your fiancée, soon to be wife, into an apartment, it's tough. So, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't obviously open to considering any other opportunity that came along.

Schwind, who began working at the *Leader* after he graduated from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, in 2005, told me that he'd only recently gotten a 2% pay raise.

It's kind of frustrating cause I feel like I'm good at what I do, you know? I like to think I am. So, I've got relationships with a lot of the principals and a lot of the people in here that some guy fresh out of college isn't going to have and that came from me earning it for three and a half years, but I would think that would be almost worth more to the company to keep that for a little extra money rather than see me go off and then them scooping up some young fresh face for \$22,000.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Schwind left the *Leader* and took a job as a social media coordinator with General Dynamics Information Technology in November of 2009.

He also acknowledged that because of the already small size of the staff, there isn't much room to move up in the ranks at the *Leader*. Both Paul Milton, of the *Leader*, and Frank Abbott, of *The Gazette*, acknowledged that there is usually turnover among the entry-level journalists. Milton estimated that Patuxent experiences 10 percent turnover in the course of one year, while Abbott said he was unable to estimate the turnover because of the state of the slowed economy. Milton acknowledged the inherent tension that exists regarding turn-over of journalists at a community newspaper. So, although the assumption is that a constant churn among journalists is a problem, because it means people have little connection to or knowledge of the community, Milton saw another side:

We might even say we wish we had more turnover in some cases because you won't always get fresh blood and get new ideas and things like that, but we tend to hire what we think are pretty good people and we would like to keep them around. It's too short, memory of a community is really important.

Milton even recalled an experience he had with a new reporter just a few days before our interview. He recounted the story to me:

We have a new reporter in the Arbutus paper and he came to me the other day and he said, 'I just don't know anybody,' and I was able to, even though it's been 20 years since I've been there, able to kind of rattle off, 'well, call this person, call that person, and that person' and his boss, who's been there 20 years said, 'call this person and that person.' And in a matter of a five minute conversation we gave him 15 names of people who

he needed to know and they're relevant, good names for him, for a young reporter that's starting out to know; and if he gets to know these people, he'll know his beat real quick.

But, as Schwind pointed out, knowing their names and knowing *them* are two completely different things. Getting to know the people of a community takes time. Perhaps that's why the community columnists, who live in Laurel and write bi-weekly columns for the local newspapers, are well-suited to report on the happenings within their parts of town.

### **Neighborhood columnists, citizen journalists**

As Dan Schwind said earlier, the neighborhood columnists are well-suited to report all of the positive news happening around Laurel. And, for the most part, that's what they do. The *Laurel Leader* has six "neighborhood columnists," which represent Old Town, North Laurel, South Laurel, West Laurel, Maryland City, and Russett.<sup>44</sup> *The Gazette* has only one columnist, who writes about Savage, a town north of Laurel. I spoke with two of the *Leader's* columnists—West Laurel columnist Christine Folks, 52, and Old Town columnist, Mike McLaughlin, 56. Both have lived in Laurel for more than thirty years and considered themselves to be active within the community. But, Folks said that she doesn't consider herself to be a journalist, because she doesn't have a journalism degree. She's simply a columnist. As mentioned earlier, both columnists agree that the content of their weekly columns is not hard-hitting news, but in many cases it is researched and verified. McLaughlin said that his

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<sup>44</sup> Not all areas of Laurel are represented by neighborhood columnists. There is no columnist representing The Grove, the historically black neighborhood in Laurel.

responsibility in writing the column is to “let [readers] know about their neighbors.” To do this, McLaughlin not only writes about his neighbors, but also photographs them, or captures them on video. On several occasions, McLaughlin’s videos were embedded in the online version of his column.<sup>45</sup> Both columnists described the majority of their content as people news.

Folks said that being a columnist has brought her a sense of “celebrity” around Laurel. She explained:

I really do like it and the humorous thing about it is that it is a little bit of a celebrity thing for me. It’s like my claim to fame because [...] I’ve had a lot of people [at] different places saying, ‘Oh, you’re the [*Leader* columnist].’ I have had that but people just kind of know who I am or somebody else says who I am and believe me I’m not trying to exaggerate this, I’m just saying it’s kind of silly.

As a result of her work with the newspaper, Folks was awarded a West Laurel Civic Association award a few years ago. She said it was very “sweet” to be recognized for her efforts in bringing some community news to the people of West Laurel. Both columnists reported enjoying writing the column, for which they are paid only about \$45.

Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I kept hearing about a community columnist named Elizabeth Leight, who covered Laurel for the *West County*

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<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately, when the *Leader* moved to Columbia, its online archive did make the move along with it. Upon review of a draft, Mike McLaughlin talked about this fact. He said, “To me, that is one of the most devastating aspects of the move [to Columbia]. They have essentially erased the *Leader*’s—along with some of Laurel’s—modern (online) history. There were many times when I searched the *Leader* issues that were available online as I was writing a column. Melanie still can’t say when or if they will ever be available again. That’s a damn shame.”

*Gazette*. The *West County Gazette* is a newspaper published by Capital Gazette Communications, Inc. on Thursdays and distributed free to residents in Odenton, Gambrills, Maryland City, Russett, Seven Oaks, Piney Orchard, and Four Seasons.<sup>46</sup> Because Maryland City and Russett are technically part of Laurel (Ann Arundel County), the newspaper sends Leight, who lives in Russett, to cover Laurel community news for the paper. I decided that, even though my research focused on the two newspapers that covered Laurel more exclusively, I should talk with her because she seemed pretty well-known around town.<sup>47</sup> Leight, 54, is a lawyer by day, but very much sees reporting for the *West County Gazette* as not only a job, but a passion and a “labor of love.” “I’m active and I’ve made it my job to become involved in community,” she said. She is paid about \$85 per column.

Leight said that when important events are happening in Laurel that she wants to cover, she takes personal leave from her job as a lawyer to be able to do so. Not only does she cover events that she said most Laurel reporters are not covering, she delivers the newspaper around town and saves extra copies—in the trunk of her car—for people whom she has written about, so that they might be able to clip the story for their refrigerators or scrap books. She had a stack of old *West County Gazette*’s for me when we met at a local restaurant to talk.

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<sup>46</sup> Upon review of a draft of the dissertation, Leight informed me that the *West County Gazette* was merged with the *Crofton Crier* and renamed the *Crofton-West County Gazette*. She added, “The important thing is that we are still publishing—every week, photos and all!”

<sup>47</sup> Upon review of a draft, Mike McLaughlin, former neighborhood columnist for the *Leader*, said of Leight that he “had never heard her name mentioned, never met her, and never [saw] her at any events,” though he acknowledged that he wouldn’t know her to see her even if she had been at an event. He added that this was “either a statement of [his] disconnect or further evidence of the distinct communities of Laurel.”

She not only writes about local events, but like McLaughlin she often photographs them. She sent me a flyer shortly after our interview, which announced an upcoming event at the Russett Library that was going to feature ten years' worth of Leight's photographs and memorabilia collected during her time with the *West County Gazette*. For Leight, and the *Leader* columnists, community reporting is all about celebrating the accomplishments of the people—for Leight, especially the young people—in Laurel.

She recalled one particular instance that confirmed for her that the work she was doing—and the sacrifices she was making on behalf of the newspaper and community—was all worth it. Every year, Russett participates in National Night Out, and a few years ago, Leight decided to head down the streets to do some reporting on the events in the community.

I started walking to the neighborhood and as I was walking, I had my camera around my neck and some little kids were going, 'The newspaper lady is here,' and I thought, that's cute. I don't have a name; they don't care what [my name is], the newspaper lady is here. Their picture might get taken, and I think that's the perspective that I always keep in my mind. Yeah, it's their 15 minutes if they get in the paper and that's what keeps me going. I'm no charity, I get paid. But I like the fact that they are excited.

Not only does the work she does excite the local kids, it also gets them reading the newspaper, which she said is a great thing.

I have had more children come up to me, teachers, come up to me and say, ‘You know, the kids never used to read the newspaper. Now they tell me they read the story, this story or that story in your newspaper because they wanted to find out if their picture was in it.’ So that’s great.

Melissa, 25, who is involved with the Laurel Historical Society, said that she sees Leight covering more of the Society’s events than the *Leader* and *The Gazette* combined.<sup>48</sup>

The community reporter from [the *West County Gazette*], Elizabeth Leight, knows everyone. She is so involved. She does wonderful things but she reports on all of our kids events, more than the *Leader* and more than *The Gazette*. She comes to every kids event, takes pictures and they’re usually on the cover of the *West County Gazette*. And even when it’s not us, she still drops off the *West County Gazette* [...] I think she does a better community reporting of Laurel than the *Leader* and the regular *Gazette*.

Bob Mignon, owner of Minuteman Press, who is also a neighbor of Leight and who urged me to talk with her, agreed that the *Leader* and *The Gazette* are not doing enough to cover the community. “If you’re going to be successful, then you have to send people out in this community and cover the events that are out there,” he said. As a business owner, Mignon has a stake in the success of the

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<sup>48</sup> Upon review of a draft of this dissertation, Melanie Dzwonchyk commented that Leight’s coverage of Laurel is somewhat less than objective. She said, “You should know that Leight is an active member of the Laurel Historical Society and her volunteer role is to send out PR from the Laurel Museum. My observation is that Leight writes about those organizations or events she is attending as a participant. When she sends out PR or photos, her son or Leight herself is nearly always included in the news.”

newspapers—especially if he hopes to advertise his business there. The next section deals with advertising.

### **Advertising**

Especially among the business owners I interviewed, there was a lot of discussion of advertising. But, among readers, discussion of advertising was minimal. The majority of my participants said that they pay little or no attention to the advertisements in the paper—whether they are inserts, like grocery flyers, or in-text ads alongside editorial content. Mayor Craig Moe and council member Mike Leszcz said that they look at the state of local advertising as a measure of Laurel’s success. Leszcz said that he gets a sense of how Laurel is doing economically by looking at the business, real estate, and want ads. Mayor Moe recalled a conversation he had with former *Leader* editor, Joe Murchison. When Murchison asked him how he knew when Laurel was doing well, he replied,

‘Laurel will be doing better when we have two local newspapers in town or more.’ Cause, I said, that’s a signal [that] advertising is good, business is good, all of those things. He kind of laughed because they were the only [newspaper] at the time.

Laurel has been a two-newspaper town for more than ten years now. And, now, the Mayor said, there are more ads than editorial content. Of Laurel city government, he said, "We get good coverage; I think it could be better. But, I think they’re more worried sometimes about selling their space for advertising.”

But, Dzwonchyk pointed out that the editors lack any control over the amount of advertising in the paper each week.

The percentage of editorial space versus advertising space ... is something of course, [that] is controlled by our corporation ... There is a bit of wiggle room, but that's pretty much dictated on a weekly basis to all the papers ... in our group.

She went on to explain that in the past, newspapers' primary goals were not revenue generation. However, today—and especially in troubled organizations like the *Tribune*--the expectation for profits has grown. As a result, the percentage of advertising in each newspaper has risen. At times, she said, the percentage of advertising in a given issue has risen as high as 70 percent. Frank Abbott, publisher of *The Gazette*, would not talk about advertising percentages, citing it as “proprietary” information.

Paul Milton, Executive Editor for Patuxent Publishing, confirmed that the size of the newspaper is dictated by the amount of advertising sold on a weekly basis. While some, like Mike Leszcz, said he understands that this is how the amount of editorial content is determined from week to week, others I talked to, like Nate, had a different perception. Pointing to a page from a recent issue of the *Leader*, he said, “There's a whole page [of ads]. That's an indication that they don't have news. They have to fill the page.” Nate assumed that in the absence of editorial content, the editors instead chose to fill the page with advertising. Nate, a real estate agent in Laurel, said that he advertises homes in the *Leader* every other week instead of every week, as he did in the past, “because we're not sure anybody is reading it.” Nate's assistant, who is in charge of placing the ads, was upset, according to Nate, when the local advertising contact she dealt with in

Laurel was no longer available because when the *Leader* moved to Columbia, all of its advertising was handled by the *Sun*—the parent company of Patuxent Publishing. Because that relationship was lost, Nate said his assistant discussed with him stopping the advertising all together. That, coupled with the fact that Nate said the *Leader* seems to be garnering less and less interest from people in Laurel. “It’s a vicious circle because the less [editorial content] you have the less interest there is, and the less people read it. [Then] people don’t want to advertise,” he said.

Joan Kim, 39, West Laurel resident and owner of Main Street Pharmacy, stopped advertising her business in the *Leader* once it moved to Columbia. She was hesitant to talk with me about her feelings on the matter, for fear that the local newspapers might boycott her business. But, she felt strongly that the *Leader* made a wrong move when it moved out of town. “I think publications have the obligation to provide for the immediate neighborhood that they provide their services to,” she said. She added, “I just felt like they jumped the ship at the wrong time and angered a lot of people in the local community.”

Kim advertised fairly regularly in both the *Leader* and *The Gazette* in the past, but has since changed her advertising strategy all together. Kim said that her pharmacy business hinges on local customers, relationships and trust. “I really doubt that people would drive 10, 20 miles to come to get their services from me,” she said. That’s why newspaper advertising—especially in the more county-focused *Gazette*, wasn’t really working for her. So, she decided to start

sponsoring local events—getting her name out in the community while giving back to it at the same time.

I think people are more responsive, at least I get immediate feedback when I give a couple thousand dollars to the local charity. People would come in right away and give their input, how the money was being used and how they appreciated it and they bring their customers in.

Theresa, Old Town resident who is involved with the Laurel Historical Society, agreed that Kim is getting “fabulous word of mouth” by sponsoring local events, like a recent gala the Society held.

Like at the gala, which is you know, it’s about 200 people, but it’s 200 [of] what I would call ... influencers. [...] People talk about [the fact] that she did a really good thing and you should go over to her store and patronize. How else are you going to build good business if the advertising isn’t working?

Kim agreed. She added:

I think it’s a much wiser decision to advertise yourself but in a good way, in a way that you can benefit everyone including yourself, because you better the community that you’re in. Most likely the community will grow and become stronger and they will in turn support their local businesses.

Kim’s comments show just how important the local community is to the survival of her business. This is another reason why she was so upset with the *Leader’s* move—and shift in advertising practices.

I'm kind of raising my eyebrows because a lot of the doctors that used to have their business in Laurel have now since moved to Columbia. And if you look at the *Laurel Leader* now, a lot of the practices and businesses that they advertise, they chose to have in their newspaper are all Columbia based, which leads me to think that, as a Laurel business owner, you are driving people to go to Columbia to buy their shoes or get their MRI's and go to the doctor's offices. [...] If you want to be a local paper, you better support the local community. You cannot just use our name and say you're the *Laurel Leader* and suck everybody out into Columbia.

Kim said that she was very happy with the *Leader*, until it decided to “skip town.”

She actually found its content and local focus superior to that of *The Gazette*.

Mayor Craig Moe agreed that he hasn't seen “a lot of Laurel” in the advertisements of late, but rather more Howard County. But, depending on the business, the broader reach of advertising could be seen positively.

For Ginger Reeves, owner of Toucan Taco in Old Town Laurel, being able to “mix and match” her ads across Patuxent's local papers, like the Howard County Times and Columbia Flyer, is advantageous, because she is reaching a wider audience—which she desires. Reeves had been placing ads with coupons in the *Leader* with frequency. Asked why she didn't advertise with *The Gazette*, she replied, “I don't know. I never approached *The Gazette* and they've never approached me.” But, advertising in the *Leader* and other free publications, like the *Penny Saver*, seems to be working, as she said she collects about 20-25 redeemed coupons per month. And, Theresa, Old Town resident, agreed that one

of the primary reasons she reads the ads in the newspapers is to find coupons or learn about new restaurants in the area.

Advertising plays an important role in community journalism, but in Laurel has become especially complicated for some by the *Leader's* move to Columbia. But, the success of advertising may determine the *Leader's* ability to continue publishing in Laurel. Several of my participants questioned whether the *Leader* has a future in Laurel.

### **Will the *Leader* survive?**

Though it may seem as though many of my participants spoke negatively—and in some cases angrily—about the *Leader*, most did so only because it is something about which they care a great deal. Gwendolyn Glenn agreed.

When we moved, people let us know how important we were because they wanted us to stay. Even the city officials were saying they were upset that we left Main Street. So, that lets you know that people ... have put value on it, other than that, they wouldn't care. 'See ya.'

One of those city council members, Fredrick Smalls, agreed that something would be missing if the *Leader* were to close.

I think there would be a void. There would be nowhere for us to really get, despite all the criticism we may have about the papers, not having it there truly would be a void, there wouldn't be any other resource for us to get local news. You certainly won't see any local news reporting in *The*

*Washington Post*. You won't see it on any of the local TV outlets even news channel 8.

At the same time, however, he said he recognized that the paper needs to do something to draw in more readers.

I certainly know that people who are not native to Laurel, who have not lived in Laurel for a number of years, don't pick up that paper to read it at all. It's lying in their front yards for weeks and weeks because they have no interest; there's nothing in the paper that will draw them into reading it.

Jan Robison has watched the newspaper decline for the past several years, and said, "I'm not real sure that when it finally goes that, after the first shock, I'm not sure it's going to make that much difference." For Jan, and many other participants I spoke with, the question is not *if* the *Leader* will fail as much as it is *when*. Christine Folks, community columnist for the *Leader*, agreed, but said that its closing will have more to do with financial stability than a community who no longer wants it around.

The *Laurel Leader* will stay around if they have the money to stay around. It's all going to come down to who can afford to stay around. It's not going to be whether or not people want it or not because I think people will want the *Laurel Leader*, especially people who have lived here for a while. They want to read what's in the *Laurel Leader*. I mean, I believe that, it's not that I don't think that people won't want to read *The Gazette*. I think people like that, too; but I don't think if *The Gazette* lasts and the *Leader* doesn't it won't be because *The Gazette*'s a better paper. It's going

to be because the *Leader* didn't have enough money, The Tribune [Co.] didn't have enough money to keep it afloat.

But, Paul Milton, Executive Editor, said that the *Leader* is not “a product that we thought was ever in any danger of not being here,” though he admitted it is struggling “like every other newspaper is.”

This is sort of a perfect storm right now for newspapers. The economy is bad. It's getting better, but since the size of our papers are determined by the number of ads that are sold, that's why it's getting smaller. Between the website and the newspaper, I think the content, we're probably providing as hyperlocal of content as we ever have.

On this note, however, many of my participants disagreed. This chapter has explored a number of issues relating to the state of community journalism in Laurel. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of human interest news provided in the newspapers, as well as the lack of connections made between important happenings in Laurel, such as development or actions taken by city and county governments. Participants also disagreed on the role of a community paper. Some residents and most city government officials agreed that a community newspaper should champion and focus on the positive news happening in Laurel, while the journalists agreed that the community newspaper is not a public relations newsletter; its responsibility is to record all of the news important to Laurel—even the bad news. This shift in thinking by the community journalists—that maintaining the image of the community is not as important as

reporting the news, good or bad—marks a shift from Janowitz’s (1952) findings from 1950s Chicago community newspapers.

Several audiences—though most prominently young people and Hispanics—seem to be ignored segments of the Laurel population. And, finally, the *Leader’s* move to Columbia provided real and significant challenges for the journalists; the move alienated many in the community, and according to several readers, negatively affected both the coverage and advertising provided by the paper. But, several of the *Leader* journalists maintained that they are still able to do their job and cover the Laurel community from a distance. Their comments are not inconsistent with Gaziano and McGrath’s (1987) findings that community journalists seek to keep distance between themselves and their readers in an effort to maintain a level of credibility for their newspaper (p. 325). Their study also revealed that “a significant minority of journalists work in relative isolation from news sources, readers, and supervisors” (p. 328).

Though it was clear from my interviews that many people want, need and care a great deal about community journalism in Laurel, it is in a state of flux, which is frustrating many of the constituent groups with which I spoke. While this chapter explored mainly the editorial and advertising content perceptions and challenges, the next chapter will explore news distribution as well as the future of community journalism in print and on the web.

## CHAPTER 7

### Results and Discussion

#### Part III—The digital era of community journalism in Laurel

Chapter 6 explored the state of community journalism in Laurel—that is, the state of the print editions of the newspapers. This chapter will explore the role of the Internet in delivering community news in Laurel. It will also address current distribution issues of both the print and electronic formats. Both the *Leader* and *The Gazette* are delivered free in print and both also have websites to supplement their weekly print editions. And, in addition to the corporate entities that provide news to Laurel, a few local residents have taken to writing local blogs—like my participant G. Rick Wilson, who had lots to say about the role of his blog, called Laurel Connections, in Laurel’s news distribution. This mix of professionals and citizens providing news—as well as new outlets for community conversations—are reshaping the face of community journalism.

#### **Delivering the print editions**

Both *The Gazette* and the *Leader* are delivered free to many households in Laurel. For those not getting either paper on their doorsteps, free copies are available at various locations throughout all parts of Laurel. But, circulation of the print edition has proven both confusing and frustrating to many of my participants. Even Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor of the *Leader*, was confused.

I don’t understand the circulation module at all. [...] It used to be, if you came to the *Leader* office [on Main Street], you could have four complimentary copies for free. But that’s not the case here [in Columbia], I think because this is out of the regular distribution geographic area. So if

you came in today and wanted a paper it would be 75 cents. But if you came in and said, 'I want to talk to the editor of the *Leader*' and said, 'My daughter's wedding announcement is in here. I need extra copies,' I can give you one and it's our discretion. We have giveaways. You could just as easily go to library and pick up 25 copies, if you wanted you could pick up the whole stack.

Dzwonchyk said that she hears many complaints from readers about the lack of consistency in delivery, but, she said, there is not much she can do, since editorial, advertising, and circulation operate independently of one another. Paul Milton, Executive Editor of Patuxent Publishing, said that "the paper is delivered free to homes in the area" and is also available at many newsstands around Laurel (email communication, January 3, 2011). A list of newsstand locations, provided by Milton, is available in Appendix 10.

Fredrick Smalls, 58, city council member, said he suspects non-natives are not reading the newspaper because he sees the newspapers, tossed in driveways and on front lawns, sitting for days. Hannah, 40, who lives in Russett, said that delivery is sporadic at times. "For a couple of months, you won't get the *Leader*, and then you'll get it again." Sam, 44, also of Russett, said that he notices unread newspapers littering the streets in Russett with frequency. And, because the paper of late have been so thin, he said that they tend to blow around the neighborhood, creating trash. Craig Moe, mayor of Laurel city, agreed. He said he'd rather see the *Leader* and even *The Gazette* go back to subscription in order to curb the problem.

I'd rather go back to that [subscription] rather than see all the newspapers thrown all over the place. [...] Wind blows it out in the street. There's trash issues. There's security issues. Again, I understand that's a business decision because they're able to say, 'Look, I have this amount of circulation, this is where we're hitting.' But, those are decisions that they made.

Nate, 64, Old Town resident, said he's not sure subscriptions would work because he's not sure anyone would subscribe.

I would be willing to pay a subscription to get it not to land in the driveway, if it came in the mail. I know postage is a big cost nowadays, but if you go away on vacation you have to get somebody to pick up the papers in your driveway. You can stop *The Washington Post* and I was told you could stop these too. [...] You know, it's [the *Leader*] such a piece of trash. I think it's more viewed that way because of the way it's delivered.

Hannah, 40, said that she is unwilling to pay for a subscription to either the *Leader* or *The Gazette* because she finds the content of neither paper interesting. She added that if the news is important enough, "you're going to find out one way or another" about it. Lara, 67, said that she'd be more than willing to pay for a subscription to the *Leader* if she could be assured that they would hire more reporters, who would increase the news content of the newspaper. Readers of the *Leader* could purchase a subscription now and have the newspaper

delivered to their mailbox, but Dzwonchyk said, “why should they when they can get it free [in print].”

Donna Crary, whose law office is located on a street corner directly behind the Laurel Giant Market, said she sees, or rather *hears* people picking up the *Leader* every Thursday from the free newspaper box on the corner. “When the *Leader* comes out, cars just stop all day long and you can hear them slamming the old newspaper box because they stop. It’s a part of their routine,” said Crary, who added that the box is usually empty within a day.

People are reading the *Leader* and *The Gazette*. However, many are not, as evidenced by the newspapers that land on sidewalks or are run over continuously in driveways throughout Laurel. Though free delivery bolsters a newspaper’s ability to inflate circulation figures, their accuracy is questionable, said G. Rick Wilson, 51, local blogger and Old Town resident.

I don’t believe Melanie’s distribution numbers, not her personally, but these papers are putting out these numbers from ... the Audit Bureau. One of the reasons I got out of the habit of reading the physical paper is that it never made it to my doorstep. Sometimes the kid doesn’t drive down the street and throw it in the yard. And so it’s just easier for me to just read it online.

While Wilson might be considered an “early adopter,” of the digital versions of the Laurel newspapers, both the *Leader* and *The Gazette* are trying to grow readership by utilizing the web as a distribution channel for delivering local news. As demonstrated by my participants’ comments, distribution is a key component

in the local news business and something that needs closer examination by both the *Leader* and *The Gazette*.

But, is the Internet the answer? Both the *Laurel Leader* and *The Gazette* have online editions that supplement the print editions. At the *Leader*, Pat Farmer, the editorial assistant, updates the website, which appears under Patuxent Publishing's "Explore Howard" site at <http://www.explorehoward.com/laurel-leader>.<sup>49</sup> Generally, the content published on the web is the same content printed in the newspaper, though breaking news is published online daily. The same is true of the Laurel edition of the *Gazette* online, found under the "News by Community" tab at <http://www.gazette.net/>. Neither of the sites, however, have any interactive or user-generated content (UGC) components. The next section will further explore distribution of local news via the World Wide Web.

### **Delivering the digital edition**

The Internet has without doubt transformed the way journalists report news and the way people consume it. Paul Milton, executive editor of Patuxent Publishing, acknowledged that all newspapers—not just the *Leader*—have to rethink the way they've been distributing news.

We're in the information gathering business. It's not just a newspaper business anymore ... We have to we have to find ways to get people their news in whatever form they want it, whether it's print, which I think will be around for quite some time, or it's online.

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<sup>49</sup> Because I was unable to talk with editors at *The Gazette*, I did not learn who handles its web edition. However, upon review of a draft of this work, Melanie Dzwonchyk noted that Farmer no longer handles updates to the *Leader's* website. She said, "So much has changed about our web approach in the last year; it is updated daily by a few of us, including our new social media editor ... since it's more than just what was in the paper that week."

Frank Abbott said he is confident about the future of print in community journalism. He cited *The Gazette's* recent \$42 million investment in the new printing plant, located in Laurel, as an expression of the company's optimism that the future of community news is in print.

Several of my older participants tended to agree. Anne, 62, and Lara, 67, said that reading online was not part of their habit. Anne speculated that if the *Leader* were to go online only, she'd probably read it less. Ray, 76, said that he tends to use the newspapers' websites for "research" but not for regular reading. Even Christine Folks, 52, community columnist for the *Leader*, said she prefers reading the newspaper in print.

If it was going to be on the web, and not a newspaper, in that case I would go to the web and read whatever was there. ... I'd rather have the newspaper but if they were to have it on the web yes, in that case I would definitely, I would get it somehow. I would want to read it. I would want to know what's going on, but I prefer to have the newspaper.

But, my younger participants, Julie, 22, Brian, 21, and Gina, 20, said they rarely use the newspapers' websites to get Laurel news. When I told them that I was surprised to learn they didn't use the web to read the local newspapers, Brian said it had less to do with using the Internet and more to do with not having a strong news reading habit.

You've got to think, too, like with me, I didn't start reading the *Laurel Leader* until not too long ago, so the younger people I guess don't really

care about the news as much. [They have] no desire to read the *Laurel Leader*.

For those who have developed a news habit, the Internet provides a level of convenience that a weekly print edition of a newspaper does not. Laurel Mayor Craig Moe said that *The Gazette* and the *Leader's* websites allow him to read the newspaper at any time of day or night, which is especially convenient for his busy lifestyle. In addition, the Internet makes it much easier to share content with friends, family and co-workers. The mayor said that people in his office share online content with one another all of the time. "If they see stuff, they know I'm interested in certain things and so they'll send me a link or they'll pass that information on to me," he said.

Only about one fourth of my participants reported using the two Laurel newspapers' websites to read local news. Thirteen people reported using the *Laurel Leader's* website, while only 11 reported reading news from *The Gazette* online. Only one of my nine participants over the age of 65—Irene—reported using the Internet for news consumption. This is not surprising as, according to the 2010 State of the News Media annual report, only 31 percent of people age 50 and older read news online (Online: Audience Behavior). Interestingly, Pat Farmer, 65, who is responsible for updating the *Leader's* website weekly, said she did not read the local papers online. A few other participants reported using other Internet sites to get news, including Yahoo.com, MSN.com, CNN.com, and two reported reading G. Rick Wilson's blog, Laurel Connections.

Understanding web audiences—how and when they access content as well as what type of content is most desired—is something that Paul Milton, executive editor of Patuxent Publishing, said the company is still working on. Milton said that Patuxent’s early examinations of site visits indicate that online audiences are more interested in regional news than hyperlocal news—in contrast to the *Leader’s* print audience.

What we’re finding is that while our papers are hyperlocal, there’s interest from almost a regional scale on the websites because people might be concerned about something that is happening a couple miles out of their community because it may affect their driving patterns. [...] We’re noticing those kinds of patterns where people are a little more, I don’t mean open, but they think a little broader in the sense of what’s community when they’re online and I’m not exactly sure why but that’s what we’re sort of noticing initially.

This could be the result of the fact that after the paper’s move to Columbia, the *Laurel Leader* no longer hosts its own website, but instead appears under “ExploreHoward.com.” This website, which is sponsored by Patuxent Publishing and Baltimore Sun Media Group Interactive, hosts not only the *Leader*, but also the *Columbia Flyer*, *Howard County Times*, *Guide to Howard County*, and *Howard Magazine*. A user could access content from any of these publications once on the ExploreHoward.com website. Mayor Craig Moe said he has become frustrated when accessing the *Leader* online because “it’s all Howard County stuff” there. Pat Farmer, editorial assistant at the *Leader*, who was responsible for

updating the website before the paper's move to Columbia, said she finds it unfortunate that they no longer have a separate identity with a separate website. But, Milton said that the difference has to do with the fact that the two mediums simply have different audiences.

I still think that there's two different sets of readers. I think that the websites tend to be more breaking news driven and people might be a little bit more forgiving in what's going on regionally because they're looking for that updated breaking news.

The fact that the Internet allows news organizations to track readers eyeballs in a way not possible with print delivery is encouraging to journalists. David Driver, sports reporter for the *Leader*, said he likes being able to know how many people are actually reading his work.

One thing I would say about the Internet and website is that you know that somebody read your story on the web ... .Whereas, you can say your circulation is 25,000 ... that doesn't mean 25,000 people have read *your* sports story.

But, another challenge of gaining and sustaining an audience on the Internet emerges from the difference between content that is “pushed” versus content that is “pulled.” Websites provide content that readers must navigate to themselves; in other words, they must be pulled—in most cases, on their own as a result of web navigation—to a newspaper's website in order to view content. But, new technologies, like Facebook, Twitter, RSS feeds and listservs, allow news media organizations to “push” content out to readers in a way not possible in the past.

Providing links to subscribers or followers draws them to the news website rather than relying on the reader to navigate there on their own. But, no matter how they get to the content, if they're viewing it online, readers can be tracked more efficiently than they can in print.

Tracking circulation more accurately is certainly a benefit of electronic delivery, as is the ability to provide constant updates and fresh content. According to *Leader* editor, Melanie Dzwonchyk, the ability to deliver news to readers 24/7 is certainly enhancing her and her staff's ability to cover Laurel. She said that everything printed in the weekly edition of the newspaper is posted online, and they revisit the website daily, making necessary updates and adding breaking news. "The *Washington Post* is not going to post always the next day the results of the varsity girls' basketball game, but we are. That's important to our readers," she said.

David Driver, sports reporter for the *Leader*, said he is both excited and encouraged by the possibilities of web publishing.

Ten years ago, our paper came out on Thursday and that was it. If a fire happened on a Wednesday night, it wouldn't make Thursday's paper. But, now we can have that on our web the next day, so we are becoming more of a daily paper actually. And sure that creates more work, but it's exciting, too, that we can be fresh.

But, according to Gwendolyn Glenn, website updates and breaking news posts are not automatic yet, but rather determined by the value of the news story. For example, at the time of our interview in early May of 2009, Gwendolyn cited

breaking news on the Swine Flu pandemic as a story worthy of a mid-week update.

We immediately put that [story on the Swine Flu] on the web to give people information. If it's a breaking story, I mean some of it could be a shooting, a police officer being shot [it goes up immediately]. The story determines whether or not [we post before Thursday] because it could be something that can wait until next week. Then too, you don't want to give you're competition the story, so if it's a breaking news story, something that people need to know about, we put it up.<sup>50</sup>

For G. Rick Wilson, who only reads both the *Leader* and *The Gazette* online, delaying publication on any story is frustrating.

I live on Laurel Ave, [and] when I hear a siren, I want to know what it's for. And I don't want to wait until Thursday to figure that out. Now, Melanie and the editor prior to her, have done a great job. [But] they still have this mentality that, 'Oh, we can't put this up before our paper comes out because we're going to scoop ourselves.' Well, it's not Thursday. Do you really care?

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<sup>50</sup> Upon review of a draft, Gwendolyn Glenn said that since the time of this research, the *Leader* has upped its digital delivery and social media efforts. She said, "The *Leader* has moved into the social media world with a presence on Facebook and Twitter. I have a Twitter page and with my business cell phone, often take pictures of breaking news, such as when a woman was killed in an accident with a tractor trailer on Route 198 West recently, download the pictures and put them on Twitter. We tweet our stories and put them on Facebook and I've seen numbers such as getting 12,000 on-line hits on a story I did on Prince George's County Executive Jack Johnson and his wife's arrest." She also said that because of her broadcasting background, she has begun producing video news reports for the web. She added, "Some [videos] are in the two- to three-minute range and I've also done longer pieces, such as the 10-minute video report I did (I do my own shooting with the video/still cameras we were given) on the future of the Laurel Race Track. I'm having fun doing them and in addition to having them imbedded in my stories online, they are also available on YouTube."

And, in an age when new technologies allow for immediate updates, Wilson's criticism is warranted and something that weekly newspapers will need to address, especially as people come to expect and rely upon 24/7 news. Wilson said that he understands Melanie's reasoning to a degree. After all, she needs some way to "manage her reporting assets," as Rick put it. But, for Rick, the future of community journalism is about content, not medium. "They still think of the paper through the prism of the medium. They don't think about it as content," he said. And, to him, this is precisely the problem. While the websites are providing a more convenient way for some to access community content, lack of updates and new news—news that readers desire—proves frustrating. As David said, constant updates require more work from an already small staff of reporters and editors. But, the beauty of online delivery is the ability to more easily solicit user-generated content, or UGC. The next section will deal with the ways that digital news delivery can promote community conversation.

### **Digital news provides forum for participation**

Traditional newspaper journalism, which was mainly a one-way communication process—newspapers to readers—has transformed as a result of the Internet. User-generated content (UGC), which includes comments, articles, photographs, and videos submitted or published by citizens, has become a popular and useful side-effect of news on the Web. According to Paul Milton, readers have always played an important role in community journalism, and he is only further encouraged by the possibilities of reader participation as a result of the Internet.

[Readers] have to be participants for us to put out a good newspaper. The *Leader*, for example, has two reporters and an editor and an part-time editorial assistant who types in their calendar of events and things, but probably 50-60 percent of what's in that paper comes from our readers, whether it's the calendar listings or whether it's the weddings, engagements, and birth announcements, and or if it's a news tip about something that's really important. [...] One of the buzz phrases in journalism right now is user generated content. [...] It's a new buzz word, but we've been doing that for a hundred years, and if we didn't get that information, the paper wouldn't be half of what it is today.

But, simply because the technology exists for such user participation does not mean that readers are catching on. Many of my participants reported rarely—or not at all—using the online version of either the *Leader* or *The Gazette*. In fact, reader participation in both the print and electronic versions of the *Leader* had been minimal at best, according to many of my participants. User-generated content—aside from the columns written by community columnists—is minimal in both publications. During the course of my fieldwork, I surveyed 19 issues of the *Leader* and 18 issues of *The Gazette* (from February 5, 2009 through June 4, 2009) to see just how many letters were submitted. The *Leader* printed a total of 39 letters, 33 of which came from Laurel residents. *The Gazette* published more letters—80—though only seven came from Laurel residents. Melanie Dzwonchyk said that she'd like to see more letters submitted.

I need more letters, but ... people ... react and they chit chat among themselves, but they don't bring it back to the editor that much. That's one way that I think the new media [...] it does open up that wonderful two way communication avenue. ... You read something online, comments, you push a button and say 'I totally disagree; I think you're completely wrong.' That's all you have to do. You read something in the paper, 'Oh boy,' you say to your neighbor, 'what do you think? Did you read about this?' and you chit chat about it and talk about it. Do you contact the editor or the reporters? That just doesn't happen that much.

Nate, 64, commented on the lack of letters to the editor in the *Leader* during our conversation. When I asked him why he thought that people were not submitting letters, he said,

I wouldn't be surprised if people have just written the paper off and don't write. [...] I There always used to be two or three at least and they were often about something that appeared in the *Leader* that somebody would take attention to or question or make an alternate comment on or something.

Frustrated by the declining amount of content in the *Leader*, he added, "[If] there's nothing there to comment on, you don't get the comments."

Another popular form of UGC, especially for community publications, is photographs, although Pat Farmer, editorial assistant at the *Leader*, said that they don't accept or publish many photographs submitted by readers.

I guess they prefer that the [staff] photographer go out and take the photos. [...] I don't know. Maybe they're particular about the quality. Maybe they can be more specific as to what it is they want for a given event, and they do tend to get away from just posed shots. They want more activity and something more interesting.

When the *Leader* does use a submitted photo, it gives credit to the photographer. For instance, during the February 2009 snow storm, the *Leader* published a photograph on its website taken by my participant Rick Wilson and gave him credit for the shot. The editors likely accepted and published this photograph because it was difficult for anyone—including their own photographers—to travel during the crippling storm. But, Paul Milton, Executive Editor of Patuxent Publishing, explained why the Patuxent newspapers don't accept more user-generated content, like photographs:

Well, we should frankly and I think part of it is that it's a cycle that, once you start printing them, then people realize that you want them. There are a couple of factors. It's a space limitation. [...] We have prided ourselves by having great photography. [...] Two or three years ago we were named Best Regional Photo Staff from the East Coast, so we pride ourselves on taking our own pictures ... The photos that we tend to get from the community are the kind of 'stand alone and grins' as they call it and they're not as enticing to pick for your front page of your paper.

Yet, according to Elizabeth Leight, community columnist for the *West County Gazette*, pictures are a very important part of community journalism. As

mentioned in the last chapter, an entire community event was held to display all of the images she took while out reporting in the community. And, of course, Leight is not a professional photographer or journalist; she is a lawyer. Leight said that another important part of community photography is putting names to faces.

There are a lot of things that I go to and maybe *The Gazette* and the *Leader* will have sent their photographers ... Sometimes their pictures look similar, but I'm the one going down the line going, 'where are you from?' [and] 'where do you go to school?' I don't see that they're doing that.

Milton said that accepting more UGC is something the newspapers will need to think about as they go forward, especially given the financial distress the Tribune Company is facing.

We can't be everywhere, and I think we feel we need to do a better job long term getting those submitted photos and that's part of where I think we're heading as the financial minds tighten the papers .... We have to look for alternatives and having citizen journalists ... I don't know if I like calling them citizen journalists, but citizen contributors sending us photos is something we're going to have to take a longer look at.

### **News should make connections for readers**

G. Rick Wilson, 51, Old Town resident, Laurel blogger and community journalism enthusiast, agreed that the newspapers need to work harder and reinvent the way that they do community journalism. They need to find ways to

provide connections with and for readers and residents. He told me a story about a woman named Catherine DeVore, who moved to Laurel in 1938. She was known by many as the grandmother of Wilson's street. And, he said,

If you had a baby and you were pushing the baby up the street, she demanded that you come on her porch ... present the baby, and then she fussed over the baby, and from that point on, whether you were new in town or not, she was the one you took the baby to go see.

The point of his story? He continued:

We need a digital front porch. So, the days of Catherine DeVore sitting on the front porch being the grandma of the street are over. People are way too busy. They would love to do that. It's not that they don't want to. They either can't or don't make the time. So, how do you provide them that experience in a digital way? There's no kind of experiments about that.

Newspapers need to provide better ways for people to connect and converse.

Milton agreed that the newspapers do—or at least should—supplement or take the place of that conversation “over the back picket fence” and should contain content that neighbors would be talking about in their back yards. He said that letters to the editor did this first, and now the Internet provides a way for people to converse through comments left after online stories.

For digital natives, who socialize and converse regularly via the Internet, like Julie, 22, newspapers are not doing as much as they could be to provide those social connections for readers.

I'd like to see the papers here ... take on a role like fostering community... staging meet ups or something like that [...] It would be like reading a yearbook so, like if they can play that role and kind of reconnect you with the people you know here and introduce you to new ones.

Milton said that Patuxent is working to make their website more interactive, like a social network, that would allow people to, "upload their own notices ... submit their photos online [and] talk to everybody else in a social networking format." And, he said, the newspaper will become "the aggregator of the local content," finding a way to "be that one stop portal, if you will, where people can find out about Laurel or their specific community, and that's where we're heading."

Whether the newspaper will aggregate content produced by citizens remains to be seen. But, in the meantime, citizens like G. Rick Wilson will continue to fill in the gaps by providing their own local content—through blogging.

### **Bloggers providing unique content, filling the gaps**

Many of my participants reported that they have been disappointed with both the quantity and the quality of news provided by the *Leader* and *The Gazette*. And, several of them have actually taken steps to do something about it themselves. Laurel city council members told me that they were in the process of starting up an online newsletter, similar to a blog that would provide information straight from the council, rather than through the filter of a newspaper. Fredrick Smalls, city council member, said that the newsletter is in "direct response" to criticisms they received after the last council election.

People said, ‘We didn’t know who the candidates were.’ ‘We didn’t know who was running.’ ‘We didn’t know when the election was, where.’ ... So we decided that it was our responsibility to share as much information with our community as possible.

Craig Moe, mayor of Laurel city, also writes and publishes a blog called *Laurel Straight Up!* The blog, which is the “Official City of Laurel, Maryland Blog Site,” sets out to “give you up-to-date information on what's happening in the City,” according to its home page (Laurel Straight Up). The blog provides residents of the city with information about local events and meetings.

In addition to writing their own blogs, members of Laurel city government follow several other local blogs, according to Fredrick Smalls, who said that doing so helps the members “to get the pulse of what’s going on in the city, particularly around certain hot issues.”

If there’s a controversial issues coming before the council or that has come before the council, a lot of people will sound off on a couple of the local blogs and we’ll sort of go and measure the temperature of the community. One of the blogs read frequently by members of city council is written by G. Rick Wilson. In his blog titled “Laurel Connections”—found at <http://conexshuns.blogspot.com/>—Wilson posts short articles, commentary, photographs and even audio interviews. During the huge blizzards that hit the D.C. metro area in February of 2010, Wilson posted hundreds of photos of Laurel, while the *Leader* posted only two—and one was image was taken from Wilson’s blog. For his blogging through the storm, Wilson and two other local bloggers

were featured on The Kojo Nnamdi Show, a national program carried by many public radio stations, including WAMU 88.5 FM, American University Radio on February 11, 2010.

On the show, Nnamdi asked his participants, which included Wilson, whether or not he believed local blogs and listservs were replacing local newspapers. Wilson argued that during the storm, he and the *Leader* were feeding off of one another for content.

I've got a very good relationship with our local newspaper, the *Laurel Leader*, so during this snow crisis, the *Leader* was going online, putting up their stories, they were referencing my blog, and then from my blog, I was referencing back to the *Laurel Leader*. And, Melanie Dzwonchyk is the editor of the *Leader*, a very innovative editor, and beginning to work with the local community in being able to do that, so it is more than just waiting for the newspaper to come out on Thursday (Blogging a Blizzard).

Wilson's blogging through the storms provided an excellent example of how a local blog can serve a hyperlocal community, which Wilson said is his goal. To Wilson, "hyperlocal" means more than writing about a tightly bounded geographic space. He said on the Kojo Show, "I'm not doing journalism ... Most of the people that read my blog live within a few blocks of me and we know each other. And that relationship existed before the blog."

And, this type of approach to community blogging, he told me, affects both the stories he write and how he writes them.

There's a lot of times when I say, I wish I had the courage to write what I really think about that issue, but I know by doing that, I'm going to alienate these people that are real faces to me. It's the same as if they were on my porch.

To provide an example, Wilson cited the controversy surrounding the Laurel Library, located near Emancipation Park. Many Old Town residents, including Wilson, want the library to relocate to Main Street in the former police station building. They believe such a move would aid in the revitalization of the downtown. A group called BOLD, or "Bring Our Library Downtown," formed in support of the relocation. However, residents of The Grove wished for the library to remain in their neighborhood (Glenn, 2010). At the time of our interview, in late April 2009, Wilson was not ready to speak out publicly—on his blog—about his feelings on the status of the library. He further explained the challenges of being a community blogger.

If you start from my premise, which is I'm trying to replace the porch ... I wouldn't try to alienate [my readers] or offend them in any way. I'm going to try to balance.

He said that he writes about controversial issues only when he feels as though the issue is one he would be willing to discuss, face to face, with his neighbors in his back yard. It was not until August 8, 2010 that Wilson blogged about the Laurel Library. He even posted a poll on his blog, asking readers whether they think the library should move downtown or stay where it is. But, he clearly laid out an argument in favor of relocating the library downtown. Although based in several

facts, Wilson's piece is surely one of opinion, which he said is the purpose of his blog and what separates it from more traditional forms of community journalism.

People say you can't read a blog because that's somebody's opinion. I wrote a couple of pieces on my blog that says exactly that—what I'm writing here is my opinion. If you don't like it, write your own blog, which is cheap and easy to do, and/or don't read it.

He added that some readers—namely politicians or “their minions”—accuse him of being unfair in his writing. What they do not understand, he argued, is that he has no obligation to be fair in his blog. He said that he has even offered to help people set up their own blog in order to allow them the opportunity to express their views. But, the slant is not the only challenge associated with blogging.

The problem with the blog ... [is] I'm not doing this for a living; I'm doing this for fun. So, you can't count on a blog to give you news. You need a *Leader*. You need a *Gazette*.

According to Wilson, blogging cannot replace traditional community journalism. Both are valuable and necessary. Wilson blogs only as frequently as his schedule allows, which is about once per month or more often when something newsworthy—like the February 2009 blizzard—occurs. And depending on the issue, readers do comment on Wilson's blogs. One of Wilson's most recent posts on the library issue titled, “Rebuilding Main Street with a New Library,” and posted on August 8, 2010, received 18 comments. The remodeling/relocation debate regarding the Laurel Library is a hot local issue, so the number of comments is not surprising. Other posts, like “Fall Morning in

Laurel” on October 25, 2009, with pictures of wildlife and scenery around Laurel Lake, garnered only three comments.

But, unlike on traditional journalism websites that allow for reader comments, on Wilson’s blog, he is actively involved in the conversations. Wilson engages in conversation with the commenters when he responds to peoples’ posts, often thanking them for providing their insights on any given issue. In this sense, Wilson is not only engaging his audience, but also forging relationships with others in the community as they discuss issues of importance to Laurel and its citizens.

### **The intersection of community journalism and blogging**

While blogs serve to give a voice to average citizens in Laurel, as well as to promote community conversation, they do have some shortcomings. While some may believe, as Wilson argued, that blogs cannot be relied upon for news because a blogger writes with slant, knowing where a writer stands on a hyperlocal issue can also be positive. Wilson argued that writers with “smell” have a place in the news media landscape, citing the popularity of commentators like Rush Limbaugh. Yet, bloggers, who often operate independently, face challenges and pressures most traditional journalists do not. For Wilson, the first challenge, described earlier, is personally knowing most readers of his blog and also staking his reputation on his posts. His explanation is worth quoting at length here.

If you’re willing to do a blog in your own name then I think I have an obligation to be as absolutely transparent as possible because it’s my

reputation, me personally. I'm not hiding behind the *Washington Post* banner. There's no masthead there. It's just me. It's my reputation. And that's the kind of a different dynamic online and that brings this whole other set of emotions that I go through every time I want to write something, cause it's me. Now that actually impedes me from doing what I think is the real journalist's point of view. I will not take on those stories that I'm uncomfortable with, so if you're a real journalist right, those journalist's stories you need, you need to be able to hide behind the masthead, right? So, I'm not going to do an investigative piece on the city even though there's many, many times when I kind of know the inside story, but if I use that, right, I've crossed [a line].

Wilson's comments show the difficulty of being an "insider"—of living in a community on which you report. But, they also show one of its big advantages—knowing the inside story. He continued:

If you're a blogger and you've got this community that is close to you, these people aren't separate from you. [...] I'm part of the establishment. I sit on boards and committees. I'm a person. I live here. Well, now I'm going to be conflicted to get too deeply into a story, but you still need that function, so there may be bloggers that are going to be rock throwers in the world [who are] willing to do that ... but I've never been comfortable being a rock thrower.

Theresa, 59, Old Town resident, agreed that losing the newspapers in Laurel could lead to issues of accountability, further suggesting that traditional

community journalism is crucial to small towns like Laurel. The masthead plays an important role.

If you have somebody who isn't shielded from the consequences of reporting a story, then there's no incentive. If you're just an ordinary citizen and ... you make a huge stink about something or you make life difficult, maybe they look at your permits or something as a way to make your life difficult, whereas if the reporter is doing the reporter's job, the city may complain and scream and do this but it's shouldered by the newspaper or the radio station or whatever and when there's none of that available to you [as a blogger], that's dangerous.

On the flip side of the coin, Wilson said that when he takes issue with a way a story was reported in one of the newspapers, he feels more comfortable taking on the masthead than he does the individual reporter or editor—in the case of the *Leader*, his neighbor, Melanie Dzwonchyk. The masthead provides a protective barrier that allows him to express his disappointment with how a situation was handled without attacking a writer or editor personally. But, for bloggers, no such barrier exists. Furthermore, Wilson can, using tracking statistics, see the domain names of people accessing his blog, making his relationship to the audience that much more intimate. And people are reading. Since Rick began his blog in 2005, he has had 42,185 visits; that's an average of 15 site visits per day (Connections: Site Summary). While he said the stats do not allow him to see the name of the person who clicked on the blog, often he can speculate who is reading based on that domain name.

Despite these challenges, Wilson continues to blog, as he has been since 2005. But, he told me in an email in August 2010 that, while he enjoys community blogging, he is not sure he can sustain coverage of Laurel alone.

I'm beginning to think that a successful hyperlocal site needs to be a group activity. A single person cannot sustain the effort. Lots of voices are needed to make sure that there is fresh content. I've been talking to Mike McLaughlin about starting a new group site (Wilson, email communication, 15 August 2010).

But, for Wilson, this is not really a new idea. It's not new for anyone, really. Hyperlocal sites are popping up in big cities everywhere, but not all are created equal, as the following examples will demonstrate. Everyblock.com, founded by former journalist and Web developer Adrian Holovaty, launched in early 2008 in Chicago, New York and San Francisco as an online journalism experiment. Everyblock.com provides "an assortment of local news by location so you can keep track of what's happening on your block, in your neighborhood and all over your city" (About EveryBlock). Readers can search from their city down to their city block to get hyperlocal news. Holovaty told the *New York Times* that EveryBlock has "a very liberal definition of what is news. We think it's something that happens in your neighborhood" (Miller & Stone, 2009). Everyblock does not employ journalists, but rather serves to aggregate existing local information relevant to hyperlocal audiences.

Another hyperlocal start-up, AOL's Patch.com, is similar to EveryBlock in that it aims to provide community-specific news to hyperlocal audiences. The

difference is Patch hires reporters and editors while also allowing locals and freelancers to contribute to the site. They even provide head shots and brief biographies of the various editors and contributors in the individual communities served and reveal information about the editors—their political affiliations and religious beliefs. They put their beliefs on the record, they say, so that they will “be ever mindful to write, report and edit in a fair, balanced way” (Joshua Garner). They also have an editorial advisory board in place, with members including the well-known journalism scholar Phil Meyer. This structure allows Patch to provide “comprehensive and trusted local coverage” to its readers (About Us).

As of December 13, Patch.com has gone live in Laurel. The Laurel Patch has an editor—Joshua Garner—and a handful of writers. And, Patch.com’s “Give 5” program was developed in order to “can give back to the communities we serve.” To do this, Patch “gives 5% of its advertising space, free of charge, to local charities from the communities Patch serves” and “all Patch employees spend 5 working days each year volunteering in the communities Patch serves” (Volunteer). Patch seems like a great model for supporting the community, but like any new venture, is not without faults and early criticisms.

Anonymous charges have been made against Patch that working conditions are “unfair and grueling,” and that the \$40K-range salaries are not enough for a round the clock job. Patch has also been criticized for instances of plagiarism and of trying to scoop up editors and reporters from existing community news outlets in the new Patch towns (Palser, 2010). Perhaps the latter

is a fair criticism. David Driver, sports reporter for the *Leader* told me, upon review of a draft of this work, that he had “resigned effective immediately” from the *Leader* on January 10, 2011. Shortly after receiving this news from Driver, I happened to be poking around the Laurel Patch.com website, and I noticed that Driver’s byline was on the very first story appearing on the Laurel Patch website on January 22, 2011.

But, criticisms aside, Patch seems to be doing some things different and which could catch on. Acknowledging that their reporters and editors are people, often who live in the communities on which they report, and who have biases, is a step in the right direction, as is supporting the community through advertising incentives for non-profit charities.

Newspapers are also starting to recognize the need to integrate the community into their news operations. BlufftonToday.com works in conjunction with the South Carolina *Bluffton Today* newspaper to provide hyperlocal community content to readers. The “About” page explains how BlufftonToday.com works:

This is a place where you take the lead in telling your own story. As a registered BlufftonToday.com user, you get your own weblog, your own photo gallery, and the ability to post entries in special databases such as the events calendar.

In return, we ask that you meet this character challenge: be a good citizen and exhibit community leadership qualities. It's a simple and golden rule. Act as you would like your neighbors to act.

Some of the content you post on BlufftonToday.com may find its way into the Bluffton Today newspaper. By posting here, you grant us permission to do so. We may edit items selected for the newspaper. We ask that you keep your BlufftonToday.com contact information up-to-date so that we can contact you if necessary.

We believe that Bluffton Today should be a conversation -- both online and in print. We promise to be open, accessible, and easy to contact. With your help, we will continuously improve Bluffton Today, BlufftonToday.com and the Bluffton community (About BlufftonToday.com).<sup>51</sup>

Another similar example comes out of Bakersfield, California. The Northwest Voice is a weekly print publication that works in conjunction with the [bakersfieldvoice.com](http://bakersfieldvoice.com). According to its website:

The Northwest Voice is all about down-home news, told from your perspective. Most of the information and pictures in The Voice is contributed by readers, community organizations, churches and schools. We hope you'll participate! Our policy is to publish all contributions on our Web site and include as many as possible in the print edition (Who We Are).

As with BlufftonToday.com, editors work as a filter, monitoring the content published on the websites. This is not true of all hyperlocal community sites; many allow any registered user to post directly to websites without filters (like

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<sup>51</sup> Upon review of a draft, Mike McLaughlin said that he “didn’t buy” Bluffton Today’s catch phrase that “news is a conversation.” He added, “I think it is just a marketing tagline to stimulate comments, which add up to clicks.”

phillyfuture.com). While the previous examples of hyperlocal community news websites vary in terms of quality of content, the fact that so many are appearing in the news media landscape is worthy of additional scholarly attention.

Wilson talked about creating a new hyperlocal news website for Laurel during our April 2009 interview. He described his new idea as a “miniature Huffington Post,” which would bring together a variety of voices in the community and allow people to write about news and events in which they were already involved or invested. For instance, someone who was involved in the PTA and attend meetings regularly could post news and information about the meetings. Someone else involved in the historical society could post about events at the Laurel museum. “That way, you’ve got 10 or 15 points of view, you’ll get some news, you’re not going to get professional news, but you’ll get some news, you’ll at least have a way of moving this information around the community,” he said.

But, perhaps the most challenging thing about delivering and consuming news in the digital era is the vast amount of information available and circulating on the Internet. The only way to get around this, according to Wilson, is to have an editor who is sifting through the mess. “I need an editor that says this is important and this is not. This goes above the fold. This goes below the fold. And, I would prefer it to be a professional,” he said. But, Wilson has done some editing and aggregating of his own on his blog, where he provides links to six other local blogs, as well as several other websites of interest to citizens in Laurel.

As Paul Milton, Executive Editor of Patuxent Publishing, said earlier, newspapers are in the information gathering business. In 2010, it seems nothing

is more important than being a successful aggregator of information that is useful and important to your audience. Newspapers and editors play an important role in that process, but according to Theresa, who actively seeks out local news and information on her own, using Real Simple Syndication (RSS), the local Laurel newspapers are not keeping pace in the digital era.

Truth is, I can go to homegrown news.com at this point, because I have all this stuff on my RSS feed and I'm getting two-thirds of the stories that are appearing in the *Leader* before the paper even arrives. ... If I didn't ever see the paper, I could still have the news.

Newspapers like the *Leader* and *The Gazette* are challenged with coming up to speed in an era when they are expected to do more with fewer resources. While the Internet provides significant advantages for delivering community content, journalists are still needed to gather and sift through it. They also need to find ways to “push” content out to readers, rather than waiting for their websites to “pull” readers in. Listservs function well in this regard. According to Wilson, a new business model is needed if the *Leader* is to survive—in print or online. And, as Jan Robison pointed out, both mediums are important in the Laurel community. With a significant elderly population that has yet to adopt an online reading habit (Online: Audience Behavior)—the print editions are a necessary medium of circulating community content.

This chapter has explored the challenges of news distribution and consumption in Laurel. Participants cited circulation issues with the print edition of both the *Leader* and *The Gazette* that discourage many residents of Laurel from

reading the news. Few participants cited being frequent consumers of the newspapers' electronic editions. While electronic editions show a great deal of potential for aggregating more user-generated content, the *Leader* seemed to be cautious about accepting it. Such UGC has the potential to provide connections among readers, recreating the "front porch," as Wilson put it. Hyperlocal websites like EveryBlock.com, Patch.com, BlufftonToday.com and BakersfieldVoice.com are beginning to reshape the community journalism landscape. Blogs like Wilson's are helping to bridge the gaps as traditional outlets of community journalism, like the *Leader* and *The Gazette*, struggle to find their way in a rapidly changing news media landscape. But, blogs are not likely to replace these traditional outlets, which serve as established local institutions that can take seriously the role of watchdog and whistle blower. The intersection of blogging and community journalism, however, is not likely to diminish as we press further into the new digital terrain.

## CHAPTER 8

### Conclusion:

#### Reflections on community and community journalism in Laurel

This dissertation set out to discover how citizens of one town, Laurel, Maryland, negotiate issues of community, as well as to assess the role that community journalism plays in creating and/or sustaining that community. This chapter revisits the original research questions. It also discusses the contributions of this research to the larger scholarly community, explains limitations of the work, and suggests future research possibilities.

#### **Revisiting the research questions**

As I began this research, I was guided by the following questions:

1. *Do the stakeholders in Laurel perceive it to be a community?*

I was interested in whether the stakeholders in Laurel considered it to be a community for a few reasons. My primary interest in this research began as a desire to understand the role that community journalism played in Laurel. But, as I began reading more and more research on the relationship between communities and the press (which was discussed in Chapter 3), I realized that every study I encountered took for granted that the “community” under examination was, in fact, a community. However, as I began to learn more and more about Laurel, its structure and size, I began to wonder if Laurel was a community—a place where people take advantage of their physical proximity and shared goals to form meaningful relationships—or merely a town where people lived and worked. So, I set out to ask my participants about Laurel, what it is like to live and work there,

what kinds of relationships they have there, and how they understand the place— as a town or as a community.

2. *Do those connected to Laurel have a sense of community in Laurel or in other groups and/or Laurel-based organizations they may be a part of? Is that sense of community guided by local news media, personal interactions, a combination of both acting together, or by something(s) else completely?*

Historical research by Steiner (1983) and Nord (2001) as well as empirical research by Park (1922), Janowitz (1952), Rakow (1992), Wei & Lo (2006), Hampton (2007), Rosenberry (2010), and Stamm, et. al. (1982; 1985; 1991; 1997) demonstrated the potential for mediated communication to create a sense of community among readers. Though, research by Stamm (1985) and Stamm, Emig and Hesse (1997) also showed that other factors, like longevity of residence in a particular place as well as interpersonal communication, can help to create a sense of community. I assumed that local news reading alone would not create a sense of community for my participants, and so was curious to know from them what else, if anything, was a factor.

3. *Do the local news media—mainly referring to the two dominant weekly newspapers—play a role in creating and/or sustaining community in Laurel? Which media, including which other local news media, try to or succeed at this?*

I arrived at this research question easily, as one of my primary goals was to better understand the role the two weekly newspapers played in creating

community in Laurel. My own newspaper reading experience in my hometown led me to feel a strong connection with the local community, and I assumed that this would be true for others, as well. James W. Carey's (1989) theory of ritual communication is that communication is a process through which people share, create, modify and transform culture (p.43). Unlike the transmission model of communication, which puts a premium on sending greater amounts of information more quickly and more efficiently across greater space, Carey's ritual view of communication suggests that communication—both interpersonal and mediated—is not simply a means to transmit information, but rather a ritual that draws “persons together in fellowship and commonality” (p. 43). As citizens participate in the act of reading the same local news—and interact with one another through letters to the editor or online comments at the newspapers' websites, or even conversations around town about something they read—they share a common knowledge and experience that community journalism provides. They read not to learn new information, but rather to experience their community. Though Anderson (1983) argued that newspaper reading creates merely an imagined sense of community, this research question asks to what extent that community is a reality.

4. *How (if at all) do the various groups of people in Laurel make use of media to participate in community/civic life?*

Historically, news media has played an important role in democracy (Schudson, 1998). And, a strong democracy requires that citizens actively participate in civic life. As proponents of the public journalism movement

(Merritt, 1997; Rosen, 1999; Haas, 2007) argued, democracy requires communities where people work together with journalists to make public life go well (Merritt, 1997; Rosen, 1999). This requires not only readers to interact with others on the pages of the newspaper or website, but also journalists to act as “fair-minded participants” (Merritt, 1997) in the community. I was interested to learn not only how citizens and journalists utilized the local newspapers to participate in public life, but also other stakeholders, like government officials and local business owners. I was also interested to learn whether they perceived news reading to be an act of participation in civic life.

To try to answer these questions, I interviewed 40 people connected to Laurel by work or residence, including five journalists at the *Laurel Leader*, two newspaper executives, three neighborhood columnists, three Laurel business owners, four members of Laurel city council and Laurel’s mayor and city administrator, and 21 Laurel residents ranging in age from 20 to 88 years old. I solicited participants through unpaid advertisements like flyers and Craigslist postings, as well as through snowball sampling.

### **Why they’re questions worth asking**

Asking questions of community and community journalism—and especially the intersection of the two—is important for a variety of reasons. The newspaper industry struggles to keep pace with other news media (Sessions Stepp, 2008). The explosion of social media means that people carry news in their pockets (on the screens of their cell phones) as they never did before. Now, more than ever, journalists and news executives are concerned with the speed at

which they can relay information, how they can maintain control of it, and the channels through which they can send it. Sessions Stepp (2008) said:

The journalist-in-the-middle is a ringmaster, a maker and a consumer, a grand impresario of a two-way information flow that has no beginning, end or fixed schedule.[...] What changes is how news is assembled and shared. Here too power has slipped from journalists. News becomes a collaborative and cumulative work in progress pieced together by multiple contributors, rather than a media-certified byproduct carved in press plates and fixed in time.

Yet, local journalists retain this fixation on controlling the message, especially at the *Laurel Leader*. And, there too, journalists seem more concerned with the transmission of the message than with the message itself. Journalists and news organizations more concerned with the sending of the message rather than understanding how and why readers want to read the message are stuck in what Carey (1989) called the transmission view of communication, where the premium is placed on sending greater amounts of information more quickly and more efficiently across greater space.

But what sustains community and draws people together, as Carey said, is not the speed with which a message is delivered or its medium. It is about the process, or ritual, of consuming the news. However, when a lack of relevant content makes readers look elsewhere for news or causes them to stop reading altogether, the ritual is interrupted, and that threatens the strength of any community the newspaper aims to sustain. While local news organizations cannot

ignore all of the changes that are taking place in the area of message delivery, they can place equal focus on the actual messages they are sending. No matter the speed or medium, people long for content that provides them with a connection, as one of my participants, Rick Wilson argued.

Journalists, editors and executives must pay more attention to their audiences and, thus, the communities they serve. Knowing the audience's values—and not simply whether they prefer to read the news in print or on a cell phone screen—is imperative; without timely, relevant and accurate content, audiences will disappear, regardless of the ease with which they can access the news. And, knowing the “community” that the “community newspaper” serves is vital to its success. If members of that community are ignored, if issues of importance are ignored, the paper's potential to not only inform, but to sustain community are greatly diminished. If weekly newspapers wish to remain viable in the years to come, they must re-evaluate their focus and goals and find ways to cover their communities more intimately. Doing so means investing in journalists who understand the dynamics of the community, and who intend to stick around long-term. The next sections examine each research question in more depth, providing conclusions based on participants' insights.

**Research Question 1: *Do the stakeholders in Laurel perceive it to be a community?***

Asked if they considered Laurel to be a community, my participants gave me those warm and fuzzy answers I expected. Mike Leszcz, 63, member of city council, said the fact that “people help people” and “people know their neighbors”

makes Laurel a community. Lara, a 67-year-old retired teacher and South Laurel resident, said that “people from all over the area come together to do things,” making it a community.

Most participants agreed that community exists in Laurel, but most often, participants went on to talk about all of the things seemingly working *against* community there.

### ***Things working against community***

#### ***A failing mall***

As literature on community suggests, especially for geographically located communities, the nature and “quality” of the space matters; transportation routes, architecture, city planning mechanisms, and the arrangement of shopping, schools, and parks can encourage—or can impede—development of a sense of community. For instance, many participants talked about the Laurel Mall and the fact that it is failing. Husband and wife, Doug and Carol, said that they are afraid to go to the Laurel Mall. And, my youngest participants, Gina, Brian, and Julie called it “a joke.” And, three years later, nothing has been done to help revitalize the mall. A recent *Laurel Leader* article headlined, “Vacancies, delayed renovations plague Laurel Mall” said that “the health of the mall is plagued by many issues: weak holiday sales, numerous vacancies, continued closure of name-brand retailers and a stalled \$450 million proposed renovation project” (Glenn, 2010). To some participants, the Mall is a place where people could bump into one another and interact regularly. It represents a town center. Without that vital third space—places of recreation outside of the home or work place where people

gather (Oldenburg, 1999; 2001)—people have less opportunity for getting together outside of their homes and places of work.

### *A depressed Main Street*

Another potential third space is the Main Street, which runs right through the heart of Old Town, connecting it with the Route 1 (the major highway that runs from Florida to Maine constructed in 1929) corridor. Participants from all stakeholder groups commented on the depressed state of Main Street, and the fact that Laurel has by and large not found an effective way to revitalize it. Gina, a 20-year-old college student, Brian, a 21-year-old police officer, Julie, a 22-year-old recent college grad, and Sam, a 44-year-old salesman talked about other places, like Alexandria, Virginia, that has successfully revitalized their downtown areas to make them places where people want to stroll, shop and dine. Lack of upscale dining was a frequent complaint of the majority of my participants. Fredrick Smalls, a member of city council, talked about the fact that city government does desire to revitalize the Main Street, but the age of the buildings made such a process too expensive for most who have expressed interest in locating restaurants or other shops there.

Without a vibrant Main Street, and without a vibrant Mall, Laurel lacks communal space that brings people out of their homes and together for recreation. A walking path stretches along the Patuxent River, just behind the Main Street, and could serve as a key component in a riverfront-type revitalization project. As a resident of Laurel for two years, I walked the path often. But, not many people, it seemed, took advantage of it. Many opportunities exist in Laurel for such

vibrant third spaces. The location (and possible expansion) of library, which is a topic of much debate in Laurel demonstrated that vibrant third spaces are possible in Laurel, as it is one of them. Having spent many hours in the library doing research, I know well that this is a space which many residents frequent. As Gwendolyn Glenn, reporter for the *Leader*, noted in one of her comments in Chapter 6, she, like many others, often must wait to access one of the ten or so computers, because they are frequently all occupied.

With the proper planning, spending, and execution, Laurel can be revitalized into a community that feels alive. It's still breathing now, but it's labored. Jane Jacobs (1961) famously argued that planning alone cannot create community; rather, planners must have an innate sense of the function of a space before they can design its form. Main Street in Laurel has a rich history. And, also working in its favor is the fact that many of the members of Laurel city government are long-time residents who have a sense of its current function. Together with planners, the public officials should be able to find ways to revitalize the space so that it can meet the Laurel residents' expectations and create spaces where people will want to frequent and gather.

#### *A divided town*

The most omnipresent challenge working against community in greater Laurel is the fact that the town is divided, or sectioned off, physically, semantically and perceptually. The divisions seem to be a result of Laurel's size. As it grew outward, people likely used the qualifiers, like North, West, etc., to easily distinguish the part of Laurel in which they lived. But, these divisions

create enormous challenges for community in Laurel. Nearly all of my participants commented on the fact that Laurel is broken up into sections (see Table 2, Chapter 4). Residents almost always identified with one of these sections when I asked them where they lived. Brian, 21, who has lived all of his life in Old Town, or within the city limits, was even a bit defensive about the fact that people from outside of the city still say they are from “Laurel.” Christine Folks, *Leader* neighborhood columnist, husband and wife Nate and Ann, and husband and wife Doug and Carol, all strongly identified with West Laurel. Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor of the *Leader*, said that she doesn’t make distinctions, “unless somebody wanted to get real specific.”

Generally, the perceptions I heard most reinforced were that Old Town was the heart of Laurel and where most of the Laurel natives lived. North Laurel, located in Howard County, was a desirable place to live because of the good housing and school options. West Laurel was also desired in terms of housing and its “suburban” feel. Perhaps because none of my participants readily identified with Maryland City, it was rarely mentioned. And, Russett, the newest part of Laurel, with its neighborhood developments, is somewhat offset, meaning that the people there don’t really mix with others in Laurel. Christine Folks even went as far to say that Russett is like a “whole other culture.”

Besides these basic perceptions of difference, the divisions create practical challenges as well. Journalists Gwendolyn Glenn and Dan Schwind, city councilmen Fredrick Smalls and Mike Leszcz, and resident/blogger G. Rick Wilson all commented on the importance of making distinctions when talking

about the different parts of Laurel, especially when something like a crime is being discussed or reported. Doing so is important to residents and members of city council because linking a particular section of town to a crime or otherwise negative happening could tarnish its reputation. This issue of identity and image affected all groups of my participants. Journalists said issues related to Laurel's identity and image affected their coverage. Accuracy with reference not only to crime, but also to the workings of the various municipal and county governments is important to image maintenance and historical record. For advertisers of primarily local small businesses, and in real estate, distinctions between sections with regard to advertisement language and placement could mean more or less sales. And for public officials and residents, maintaining a positive image of their part of town is important of their own identity. As Hummon (1990) said, people's personal identities are wrapped up in—or at least linked to—the identities of the communities in which they live. When meeting someone for the first time, “questions about where one lives become queries about who one is” (Hummon, 1990, xiv).

The majority of participants who lived in Laurel said, either directly or indirectly, that they are proud to be residents there. The exceptions were retirees Doug and Carol, who said that throughout their nearly 40 years living in Laurel, the quality of residents, schooling, and recreation has gone downhill. But, most residents defended Laurel against what they told me were the negative perceptions of Laurel, including the fact that Old Town and West Laurel sit in Prince George's county, which also has a less desirable image than some

neighboring counties, especially Howard and Montgomery counties. The majority of participants highlighted several things that help to create a sense of community in Laurel. Those are detailed in the next section.

### ***Things working for community***

#### *A shared history*

The majority of participants noted that Laurel has a rich history. As shown in Chapter 5, Laurel's roots stretch as far back as 1658. Unlike neighboring Columbia, which was a planned community developed in the 1960s, Laurel was unplanned, and as a result, has eclectic architecture styles throughout the town which gives it a sense of historical charm. Neighborhood columnist Christine Folks, city council member Donna Crary, and local real estate agent Nate, all used the varying architecture to describe Laurel. Christine told me that she could tell whenever she was entering West Laurel because when coming across Montgomery Street, the houses go from old to newer in architectural style. Also while I was living in Laurel, brand new "period style" streetlights were installed on Main Street in an effort to maintain the authenticity of the Old Town charm. Members of Laurel city government also work to maintain the city's charm through zoning. Fredrick Smalls, city councilman, told me that zoning laws prohibit high rise buildings and other large commercial buildings in Old Town that would take away from the residential feel.

Old Town's history is also celebrated and capitalized upon. Drivers entering Laurel from Route 198 or from 7<sup>th</sup> Street are greeted by wooden signs that alert them that they are about to enter "Historic Laurel." Also in Old Town

on Main Street is Laurel's Historical Society and Museum; new exhibits are featured at the museum at least twice each year and the Society is active in the community. Many of my participants, but especially those who lived in Old Town, said that Laurel's age and history were some of its primary defining features. The local newspapers could certainly do more to capitalize on this sense of history in their coverage of Laurel; they rarely mention history. Janowitz's (1952) analysis of Chicago community newspapers revealed their dedication to local history. His findings are worth repeating here:

Developing and maintaining a community focus of attention involves utilization of community history, not only by specific items about local community history but more frequently through a style of writing which proudly refers to the age of individuals or to the number of years an organization has been in local existence. Even routine announcements try to emphasize the stability and persistence of organizations, and all types of anniversaries are seized upon for this purpose. The most extreme form which this type of news coverage takes can be found in the special editions celebrating the historical anniversary of the local community or its newspaper (1952, p. 83).

Gertrude Poe, editor of the *Laurel Leader* from 1939-1980, was known for capitalizing on Laurel's history in her reporting. She even produced a centennial booklet for the town when Laurel turned 100. Many of my participants who had far-reaching community memories referred to Poe nostalgically and talked about "how things used to be" when she was editor of the paper. History of place has

been shown to be an important factor in sense of community (Selznick, 1992; Fowler, 1995). Many long-term residents share this history. Newcomers could as well, if exposed to it. The newspapers could do more to expose them to it.

### *Many traditions*

Laurel has several yearly events that draw people together in the heart of Laurel. I was lucky enough to attend three of these events—the Main Street Festival, Riverfest, and the Mayor’s Open House. The Main Street Festival takes place in May on Main Street, and food and other vendors line the entire length of Main Street, which is closed for the day. People packed the street, and at times, walking without bumping into folks was difficult; it was a well-attended event. Riverfest took place in September along the Patuxent River trail just behind Main Street. The event was similar in nature to the Main Street festival, but on a much smaller scale. Riverfest was not as well-attended as the Main Street Festival. And, finally, the Mayor’s Open House, in March, was an opportunity to get to know Laurel’s city government as well as its non-profit organizations. The Laurel city website described it this way:

The Mayor’s Open House began five years ago to open the doors of the City to residents so they could get to know the people and departments that keep the City running smoothly. And in addition to meeting City staff, invitations have gone out to all local non-profit organizations in and around Laurel, so you can also check out different organizations from the Patuxent Wildlife Center to the Laurel 4<sup>th</sup> of July Committee to learn what

they can do for you and what you can do for them (City of Laurel Open House).

Other regularly scheduled events include the Fourth of July celebration, which includes a parade and fireworks, National Night Out, held in August.

Occasionally, the mayor will schedule “City Hall in the Park,” and residents will come out with lawn chairs and take part in a city meeting with the mayor and city council.

All of these events, sponsored by Laurel city government, serve to bring the people of Laurel together. And they do. The events I attended were very well-attended. In my conversations with participants, several referred to these events, saying that these events are evidence of “community.” Gina, a 20-year-old college student, said,

I like the activities they have in the community. I try to go every year [...]

It was just fun growing up, going to those sorts of things ... I feel like it’s those things that they put together, either the city or the community [that] keeps us a community, like brings everyone together.

Several participants even asked me if I had been to some of these events, saying that if I hadn’t been, I should make an effort to go, implying that these events in some way define Laurel as a community. And from my conversations with participants, for them, these events do help to define Laurel and are some of the things that mark it as special. Selznick (1992) argued that “the bonds of community are strongest when they are fashioned from strands of shared history

and culture” (p. 361). These traditions help to create a shared history for residents, and so do help to strengthen Laurel as a community.

### ***Things complicating community***

#### *Diversity*

While sharing things in common—like history and traditions—are important to community, so is difference. Selznick (1992) argued that “some division of labor, some system of authority, some proliferation of roles, groups, and institutions” is necessary for community life (p. 367). Because of our differences, we form “multiplex relationships” where we serve different roles in the community depending upon our strengths and expertise. But difference is only beneficial to community when it is accepted, respected and valued.

From my observations and conversations with participants, the Hispanic population does not seem to be a recognized part of the community. This lack of recognition could be the result of the fact that the majority of the Hispanics—according to 2000 Census figures and the comments made by Pastor Mir—are in the US illegally. Illegal immigration—especially the illegal immigration of Hispanics—has become a national issue, started by former President George W. Bush when he called for immigration reform. Most recently, controversy was sparked when Arizona governor Jan Brewer in April 2010 signed one of the strictest illegal immigration laws in the nation’s history. According to a July 21, 2010 *Associated Press* article,

The law requires officers, while enforcing other laws, to check a person's immigration status if there's a reasonable suspicion the person is in this country illegally.

The law does not define reasonable suspicion, but police training materials say triggers can include speaking poor English, traveling in a crowded vehicle and hanging out in an area where illegal immigrants typically congregate (Davenport, 2010).

While there is opposition to the laws, according to a McClatchy poll taken in early May 2010 “Sixty-one percent of Americans — and 64 percent of registered voters — said they favored the law in a survey of 1,016 adults” (Talev, 2010).

Two of my participants, Elizabeth Ylsa Leight and Pastor Segundo Mir identified as Hispanic, though Pastor Mir was my only participant to speak directly and at length about the Hispanic population in Laurel. I did ask my participants about their feelings on illegal immigrants, but few mentioned them in our conversations. The fact that few participants recognized Hispanics as a prominent and growing segment of the population in Laurel suggests that they may not see them as part of the community. And this ignorance or exclusion weakens the possibility for a sense of community among all residents of Greater Laurel. The next section expands upon participants' sense of community in and throughout Greater Laurel.

**Research Question 2: *Do those connected to Laurel have a sense of community in Laurel or in other groups and/or Laurel-based organizations they may be a part of? Is that sense of community guided by local news media, personal***

*interactions, a combination of both acting together, or by something(s) else completely?*

My participants had wide and varied responses to the places where they find a sense of community, suggesting that community means something different to everyone. For instance, Melissa, a 25-year-old newcomer to Laurel, said that she feels a sense of community in the parks, where she regularly walks her dog. The people there, she said, know one another because they see each other often. Rick Wilson, 51-year-old Old Town resident, said he feels a sense of community in his Catholic Church, St. Mary of the Mills:

I go to this great big Catholic church here and we always go to 10:30 Mass and actually the 10:30 Mass is, in a weird Roman Catholic way, a community. We don't know each other. We don't actually talk because we're Catholics, right? But, you know the faces; you know the families; you know to connect them to that.

For Rick, a sense of community is about knowing people share the same values, and has little to do with the actual interactions between the members of the community. Similar examples were provided by Joan Kim, who cited her Main Street Pharmacy, and Ginger Rogers, who cited her restaurant, Toucan Taco on Gorman Avenue, as places where a sense of community exists. Ginger reported feeling a sense of community with her regular customers:

Certainly this particular restaurant, people come in here and to them, this is their community. I mean, we know people by their first name. They

know us by name. We know their order. They're so happy to come in.

It's like the little extended family.

These three examples suggest that consistency—being able to regularly enter a specific place or space and see familiar faces—is another condition for community. These examples support Oldenburg's theory of the "third space"—places outside of home or work where people have the opportunity to interact with one another. However, the levels of interaction in each of the examples provided seem too surface level for true community. Selznick (1992) argued that high levels of participation are required in order for the relationships to form and the work of community to be accomplished. So, while my participants' experiences in these third spaces may contribute to a *sense of community*, whether true community exists there is unlikely. Morgan (1942) argued that community exists when

people who to a considerable extent have cast their lots together, who share problems and prospects, who have a sense of mutual responsibility, and who actually plan and work together for common ends. There must be a mutual understanding, respect, and confidence. There must be mutual aid—willingness to help in need, not as charity, but simply as the normal mode of community life. There must be a feeling on the part of each individual that he is responsible for the community welfare (p. 22).

Whether Ginger's regular customers or Melissa's fellow dog-walkers share this degree of commitment to community is unknown, but unlikely. So, while certain regular interactions might contribute to a *sense of community*, they do not

guarantee that the space and people in it are in fact an actual community.

Certainly, this claim could be challenged by members of these so-called communities, and circumstances may arise which challenge people's interactions and relationships, creating communities where only a sense of community existed.

Other participants described a sense of community found in volunteer organizations, neighborhoods and in the local schools. Christine Folks, mother of grown children, reported having found a sense of community during her time with the local PTA. Nate, 64, talked about the sense of community he felt when he was the parent of school-aged children, but now that his kids are grown, that sense of community has diminished. He said:

Once your kids are grown it's harder to, you don't make as many friendships, I think, or have the occasion to make as many friendships as you did during that phase of life. And, like I said, when the kids were on ball teams, went to nursery school, they went to elementary school, they were in scouts and so in all those things you would meet with other people.

But, Melanie Dzwonchyk, resident of Old Town and whose kids are also grown said she doesn't have to look too far to find her community in Old Town Laurel:

I really don't have to leave Laurel to find a party to go to, or friends to call up and say, 'Let's go out to dinner.' Or, [there are] always volunteer opportunities, you know, a group is getting together to beautify a school. You could volunteer to the city. There are so many places of worship and churches, and recreation departments. It supports the people that live there

and the people that live there support it back. So it's very much a community.

For Melanie, as with many other participants, community is found in local organizations, churches, and in gatherings with friends. But, who is responsible for organizing such parties and deciding who's invited to the table? My participants had differing thoughts.

### *Who or what is responsible?*

#### *Public Officials*

A couple of the public officials with which I spoke claimed responsibility for helping to create and sustain community in Laurel. While Mayor Craig Moe said that he believes residents have a responsibility in the matter, the city's elected officials have an obligation to lead the effort. He explained:

I think the people [make Laurel a community] ... I mean you could put houses. You could put cars. You could put all sorts of structures. It's the people that make the community. And, it's up to me, you know, as the top elected official, that we make sure to continue to bring these people and these communities together.

Mike Lesczc, at-large councilmember, said that as a result of his role on council, he receives many invitations to participate in local events, and he "[tries] to go to as many of those events" as he can. He also cited the Mayor's meetings in the parks, along with other city government sponsored events, like clean-up day at the river, and a flower sale on Main Street in May. At this event, members of council were also going to teach attendees how to construct their own rain barrel. These

are the kinds of activities, he said, that bring people out and create a sense of community. Kristie Mills, the city administrator, agreed and said that she and her colleagues “work hard to keep our small town feel.”

Other participants also cited Laurel city government for having a role in creating and sustaining a sense of community in Laurel. Christine Folks, *Leader* columnist out of West Laurel, and Gina, college student from Old Town, noted activities like the Main Street festival, Riverfest, and Fourth of July festivities—all sponsored and organized by the city—as activities that bring people together, creating community in Laurel. Gina said that even though she isn’t always able to attend the events each year, just knowing that they’re continuing makes Laurel feel more like a community. Christine Folks agreed:

I like the hometown atmosphere, I really do. Lots of people work hard to create that, you know? We have our Main Street Festival and we have, even just our little Main Street. We have a Fourth of July [parade] and I don’t always go to them, but just knowing that they’re there to go to is always nice.

Bob Mignon, Russett resident and owner of Minuteman Press, along with Donna Crary, Old Town lawyer and member of city council, both said that community in Laurel is sustained by a small group of individuals—city officials, volunteers, heads of local organizations—who help to plan the many activities in which residents may take part. Bob said that “certain individuals... step up” and help plan activities for the rest of the people in Laurel. But, according to Donna, those people are few compared to the many who call Laurel home. When I asked

Donna to estimate the number of people who are actively involved in Laurel, she said, “I would say four to five hundred, depending on the activity ... but I think those four or five hundred people are the ones that are involved in everything.”

### ***Residents/Readers***

Several residents/readers said that being a part of a community—and thus experiencing a sense of community—is, somewhat ironically, an individual responsibility. Julie, 22-year-old college graduate from Old Town, said “I don’t matter to a place like Laurel unless I make myself matter, you know?” Pat Farmer postulated that “maybe it’s up to the individual” to create a sense of community for themselves. She continued, saying that she thought Laurel was a community because of the number of personal acquaintances she has there. Both Gina’s and Pat’s comments suggest that if individuals wish to have a sense of community in Laurel, they are responsible for getting involved.

Other participant’s comments suggested this to be true as well. Melissa, 25, and relative newcomer to Laurel, said to me, “I think if I moved here, like you, two years ago and had no association with [a Laurel organization], I would not know half the people, no I wouldn’t know 90% of the people that I know.” Melissa’s experience did not seem rare among my participants. Indeed, those who expressed the strongest sense of community in Laurel were those who were involved in one or more local organizations. A list of local organizations in which my participants’ reported being involved can be found in Appendix 11.

Rick Wilson, local blogger, agreed that participation in local organizations is strong, and that creates what Putnam (2000) called “social capital” or

“connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (p. 19). Rick said:

When you look at Putnam for degrees of community, we hit high on a lot of those. So, in the fraternal and volunteer organizations, [Laurel has] really high participation in those. The joke around here is that the fire department is a political party. The rescue squad and the fires department taken together are the number one volunteer things in the county. So, whatever either demographic, financial condition, or whatever that enables these folks to donate, some of them who donate their time are third generation, we still have some of that. We have very strong faith communities. They’re big and go way back. [...] So that grows, and those communities pull in more than the city, so it’s broader than just the city.

Yet, Ginger Reeves, owner of Toucan Taco in Laurel, acknowledged that coming together is a necessity for community, but not something that most people make time for. When I asked her what some of her criteria for community were, she said, “People being involved in things together consistently to build, but I think too many people are coming and going right now. [It] would be hard to have that.” Pat Farmer, editorial assistant for the *Laurel Leader* and South Laurel resident, agreed: “Everybody is busy doing their own thing to some extent. [But] I think there’s a lot of activities that bring people together.” So, Pat’s earlier suggestion—that community is up to the individual—is plausible when considering the fact that, as several participants said, everybody is busy doing

their “own thing.” Being part of a community requires time and commitment and members being “appropriately present” on regular occasion (Selznick, 1992).

### ***Journalists***

The *Leader* journalists used a variety of metaphors to describe their role and the role of the newspaper in Laurel. Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor, and David Driver, sports reporter, both likened the newspaper to a mirror, held up to the community and providing an accurate reflection of it. Gwendolyn Glenn, city government reporter, said that the role of the newspaper is to give a voice to the community, allowing not only the top officials a chance to communicate with residents, but also giving residents an opportunity to speak to one another. Still yet, Pat Farmer, editorial assistant, said that the purpose of the newspaper is to serve as an historical record of the happenings in Laurel.

None of the journalists outright said that the newspaper plays a direct role in creating or sustaining a sense of community in Laurel, though some of their indirect comments suggested that they do see themselves as having such a role. For instance, Dan Schwind said that while he doesn't live in Laurel, he becomes part of the community and has an impact on it through his work as a journalist. “When you go to the school and see articles that you've written clipped up on the wall, I mean, that sort of indicates to you, ‘Hey, yeah, I'm having an impact on this place,’” said Dan. I saw similar evidence during my travels throughout Laurel. At the Mayor's Open House, several stands for various Laurel organizations had *Leader* and *Gazette* articles pinned up on poster boards. And Ginger Rogers, owner of Toucan Taco, had a *Gazette* article laminated and hung

up near the register. Melanie Dzwonchyk, *Leader* editor and Old Town resident, said that the stories in the newspaper serve to “define the community,” and the fact that people in the community clip articles and save them to hang on the refrigerator or place in a scrapbook suggests that the newspaper is contributing to shared knowledge and shared history—two things that scholars have shown to create a sense of community (Janowitz, 1952; Selznick, 1992; Nord, 2001).

Several of my participants who live in Laurel also agreed that the newspapers create a shared sense of local history. Lara, 67, South Laurel resident, said that the newspaper are a part of the “intellectual life” of the community and help the residents to make it a better place. Doug, 76, of West Laurel, said “Newspapers historically have been the thing that helped build community in Laurel. It brings people together to let people know about other people, and you know, you can’t do that without a newspaper.” Theresa, 59, from Old Town, said that if Laurel were to lose the newspapers, it would lose its sense of community along with its history. She said:

[Without a newspaper] I think you lose a recording of a huge amount of important history because, and I’ve said this many times, that much of the community’s history becomes what’s recorded in its local paper. There are thousands and thousands and thousands of events that have happened in Laurel that we only know about because there was a story written about it in the paper. There is no other written record.

So, even if the journalists themselves do not see their work as creating community, certainly others in Laurel do. More about the newspapers’ role in

creating and sustaining community in the discussion of the third research question.

### *Advertisers*

Advertisers had strong feelings about the local newspapers and about the role of news and advertising in creating and sustaining community. Joan Kim, owner of Main Street Pharmacy, stopped advertising in the *Leader* when she learned it had moved their operation to Columbia because, she said, she felt as though it was no longer supporting the local community. For business owners dependent upon local patrons, establishing themselves as part of the community is important. Joan Kim did that through offering free blood pressure screenings to the elderly at the nursing home just down the street and through promoting her business in the local newspapers. When the *Leader's* office relocated, Joan stopped advertising and began sponsoring local organizations and events through donations. She said,

I think it's a much wiser decision to advertise yourself but in a good way, in a way that you can benefit everyone including yourself, because the community that you're in, most likely, the community will grow and become stronger and you know they will in turn support their local businesses.

Joan Kim's business certainly plays a role in the Laurel community, and Joan, while not necessarily helping to create community, works to support through her advertising strategies.

### *Toward a definition of community*

Because of its complexity, *community* will never be completely defined. While its size and its divisions make Laurel difficult to call one big community, several participants suggested that there are many smaller communities within Laurel. Dan Schwind and Christine Folks described Laurel as a “community of communities.”<sup>52</sup> This notion, while not defined precisely, seemed to imply that the larger Laurel was welcoming of communities and supportive of its neighborhoods, even if that larger entity did not itself constitute a community. At a minimum, Laurel promoted some local pride and identification with at least parts of it. Several others agreed that smaller communities—found in churches, local organizations, and neighborhoods—exist all over Laurel. Dan Schwind further described it this way:

You’ve got Laurel High School, their clustering. [...] You have this massive school community. You’ve got the police community with the police department and the LCPAAA (Laurel Citizen’s Police Academy Alumni Association) and police auxiliary. And, you’ve got the Main Street community. To me, it’s a community of communities, and I know that sounds [...] like some weird lame catch phrase that I’m coining but, yeah, that’s what it is. This giant collection of people doing different things that sort of impacts each other in different ways.

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<sup>52</sup> Upon review of a draft, Mike McLaughlin, neighborhood columnist, said that he liked the “community of communities” description of Laurel.

This description, a “community of communities,” is very plausible—and certainly more plausible than the Greater Laurel area being considered one big community.

As Ferdinand Tönnies first postulated, tension exists between the notion that community springs up organically or is created. City officials clearly believed that they have a responsibility for creating and nurturing community in Laurel. This was made clear when they outright said so, but also when they discussed the many events that they organize in an attempt to bring people within Laurel together. Furthermore, when describing Laurel, the city officials tended to go on at length about all of the amenities available to residents of Laurel—including police and fire protection, senior housing, retail, recreation, and schools—as if these amenities alone make Laurel a community. While they likely contribute, they are not solely responsible for making Laurel a community, as many of the comments from participants suggested. But, certainly, touting amenities creates the image of a community from a public relations perspective. And, it seems to be working, as several participants who are not involved with the city government mentioned these amenities when describing Laurel to me.

While city officials may be very successful at creating a sense of community in Old Town, Historic Laurel, the greater Laurel community does not seem to fare as well with its efforts to create sense of community. Participants by and large seemed unconvinced that the greater Laurel area was in fact one big community. Rather, many seemed to accurately describe it as a collection of smaller communities—some the result of geography, others the result of shared

interest. These communities seemed to be more organically formed, for example, the community found by participants in churches, parks, and neighborhoods. It is here where they more intimately know their fellow community members and begin to form meaningful relationships. However, participants' comments suggested that finding such community is not without some effort on their part. Becoming part of such communities requires that people get out and become active, forming relationships and sharing experiences with one another. While people in these communities may share interests, experiences and culture, the 100,000+ people of greater Laurel seem to share only one major thing in common—their geography. While geography is a condition under which community can develop and grow, it alone has not seemed to go far enough in uniting the people in Laurel, where, as Tönnies said of *Gesellschaft*, “they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors” (p. 65).

City government officials in Laurel make valiant efforts in organizing several activities throughout the year that draw people from the city and greater Laurel area together. But while these activities serve to bring people together temporarily, and have potential to spur deeper relationships, they do not guarantee them; the work of community remains that of the people of Laurel who can sustain it through more frequent interactions, certainly more often than once or twice each year. With more than 100,000 residents in the Greater Laurel area, however, such regular and meaningful relationships are difficult to sustain. Laurel's sheer size creates the biggest obstacle for community there. But if there was one thing that could serve to unify greater Laurel in the hopes of creating a

sense of community among all of its members collectively, it is the weekly newspapers.

**Research Question 3: *Do the local news media—mainly referring to the two dominant weekly newspapers—play a role in creating and/or sustaining community in Laurel? Which media, including which other local news media, try and/or succeed at this?***

The majority of my participants had very strong feelings about the role of the weekly newspapers in creating and/or sustaining community in Laurel. A 2008 Zogby poll found that while 70 percent of Americans think journalism is important to the quality of life in their communities, two thirds are dissatisfied with the quality of journalism in their communities. The poll seems reflected in Laurel. The majority of residents, public officials, and advertisers expressed dissatisfaction with the quality—and quantity—of community news available to them in Laurel.

***Stakeholders' take:***

The majority of participants said they believed that newspapers played an important role in community life. Anne, 62, of West Laurel, provided an example of an elderly woman who works in the same office building as she does. Her office is a site where *Leaders* are dropped off each week. And, the people she works with look forward to their arrival.

We have a little lady who does passports service—she's in her seventies—and she makes an announcement, 'The *Laurel Leader's* are here, the

*Laurel Leader's* are here.” And if she doesn't make the announcement, somebody makes it because she's not there.

A newspaper provides more than information, as my participants will attest to, but information—and in the case of community journalism, often hyperlocal information—is still one of its most important assets. Paul Milton, executive editor of Patuxent Publishing, explained.

I don't think there's anything more relevant than what's going on down the street from where you live. I mean, as horrible as it sounds, I think more people care about why the police car was down the street than they do about the Iraq war and I don't, I'm not putting any value judgments on that, but I think that they know that even though they might think what's going on in Iraq is horrible or is necessary ... they're going to be more taken by why the police car stopped at their neighbor's house down the street and that's going to consume them more ... I think that that's just human nature because things have to wait to impact them, their lives, before they take notice in a lot of cases.

This hyperlocal information provides a way for people to connect, when it becomes difficult to do so otherwise. Christine Folks, neighborhood columnist for the *Leader*, said that the prospect of losing the local newspapers would be unfortunate, “because we don't really have any other way of keeping in touch of what's going on in all of Laurel or even in just the neighborhood and just our neighborhoods of North, South, East or West.”

Bringing people together is especially important in a place like Laurel, according to Pastor Segundo Mir, because he said people live very private lives.

Comparing Cuba with the United States [and] with Laurel, we [in Cuba] don't have paper, we don't have radio, we don't have anything but we are ... talking face to face [with people every day]. We don't need the media. We are the media. But here [in Laurel] people living in house or car, work. We don't know each other. [...] The media ... let the people know each other.

G. Rick Wilson, referring to Putnam (2000) said that the newspapers are important because they help to build social capital by providing connectivity.

When everyone reads the same newspapers, they are connected based on shared information and knowledge. Theresa, 59, said earlier that to lose the newspapers would mean losing a sense of community—as well as history. Theresa added that “a community’s memory is very short,” so if things happening in communities are not recorded by the local newspapers, they are easily forgotten.

But, Pat Farmer, Laurel resident and editorial assistant at the *Leader*, said that the *Leader* has gotten away from recording many of the human interest happenings in town.

Many years ago in the paper they covered all kinds of things. We used to have Laurel BPW (Business and Professional Women) meetings listed and we would have our special events with a photo. Times have changed and they haven't been able to do that, but years ago ... anybody in the area

could expect themselves to be in there at some time or another even if they belong to an organization or were involved.

She added that for people who aren't already involved in the community, the newspapers are essential for making them feel a connection. "I think you have to have a community newspaper. Then you know what's going on ... if you're not actively involved in the community," she said.

But, my participants made clear that the newspapers—especially the *Leader*, which many of them dubbed the "hometown" newspaper—could be, and should be, doing more. The *Leader's* move to Columbia, as well as the changing media landscape, has in many ways upset the state of community and community journalism in Laurel. While several readers, public officials and advertisers said that the *Gazette* does a good job in covering Laurel, others talked about it with disdain, calling it a "county" paper. In most instances, calling it a "county" paper had a negative connotation, suggesting that they desired a newspaper that would cover Laurel exclusively and in-depth. In his most recent blog post about the new Laurel Patch.com, Rick Wilson had this to say about the *Gazette*:

We have two local newspapers in town. Well, we really only have one, the *Laurel Leader*. The *Gazette* quietly shuttered their Laurel operation earlier this year and clumps Laurel's news in with Beltsville, College Park and other communities in the northern part of the county. And let me be honest, the *Gazette* really never committed the resources necessary to serve our community well (Wilson, 2010).

The same argument, though, was made about the *Leader* by many of my participants after the newspaper moved its newsroom to Columbia. Advertisers were upset that the *Leader* left town and in the process drawn business out of Laurel and into neighboring towns. Joan Kim, owner of Main Street Pharmacy, was so angry that she found new ways to advertise her business and stopped placing ads in the *Leader*. “I think it’s [the *Leader*] a great source. I just wish that it was more involved in our neighborhood events. They should give some if they’re going to take some,” she said.

Bob Mignon, Russett resident and owner of Minuteman Press, expressed a great deal of disappointment with the state of the *Leader*. “These people aren’t providing the content to make themselves successful,” he argued. He said that when his son was younger, he used to write and submit short weekly articles reporting the results of his son’s baseball team. He would submit two paragraphs of information, but said that the editor [then Joe Murchison] would “hack the heck out of [it].”

I basically got to the point where I question highly what is the function of the community newspaper if it isn’t to talk about what’s going on in the community? Is it a distribution vehicle for Lowe’s flyers and Home Depot flyers and Safeway and Giant coupons? Is that what the function of a newspaper is? I don’t think so. I think those are vehicles to help pay for the newspaper, but you need to have reporters. The newspaper should be dedicated to and interested in what’s going on in the community.

When he opened his store on Main Street six years earlier, Bob said he invited the local newspapers as well as local and regional politicians to the grand opening. He said that both the *Gazette* and *West County Gazette* sent reporters, but the *Leader* did not. This left him with a “real sore tooth,” he told me.

I called the *Laurel Leader* and I said, ‘We’re having an open house, the mayor’s here, Tom Dernoga is here, the councilman. Don’t you want to come and cover this as a newsworthy event on Main Street?’ There were like a hundred people there. There were traffic issues there because people would gather outside of the store and, the person I spoke to said, ‘Oh, we’re too busy; we don’t have enough time to come down.’

Bob is not the only one who felt this way. Doug, 76, West Laurel resident, agreed when he said,

I think [the newspaper] brings the community together, but I think ... they have to be very careful and make sure that they stick with the community and know what’s going on in the community and here. If they don’t do that, then I think people will stop reading.

Elizabeth Leight, neighborhood columnist for the *West County Gazette*, said that good community news isn’t always hard-hitting; often the soft, human interest stories are the best examples of community journalism. “It’s [soft news] important to the people who make it important,” she said. “It’s not earth shattering; it’s not going to be, you know?”

The journalists at the *Leader* disagreed. Melanie Dzwonchyk, Dan Schwind, and Gwendolyn Glenn all suggested that news conventions dictate what

makes for good community journalism. To them, hard news is equally as important as soft news, if not more important and as journalists, they have a responsibility to make a distinction and a decision regarding what to print. Dan explained:

If a school is having a science fair or a carnival, that's fun and that's cool but if there is a shooting in that same week, what do you think people need to know more about, you know, that there's a shooting in their neighborhood or that there was a carnival? I feel like our obligation is to, regardless of what people necessarily want, to report what the story, the big story is.

Dan's description of the tension between readers' needs versus wants (Mindich, 2004) showed that he believes it is journalists' responsibility to focus on the need rather than the want. While journalists still in many ways see their role as watchdog and public servant, for them, a tension exists between this role and that of business people who need to "sell" their news. Likewise, most public officials noted that they would like to see more positive than negative coverage of Laurel in both newspapers. While journalists need not completely ignore news values—to which they were trained and hired to adhere—they perhaps need to re-evaluate what counts as news in local newspapers. Gwendolyn Glenn told me that to her, news is news, no matter if a journalist is writing for a national radio show, a regional broadcast, or a local newspaper. But readers, advertisers and public officials in Laurel felt differently. To completely ignore what readers want will be detrimental not only to bottom lines, but also to the communities they claim to

serve. And, as new technologies allow just about anyone with a cable modem the ability to create community news, journalists must be more mindful of ways to ease these tensions and maximize their readership. While none of the reporters, editors and executives said they felt threatened by the competing weekly newspaper or by the local bloggers, the landscape is changing again with the addition of AOL's Patch.com, which launched a Laurel edition in mid-December of 2010. More examination is needed to evaluate the impact of this new source of community news in Laurel. At the time of this research, most readers, advertisers and public officials were disappointed by the state of community journalism in Laurel and felt it was not reaching its potential, which many said was to help sustain the local community. So what can journalists do now to improve the state of community journalism in Laurel?

### ***Restoring great community journalism in Laurel***

- *Maintain editorial offices in Laurel, respect the specialness of **place***

Participants expressed anger, disappointment and sadness at the *Leader's* decision to relocate its office—formerly a Main Street institution—ten miles north to Columbia, Maryland. If the *Leader* wants to demonstrate its commitment to good, in-depth coverage of Laurel, journalists need to be working *in town*. Chapter 2 discussed the importance of place as a condition for community. Carey's (1997a) notion of a "republican community"—one in which people recognize the interdependence of their lives—"is organized around the principle of common social space in which people mingle and become aware of one

another as inhabiting a common place” (p. 10). Journalists need to be *in the community* if they are to be seen as a part of it. Kristie Mills, city administrators, recalled a time during Gertrude Poe’s tenure, when she could eat lunch at a local sandwich shop called Graville’s that used to be located on Main Street. Seeing *Leader* reporters, or even Poe herself, there on any give workday was not unusual. But, she said, that doesn’t happen anymore. “I never run into anyone from the *Leader* at lunch,” she said. Rather than hiding behind the masthead, community journalists should frequently interact with people in the community; doing so provides a deeper level of intimacy with not only their readers, but also with Laurel. Such an intimacy can inform their reporting, bringing to the forefront more of those connections readers say they want.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that without a newsroom in town where reporters and editors frequently interact, the sense of community among the journalists is weakened. According to Dzwonchyk, there is little regard for “brick and mortar” not at the *Leader*; reporters and editors are working from home or from in town on location, but rarely

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<sup>53</sup> Upon review of a draft, Melanie Dzwonchyk said that while my observations about Laurel and the *Leader* were “accurate,” they “represent a slice of time” in early 2009 when the *Leader* had just relocated to Columbia. She argued that since that time, much has changed but ultimately, that both sources and readers understand the move and that it hasn’t affected her staff’s ability to cover Laurel. She said, “We continue to hear the occasional complaint about not being located on Main Street, but mostly we are just teased by Laurel officials who now, I’m pretty sure, understand that moving our office was a business decision that was totally out of our hands. And now that our staff is fully equipped with laptops, air cards and cell phones, we are working outside of the office regularly, without much regard for bricks and mortar to define our workspace. In the two years since we moved our office, I have continuously worked on the ‘damage control’ such a move would inevitably require and increased my own visibility in the community. I think our readers, if asked now, would be more sympathetic to our forced move and would also agree that it hasn’t affected our coverage of news and events in Laurel. In fact, at least once a week, I find out that a reader or community leader doesn’t even know that we have moved from Main Street, even though we announced it loud and clear.”

passing each other in the halls of the Columbia newsroom. This means there are likely fewer conversations around the water cooler and debates at daily editorial meetings about what readers in the community both need and want to read, and this too can have an impact on the sense of community fostered by the newspaper. More study is needed inside community newsrooms to wrestle with these tensions.

- *Produce more content and more human interest news that readers can share*

In all fairness, the editors and journalists at the *Leader* talked with excitement and passion about their work and did appear to be working hard to provide good community content of interest to their readers given the limited resources afforded them. But my participants, even those who were quick to acknowledge those facts, still said that they want more community news than they're getting in the print editions of both weeklies. Some who are comfortable surfing the web, like Rick Wilson and Theresa, seek out more news through Internet sources like blogs and RSS feeds. But others, who depend on the print edition for their news, said they wanted more from both the *Leader* and *The Gazette*. When I asked Jan Robison, city council member and Old Town resident, how long she keeps the newspapers around before tossing them to the recycling bin, she said usually only one day. Then she whispered, as if she were uneasy saying it aloud, "It doesn't take a whole lot [of time] to read it." Those who said they thought the coverage was good usually followed up their

comments by saying “for the coverage that’s available.” Others, like Nate, who recalled nostalgically the days of Gertrude Poe, when the paper was both physically larger and contained more human interest news, seemed to longingly hope for those days to return. But, no one seemed optimistic about such a turnaround. In fact, most speculated about how much longer the weeklies would last before closing up shop for good.

Still, the newspapers, as some participants said earlier, do serve to connect the people in Laurel. Reading the same community content becomes something members of the community share in common, and sharing, as shown in Chapter 2, is also an important condition for community. Rich community news content also serves as an important historical record for a town like Laurel, whose local museum relies most heavily on newspaper articles as historical records. Sharing history also serves to unite members of a community (Selznick, 1992; Fowler, 1995). As the amount of community content lessens, so too does the most common record of community history. A decline in content, then, weakens the potential for community.

- *Hire more reporters dedicated to producing community news content*

Several participants said that both weeklies need more reporters to cover the community. As shown in Appendix 11, Laurel organizations are active and plentiful. To cover the work of these organizations, along with everyday news happening in Laurel, requires more reporters who can spend time attending events and reporting on them. Several participants,

like Lara and Bob Mignon, even said that they would be willing to pay more for the paper—through a subscription—if they could be assured that the newspapers would hire more reporters to cover Laurel. These reporters need to have an intimate knowledge of the community, and they must have a masthead which offers them protection. Yet, the *Leader's* editorial staff continued to shrink because of attrition throughout my time living and studying in Laurel. The *Leader* was not investing in the number journalists needed to cover Laurel in the ways the community expects.<sup>54</sup> But, by all indications, neither is *The Gazette*. A cursory examination of *The Gazette* clearly shows that there is usually only one reporter—Timothy Gelles—covering the majority of Laurel news for the paper.

While a handful of residents, like Rick Wilson, have taken up community blogging to provide more community content for those who desire it, Wilson said that he does not consider himself to be a reporter. He said that he often doesn't feel comfortable taking on controversial issues because his personal reputation within the community is at stake.

He blogs for fun rather than for work, and this is an important distinction

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<sup>54</sup> Upon review of a draft of the work in January 2011, Gwendolyn Glenn noted, "I'm the only full-time *Leader* reporter now... Dan Schwind left last year and his position has not been filled. We get reporting help from *Howard County Times* reporters, use *Baltimore Sun* stories on Laurel issues occasionally and other news services." She added, "I don't know what their plans are in terms of Dan's full-time position, but he will be working on a freelance basis on sports stories, since David has left ... Not having a larger staff, as we did when I first came on board, means we can't realistically cover news in Laurel at the level we did in the past. The smaller staff is another reason we can't cover every single feature the city wants us to, but we do try our best to cover the hard news stories, which have more of an effect on the lives of our readers. This is not to say that we are disregarding feature stories, but we can only do what we can with the resources we have, along with the help from the *Howard County Times* staff when they are available."

when producing community content. But, an advantage Wilson does have that the majority of *Leader* reporters do not is insider status. Wilson lives in Laurel, and has for many years. His longevity in Laurel provides him with an intimate knowledge of the local politics, connections, and values. For a professional journalist, this type of intimate knowledge could very positively influence the reporting of difficult stories. But, for Wilson, such intimacy becomes detrimental because when he blogs on a sensitive subject, his social status in the community could be called into question; taking a stance on a local issue in contrast to that of his friends and neighbors could create tension or hardships in his personal relationships. Wilson's example shows why community news organizations are necessary and will remain relevant into the foreseeable future. Communities need journalists who are not afraid to fulfill the watchdog role. Bloggers can supplement, but not replace, the important role of community news organizations in towns like Laurel.

More journalists who are also insiders—like the community columnists, Christine Folks, Mike McLaughlin, and Elizabeth Leight—are needed. These individuals, while not professional journalists, understand community news from a reader's perspective, and as a result, are producing content that my participants reportedly enjoyed. The community columnists serve as an excellent example of the dedication a community journalist and newspaper need in order to cover a community intimately.

- *More connections, knowledge of relationships*

Social connections—relationships—are another important condition for community (Putnam, 2000), and community newspapers need to do more bring to light the connections that exist among member of the communities they serve. Wilson, who named his own blog “Laurel Connections,” is an advocate for more in-depth reporting, reporting which serves to make connections between actions and actors. Mary, 22-year-old college student, agreed that the stories in the local newspapers don’t do enough to make connections, or to follow up on previous stories with new information in ways that make new connections. This lack of connection-making is an interesting observation. If one of the primary conditions for community is relationships—connections—community journalism should be working to highlight connections—positive and negative—in the communities they cover. Connecting people in the community through reporting would heighten readers’ understanding of the social network that exists in Laurel, and provide them with a better understanding—or a map—of the relationships between people there.

**Research Question 4: *How (if at all) do the various groups of people in Laurel make use of media to participate in community/civic life?***

All of my participants reported reading the newspaper—from briefly to in-depth—each week. Nord (2001) showed that the Philadelphia *Federal Gazette* served a civic function for readers during the yellow fever epidemic in the late 1700s. As American cities like Philadelphia grew and more and more formal

structures, like political systems and volunteer organizations, were required to “build community and to hold it together,” so grew the role of communication systems in sustaining a sense of community, said Nord. His historical case study showed that during the yellow fever epidemic, “the newspaper was the place for community participation” and readership became “a form of citizenship.” Nord’s readers, however, were also active in that they wrote and submitted letters which were published and responded to in the newspaper.

In Laurel, readers appear far more passive. A cursory survey of the letters to the editor in both the *Leader* and *The Gazette* showed that people are not writing letters to the editor. Many readers questioned whether letters were not appearing because the newspaper wasn’t printing them or because people were not writing them. According to Melanie Dzwonchyk, editor of the *Leader*, the latter was truer, though she struggled to cite a reason why. So, while people in Laurel may be reading the weeklies—and even that needs more investigation—they certainly are not actively participating by writing letters to the editor or submitting other content, like photographs. Yet, these seems somewhat ironic, given the popularity of Rick Wilson’s blog; many of his posts spurred his readers to write comments in response to his posts.

Pat Farmer, editorial assistant at the *Leader*, and Paul Milton, Executive Editor of Patuxent Publishing, said that the *Leader* does not accept much user-generated content (UGC). This prohibits readers from even having the opportunity to participate in the production of community news. The weeklies should allow UGC. Readers who feel as though they have a hand in producing

the news are more likely to become regular readers. And, as community news becomes more costly to produce, eliciting free content from readers seems like a logical solution worth giving a try. Altschull (1997), Hindman (1998), Nord (2001) and Howley (2005) argued that community journalism is at its best when it is participatory in nature. Altschull (1997) argued that community journalism draws “in the citizen at every step of the news process, from defining the news to determining the news sources to even helping to gather the news” (p. 149). Nord (2001) reminded us from history that “in any society those who hold the power and authority always seek to control communication” (p. 3). If community journalism is to enable citizens to participate in the governing of their own lives in Laurel, readers need open access to the dominant communication systems that function there.

Bloggers, like Rick Wilson, are taking back some of that control. Community blogs offer more local citizens with the ability to voice their point of view. Blogs like Laurel Connections are examples of successful communication tools that connect neighbors and friends through real conversation with real people rather than a masthead. Like newspapers, blogs can help to facilitate relationships and sharing, providing a sense of community (Kaye, 2007). And, blogging, which encourages conversation in the community, is a function of civic participation. Fanslow (2009) defined “civic bloggers” as those who “tend to set a civil tone that encourages people to remain neighborly” and “discourage anonymous commenting” (p. 29). Wilson certainly fits Fanslow’s definition of a civic blogger. And Wilson and his blog are playing an important role in sustaining

a sense of community in the Greater Laurel area. But, Laurel Connections cannot replace the *Laurel Leader* and *The Gazette*, as discussed earlier. Until individual bloggers are willing to work like journalists do when behind a masthead, community newspapers will remain relevant, important and necessary to local communities. But, the fact remains that many community newspapers, like the *Leader*, are struggling to survive financially. Finding ways to work with readers and local bloggers to enhance community news content is important work heading into the future.

### **Contributions to theory and application**

#### ***Community theory***

This study, like most that examined community and came before it, has shown again just how complicated the concept of community is. Community is and will always be an elusive concept. But, looking at community through the lens of community journalism has shown that the conditions of place, sharing and relationships are workable constructs with which to examine community. My participants' comments showed that the shortcomings of the two weekly newspapers, discussed in question three, relate to these three conditions. Participants' anger and frustration about the *Leader's* move to Columbia demonstrated the importance of place in community. Their desire for more content and human interest news validated the need to have something to share in common as well as a need for historical record, which also contributes to community. And finally, participants' desire for content that makes connections between citizens in Laurel showed the importance of relationships in community.

What complicates the concept of community in Laurel, Maryland is not only the size of the town, but also the physical, perceptual, and semantic divisions that exist there. Certainly, my participants expressed feeling a sense of community in Greater Laurel—in part based on their reading of the weekly newspapers. Yet, calling the Greater Laurel area a community is difficult. Better would be calling Laurel a “community of communities,” as my participants suggested. In the smaller communities, participants feel a more organic representation of communities, in the spirit of Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft*. Here, they have meaningful relationships where they interact frequently with fellow community members, sharing whatever it is that brings them together. However, in Greater Laurel, participants have more distant relationships, and the things they share are more universal. But, the community weeklies, as well as these distant relationships and universal commonalities, do create *a sense of community* among people in Laurel. Certainly, more scholarly exercise is needed in the space between the concepts of *community* and *sense of community* in order to better explicate how people distinguish between the two concepts.

#### ***Carey’s ritual theory of communication***

This study provides an example of Carey’s ritual theory of communication put to the test by two local newspapers. Carey’s ritual view of communication suggests that communication—both interpersonal and mediated—is not simply a means to transmit information, but rather a process that draws “persons together in fellowship and commonality” (p. 43).

In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as ‘sharing,’ ‘participation,’ ‘association,’ ‘fellowship,’ and ‘the possession of a common faith.’ This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the term ‘commonness,’ ‘communion,’ ‘community,’ and ‘communication.’ A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time; not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs (p. 18).

Carey’s ritual theory makes clear that conversation and communication are the elements that make community possible. A sense of community is created and sustained through the process of communicating—whether face to face or through media. In talking specifically about newspapers, Carey said that a ritual view of communication views “newspaper reading less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed.” Furthermore, readers of news see portrayed “an arena of dramatic forces and action” where news “exists only in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social roles within it” (p. 21).

Reading community news in this study is proven more about ritual than information. Participants who were long term residents of Laurel expressed the most dissatisfaction with the state of community journalism in Laurel, especially the state of the *Leader*. Many cited its shift from independent to chain ownership in the early 80s. The “golden days” of community journalism in Laurel—during

the tenure of Gertrude Poe—set expectations for Laurel natives. And changes to the way community news is produced and the quality of its content has interrupted those readers' ritual. Readers' expectations for community news content and for an "arena" where their view of the community is "portrayed and confirmed" are not currently being met. And as a result, their reading experience has become shortened, inconsistent, and for a few, virtually nonexistent.

Key to any ritual is consistency and expectation. Like church-goers attend Mass and recite the same prayers over and over to maintain their faith, news readers read news not to learn new information, but to maintain their sense of community. For people in Laurel who utilize the newspaper as a major source of their community experience—to get that *sense of community*—this change in news content is altering their community experience. Because community news in Laurel is experiencing turbulence and inconsistency brought upon by corporate mergers and financial constraints and as a result falling short of readers' expectations, the readers' ritual is interrupted. The ritual of news reading is what helped to create a sense of community in the first place. Readers' sense of community is weakened with the interruption of the news reading ritual.

### ***Remedies for application***

To restore a sense of ritual to community journalism in Laurel, the weeklies need to make investments as well as some adjustments. First, the weeklies need to make financial investments in journalists who will stick around. Less than one year after I interviewed Dan Schwind, the 26-year-old education reporter for the *Leader*, he had moved on and taken another job, likely because he

saw no room to move up there and no prospect of the competitive pay increases we discussed during our interview. In order to create quality content that makes connections for readers, journalists must have more intimate, insider knowledge that only comes from times spent working in the community. Such high turnover impedes the newspaper's ability to develop reporters who can cover the community intimately.

The newspapers also need to invest more time and dollars in audience research. Neither Melanie Dzwonchyck nor Paul Milton could recall the last time the newspaper had conducted a readership survey. And, Melanie admitted that she frequently wonders whether the *Leader* is producing content of interest to all readers. While this study's sample was small in comparison to the number of readers the *Leader* has, it has revealed that many readers' expectations are not being met. Investing in some audience research can reap rewards for the newspapers.

The weeklies would also benefit from opening up their pages to more user-generated content. Allowing readers to have a more participatory role in creating community news can help to strengthen the news reading ritual. By having an active role in the creation of the content, they will be more invested in the process and in the regular reading of the news.

And, finally, the newspapers must give equal attention to both content and delivery. With all of the changes the Internet has brought to the way people send and receive news, newspapers have been very focused on adapting their methods of delivery to suit the needs of the digital consumer. However, in some cases, this

focus is at the expense of a focus on content, which, as shown in this research, is equally, if not more important to readers.

The Internet provides an endless number of possibilities for community journalism. Going solely online would eliminate a majority of costs and concerns related to printing and distribution. The elimination of these costs might allow the organizations to hire a couple of extra reporters, though a comprehensive financial analysis would be required to determine feasibility. It would also make easier the process of soliciting and publishing user-generated content in addition to tracking and interacting with readers. The growing popularity of social media allows readers to share community content more easily; for news organizations, this kind of viral distribution of content is akin to word of mouth and in small communities, is sometimes the best form of advertising, as Joan Kim, owner of Main Street Pharmacy, found through her own advertising strategy when she decided to forgo advertising in the weeklies.

While the Internet could help to remedy some of community journalism's current cost challenges, the fact remains that many people still prefer reading community news in print, as the majority of my participants reported preferring the printed newspapers to their online editions. And, one of the biggest costs of good community journalism—competitive salaries for dedicated reporters—remains, no matter the platform on which the news is presented. If added value were provided in online editions, perhaps more readers would flock to the web; but in the face of their current preferences, my participants seem to need a compelling reason to do so. The community news organizations must find ways

to provide readers with compelling reasons to change their patterns of behavior and adopt an online news reading habit. These reasons could include more community content, including content generated by users, like photographs, columns and announcements.

### **Limitations**

One of the biggest and most unfortunate limitations of this research was the fact that I was denied access to *Gazette* editors and reporters.<sup>55</sup> The two newspapers in Laurel are quite different. The *Leader* is older and considered to be the “hometown” newspaper” by many participants. *The Gazette* is relatively new to Laurel and has clearly changed the media landscape in Laurel by providing residents with an alternative option for local news. Not being able to talk with editors and reporters from *The Gazette* leaves many important perspectives undiscovered. My interview with *Gazette* publisher, Frank Abbott, was also very brief and he was somewhat curt. *The Gazette’s* lack of cooperation and transparency calls into question its motivations as a community newspaper in Laurel. Participating in this research would have allowed editors and reporters of both newspapers to learn more about how their work is perceived by the community. Doing so would also have allowed for a better understanding of how *The Gazette’s* editors and journalists understand their roles and responsibilities as

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<sup>55</sup> Melanie Dzwonchyk said upon review of a draft that she felt the dissertation was “unfair” to the *Leader* because the omission of interviews with *Gazette* reporters “leads to an omission of analysis of how those reporters see their position as community journalists, and also how the community feels about the job the *Gazette* staff is doing.” However, participants were given equal opportunity to talk about the performance of both newspapers and, on the whole, participants talked more and with more depth about the *Leader*, which most regarded as the “hometown” paper. Mike McLaughlin, former neighborhood columnist for the *Leader* agreed that *The Gazette’s* refusal to participate was unfortunate. He added: “Their silence speaks louder than anything Mr. Abbott said, and I think you did a pretty good job interpreting that silence while not dwelling on it.”

community journalists in Laurel. Without that, this research has a significant hole.

Also limiting this research was the short window of time I had to conduct my fieldwork. Studying a community is challenging, especially one as large as Laurel. More time would have allowed for more interviews, garnering a larger sample and collection of data.

Finally, while snowball sampling was effective in garnering me more participants, it often led me to “civic leaders”—“people who hold recognized civic positions within the community”—and “connectors”—“people who move in between organizations and civic conversations [and] ... often have no official capacity” (Doing Civic Journalism). Efforts at placing flyers around town as well as posting recruitment messages on Craigslist and a Laurel listserv proved largely unsuccessful. A research budget would have allowed for better advertising and participant compensation. I suspect that people who did agree to participate were not motivated by compensation and that having offered compensation would not significantly have enlarged numbers of participants. That said, I would have hoped to have had greater variety among participants, and especially that I had been able to recruit more young people, Hispanics, and others less active in community organizations in Laurel.

### **Future research**

This project has provided a number of inspiring ideas for future research in the area of community journalism. This study could be replicated in a variety of towns and cities across the United States in order to gather a more

comprehensive picture of the state of community journalism regionally and nationally. Doing so could provide an interesting look at not only where community newspapers stand presently, but also where they need to go as they move forward and as journalists strive to reinvent their craft to meet digital standards and requirements. Furthermore, a close examination of the relationship between the fiscal status of community newspapers and that of the towns they cover could provide fascinating insight into the role newspapers play in defining and sustaining these places.

More study is needed in the area of digital community journalism, including a more comprehensive and probing look at the role of blogs, listservs, Twitter and Facebook accounts in delivering news and information as well as providing social connections among community members.<sup>56</sup> I did not intentionally set out to address issues of community blogging with this research, but instead happened upon G. Rick Wilson. My three hour conversation with him alone—along with our recurrent email exchanges—was enough to inspire ten more dissertations on community journalism in the digital era. He is helping to invent the future of community blogging and researchers could learn a great deal from his kind.<sup>57</sup>

Indeed, a rich field of study exists at the intersection of traditional news organizations and local bloggers/citizen journalists. As traditional news organizations are forced to deliver more news faster and with fewer resources,

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<sup>56</sup> Since this research was conducted in early 2009, Patch.com has entered the community journalism scene in Laurel, as discussed in Chapter 7. Its introduction may alter entirely the landscape of community journalism there.

<sup>57</sup> Upon review of a draft, Mike McLaughlin said that my observation about Wilson inventing the future of community blogging was “right on the money.”

citizen journalists and bloggers are filling in the gaps. A closer look at whether and how community newspapers are working hand in hand with local bloggers and citizen journalists could provide invaluable insight into ways traditional news organizations can reinvent their business models.

## **Conclusion**

This study has provided an interesting look at a town, its citizens, and its newspapers. Laurel, Maryland was an excellent backdrop for a study of community and community journalism. Laurel is a distinctive American town and provided an interesting opportunity for the examination of the role of community news in creating and sustaining community. Though distinctive, Laurel and its weeklies presented many of the same challenges faced by others American towns and newspapers. The findings of this research have the potential to impact the state of community journalism in Laurel and elsewhere, especially at a time when the newspaper industry is in flux. While not necessarily generalizable, the findings of this research are certainly transferable to other communities where community journalism exists. The findings are especially transferable to communities where community journalism is struggling, either as a result of financial constraints or competition. Community journalism is a rich scholarly field and worthy of further examination. Citizens need good community journalism that serves a watchdog function but also a ritual function that works to create and sustain community in towns like Laurel all across the country.

# DO YOU LIVE OR WORK IN LAUREL?

---

**Seeking participants for research  
on opinions of Laurel news media.**

**Participation is voluntary**

**Minimal time commitment  
(one interview)**

**Must be 18+**

**TO LEARN MORE, TAKE ONE**

Laurel Media Project  
Call or email Lindsey at:  
(240) 294-4459  
laurelmediaproject@gmail.com

Laurel Media Project  
Call or email Lindsey at:  
(240) 294-4459  
laurelmediaproject@gmail.com

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Call or email Lindsey at:  
(240) 294-4459  
laurelmediaproject@gmail.com

**Appendix 2: Classified Ad posted to Craigslist and the Yahoo! Laurel Group**

Seeking participants for research on opinions of Laurel media. Must live or work

in Laurel. Participation is voluntary. Minimal time commitment (one interview).

Must be 18+. Call or email Lindsey at 240-294-4459 or

laurelmediaproject@gmail.com.

### **Appendix 3: Phone and Email Message Scripts**

#### **PHONE MESSAGE**

Hi. Thanks for calling for more information about the Laurel Media Project. My name is Lindsey and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland. I am studying the relationship between communities and media and I am using Laurel, Maryland as a case study. If you currently live or work in Laurel and are 18 years of age or older, I would love to talk with you. You need not be an avid news reader to participate. Your participation is voluntary and your time commitment will be a 60-90 minute interview should you agree to participate. If you would like to participate or learn even more about the project, please leave me your name, telephone number and the best time to reach you, and I will return your call promptly. Thanks for your interest.

#### **EMAIL MESSAGE**

Thanks for emailing for more information about the Laurel Media Project. My name is Lindsey and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland. I am studying the relationship between communities and media and I am using Laurel, Maryland as a case study. If you currently live or work in Laurel and are 18 years of age or older, I would love to talk with you. Your participation is voluntary and your time commitment will be a 60-90 minute group interview should you agree to participate. If you'd like to learn even more about the project, please reply, providing your telephone number and general availability for an interview. Thanks for your interest.

## Appendix 4: Questionnaires for Participants (two versions)

### Laurel Media Project – Initial Questionnaire – Journalists/Public Officials

Thanks for participating. Please take a minute to answer a few brief questions. This information will help me to describe you in the final research report.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Religion: \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ Children? \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years at current address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Do you work in Laurel? YES NO

Highest Degree Earned (circle) HS Diploma Associate's Bachelor's Master's Terminal Degree

How many years have you lived in Laurel? \_\_\_\_\_ At your current residence, do you rent or own? \_\_\_\_\_

Where else have you lived? (town/state) \_\_\_\_\_ For how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a part of any local Laurel organizations/groups? If yes, please list: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle: YES NO \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the category which best describes you as a news media consumer:

*I never/rarely consume news media.*      *I casually consume news media.*      *I am an avid consumer of news media.*

What non-Laurel media do you consume with regularity? Please list all that occur to you. (Use back for more space.)

\_\_\_\_\_

What **Laurel** media do you read/watch/listen to? (Please circle)

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Gazette* (in print) **How often?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Gazette* (online) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Laurel Leader* (in print) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Laurel Leader* (online) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Laurel Cable Network \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If you do not read/watch/listen to Laurel media, briefly explain why.

\_\_\_\_\_

May I contact you in the future if follow up questions arise? YES NO

Thanks for participating! *Lindsey*

**Laurel Media Project – Initial Questionnaire – Readers/Business Owners**

Thanks for participating. Please take a minute to answer a few brief questions. This information will help me to describe you in the final research report. *Please remember that your real name will not be used.*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Race/Ethnicity: \_\_\_\_\_ Religion: \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status: \_\_\_\_\_ Children? \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Number of years at current address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation: \_\_\_\_\_ Do you work in Laurel? YES NO

Highest Degree Earned (circle) HS Diploma Associate's Bachelor's Master's Terminal Degree

How many years have you lived in Laurel? \_\_\_\_\_ At your current residence, do you rent or own? \_\_\_\_\_

Where else have you lived? (town/state) \_\_\_\_\_ For how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a part of any local Laurel organizations/groups? If yes, please list: \_\_\_\_\_

Please circle: YES NO \_\_\_\_\_

Circle the category which best describes you as a news media consumer:

*I never/rarely consume news media.*      *I casually consume news media.*      *I am an avid consumer of news media.*

What non-Laurel media do you consume with regularity? Please list all that occur to you. (Use back for more space.)

\_\_\_\_\_

What **Laurel** media do you read/watch/listen to? (Please circle)

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Gazette* (in print) **How often?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Gazette* (online) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Laurel Leader* (in print) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ *The Laurel Leader* (online) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Laurel Cable Network \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If you do not read/watch/listen to Laurel media, briefly explain why.

\_\_\_\_\_

May I contact you in the future if follow up questions arise? YES NO

**Thanks for participating!** *Lindsey*

## Appendix 5: Interview Questions for Various Participants

### *Questions for Readers*

#### COMMUNITY/LAUREL

- How long have you lived in Laurel?
- If you had to define or describe Laurel to an outsider, how would you describe it?
  - How does Laurel compare to other places around it, like Columbia, for instance?
  - How does Laurel compare to Washington D.C. and/or Baltimore?
  - How does it compare with other places you've lived in the past?
- When you refer to Laurel, in your mind do you make distinctions between Laurel "city" and the outer parts of Laurel (like North Laurel, West Laurel, Montpelier, Russett)?
- What are the attributes of Laurel that you like/appreciate? What, if anything, don't you like about it?
- How would you describe the people that live in Laurel? What are they like?
- Are you involved in any clubs or organizations in Laurel?
- Is Laurel a place you plan to stay long-term? Why? Why not?
- Do you consider Laurel to be a community? Why/why not?

#### NEWS IN LAUREL

- (If new to Laurel) Were the newspapers helpful in your adjustment to living in Laurel? Can you give an example?
- How do you stay connected to/informed about what's going on in Laurel? (Do you care what's going on in Laurel? If yes, what makes you care? If no, why don't you care?)
- What kind of information (about Laurel) is important to you? Where do you get that info?
- What kind of media do you use most frequently?
- If/When you get the weekly newspapers, where do they land in your house? How long do you keep them around?
  - How are they delivered?
- When you pick up either the *Leader* or *The Gazette*, what are you expecting to see?
- Do you like the weekly papers in Laurel?
  - What do you like about the *Leader*? *The Gazette*?
    - Are there any specific features about the paper you particularly enjoy?
  - What don't you like about those papers?
  - Do you ever go online to read the papers?
- Has your name ever been in the paper?
  - How often does the paper mention someone you know?

- Are the advertisements useful to you? Do you ever clip coupons, or visit a store you saw mentioned in the newspaper?
- Do you ever talk to people about what you read in the weekly papers?
- Have you ever written a letter to the editor? What prompted you to do so?
- Do you know who owns the weekly newspapers? Where the offices are?
- Are the newspapers important to Laurel? To your life in Laurel?

### ***Questions for Journalists (at the Laurel Leader)***

#### **ROLE**

- How did you become a journalist in Laurel?
- What are your responsibilities? How do you meet them?

#### **COMMUNITY/LAUREL**

- Do you live in Laurel? (Have you ever lived in Laurel?)
- If you had to define or describe Laurel to an outsider, how would describe it?
  - How does Laurel compare to other places around it, like Columbia, for instance?
  - How does Laurel compare to Washington D.C. and/or Baltimore?
  - How does it compare with other places you've lived (covered) in the past?
- When you refer to Laurel, in your mind do you make distinctions between Laurel "city" and the outer parts of Laurel (like North Laurel, West Laurel, Montpelier, Russett)?
- What are the attributes of Laurel that you like/appreciate? What, if anything, don't you like about it?
- How would you describe the people that live in Laurel? What are they like?
- Are you involved in any clubs or organizations in Laurel?
- Is Laurel a place you plan to stay—either as a resident or working-professional—long-term? Why/Why not?
- Do you consider Laurel to be a community? Why/why not?
- As a journalist, do you feel as though you are part of the Laurel community?

#### **NEWS IN LAUREL**

- As a journalist covering your section of Laurel, how would you define your responsibilities?
- How did you learn what those responsibilities were?
- What are the values held by the people you cover? How do those values affect the work you do?
- What kind of stories do you look for? Where do you get story ideas?
- How often do stories you know of go untold? Why? Can you give an example?

- What kind of reader feedback do you get?
- How do you classify the newspaper? (As a weekly, community, something else)?
- What is your take on the *Leader* moving its main office to Columbia? Do you think it affects your ability to cover Laurel?
- How does competition factor into your work?
- In your opinion, what is the role of the newspaper in Laurel?
- Is the newspaper important to Laurel? Why/Why not?

#### NEWS AND POLITICS

- What is the relationship between the local newspapers and the Laurel government like?
- Can you think of an example of an interaction with a local government official that went well? Where there was a misunderstanding?

#### *Questions for Neighborhood Columnists (at the Laurel Leader)*

#### ON BEING A COLUMNIST

- How did you become a columnist? What do you like best about being a columnist? (Least?)
- How do you decide what to write about in your column?
- Is the Laurel Leader a forum for regular people in Laurel to express themselves? For example, had you written letters to the editor a lot before becoming a columnist?
- Are you paid to write your column?

#### COMMUNITY/LAUREL

- Where in Laurel do you live?
- If you had to define or describe Laurel to an outsider, what words would you use?
  - How does Laurel compare to other places around it, like Columbia, for instance?
  - How does Laurel compare to Washington D.C. and/or Baltimore?
  - How does it compare with other places you've lived (covered) in the past?
- When you refer to Laurel, in your mind do you make distinctions between Laurel "city" and the outer parts of Laurel (like North Laurel, West Laurel, Montpelier, Russett)?
- What are the attributes of Laurel that you like/appreciate? What, if anything, don't you like about it?
- How would you describe the people that live in Laurel? What are they like?
- Are you involved in any clubs or organizations in Laurel?
- Is Laurel a place you plan to stay—either as a resident or working-professional—long-term? Why/Why not?

- Do you consider Laurel to be a community? Why/why not?

#### NEWS IN LAUREL

- As a neighborhood columnist covering your section of Laurel, how would you define your responsibilities?
- How did you learn what those responsibilities were?
- What are the values held by the people you cover? How do those values affect the work you do?
- What kind of stories do you look for? Where do you get story ideas?
- How often do stories you know of go untold? Why? Can you give an example?
- What kind of reader feedback do you get?
- What is your take on the Leader moving its main office to Columbia? Do you think it affects the quality reporting?
- How does the *Laurel Leader* compare to the other Laurel newspaper, the *Gazette*?
  - Do you read the *Gazette*?
  - What do you like/dislike about the *Gazette*?
- In your opinion, what is the role of the newspaper in Laurel?
- Is the newspaper important to Laurel? Why/Why not?

#### ***Questions for Frank Abbott, The Gazette Publisher***

- How long have you been publisher of *The Gazette*? Please summarize your career trajectory—how you got from your first job to being in this position at the Gazette.
- When did *The Gazette* begin publishing in Laurel? Why?
- How many editors/reporters work exclusively for the Gazette (and the Gazette Laurel)? How many other staff people are there?
- How much turnover with employees happens there? How many editors have there been since you began publishing in Laurel?
- Do any of the employees—to your knowledge—live in Laurel? Would you consider that a conflict of interest, if they did?
- Do you live in Laurel?
- What are your policies with regard to Gazette journalists participating in the community on which they report?
  - Do you think these policies help or hurt the journalists' ability to cover the community well?
- What journalistic principles, in your view, are most important when doing community journalism?
- How is community journalism—and specifically the journalism done by *The Gazette*—different from other “bigger” kinds of journalism and publications, like the *Washington Post*, for instance?
- How much does competition—specifically the *Laurel Leader*—influence *The Gazette*'s processes and policies?

- What do you see as the primary role of *The Gazette* in Laurel?
- I noticed there are not many advertisements local to Laurel. Is there a conscious effort to recruit Laurel advertisers?
- *The Gazette* includes both local news to Laurel as well as regional news. Why? Why not focus specifically on Laurel, for more direct competition with *The Laurel Leader*, which does have a strictly local focus?
- What is the role of the Washington Post Company in the operation of the Gazette, either generally or on a daily operations level?
- What is the ratio between news content and advertisements?

***Questions for Paul Milton, Executive Editor of News Operations, the Laurel Leader***

- How long have you been Executive Editor at Patuxent Publishing? Please summarize your career trajectory—how you got from your first job to being in this position.
- Anyone who looks back to early *Leaders* can see a dramatic shift in the content of the newspaper, especially when the paper was taken over by Patuxent Publishing in the early 1980s. How is Patuxent’s vision of community journalism different that the early editor’s of the *Leader*?
- Does Patuxent Publishing have policies with regard to journalists living in the community on which they report? What are your policies with regard to Gazette journalists participating in the community on which they report?
  - Do you think these policies help or hurt the journalists’ ability to cover the community well?
- What journalistic principles, in your view, are most important for doing community journalism?
- What do you see as the primary role of the *Laurel Leader* in Laurel?
- How is community journalism—and specifically the journalism done by the *Laurel Leader*—different from other “bigger” kinds of journalism and publications, like the *Washington Post*, for instance?
- What is the role of “community” in the community journalism you do at Patuxent Publishing?
- What are the roles of the Baltimore Sun Co. and Patuxent Publishing in the operation of the *Leader*, either generally or on a daily operations level?
- How much does competition—specifically the *Gazette*—influence the *Leader*’s processes and policies?
- *The Gazette* includes both local news to Laurel as well as regional news. The *Leader*’s content is strictly Laurel news. Why?
- I noticed there are fewer and fewer advertisements local to Laurel. What is the process for recruiting Laurel advertisers?
- From a cursory glance at the *Leader* over the past two years, it is quite apparent that the paper is shrinking. The size of newsprint has gotten

smaller, and the number of pages has nearly been cut in half. Is the *Leader* in financial danger?

- Since the *Leader* is the longest running paper in Laurel and has a very rich history, will Patuxent make special efforts to keep the paper afloat? If it comes down to it, would Patuxent consider selling the newspaper or would it be allowed to fold?
- Does the web version of the *Leader* get a lot of traffic? (How did you come to the decision to convert all of the websites under the title “Explore Howard”?)
- Do you actively solicit reader feedback? How often do you do reader surveys to gauge your audience’s perceptions of the newspaper?
- What is the future of community journalism? What is/has Patuxent Publishing done to prepare?

### *Questions for Public Officials*

#### ROLE

- How did you become a public official in Laurel?
- What are your responsibilities? How do you meet them?

#### COMMUNITY/LAUREL

- How long have you lived in Laurel?
- If you had to define or describe Laurel to an outsider, how would you describe it?
  - How does Laurel compare to other places around it, like Columbia, for instance?
  - How does Laurel compare to Washington D.C. and/or Baltimore?
  - How does it compare with other places you’ve lived in the past?
- When you refer to Laurel, in your mind do you make distinctions between Laurel “city” and the outer parts of Laurel (like North Laurel, West Laurel, Montpelier, Russett)?
- What specifically about Laurel do you like/appreciate? What, if anything, don’t you like about it?
- How would you describe the people who live in Laurel? What are they like?
- Are you involved in any clubs or organizations beyond city government in Laurel?
- Is Laurel a place you plan to stay long-term? Why? Why not?
- Do you consider Laurel to be a community? Why/why not?

#### NEWS IN LAUREL

- How do you stay connected to/informed about what’s going on in Laurel?
- What kind of information (about Laurel) is important to you? Where do you get that info?
- What kind of media do you use most frequently?

- How do you get the papers? (delivery) If/When you get the weekly newspapers, where do they land in your house? How long do you keep them around?
- When you pick up either the *Leader* or *The Gazette*, what are you expecting to see?
- Do you like the weekly papers in Laurel?
  - What do you like about the *Leader*? *The Gazette*?
    - Are there any specific features about the paper you particularly enjoy?
  - What don't you like about those papers?
  - Do you use the web versions of the newspapers?
- Has your name ever been in the paper?
  - How often does the paper mention someone you know?
- Are the advertisements useful to you? Do you ever clip coupons, or visit a store you saw mentioned in the newspaper?
- Do you ever talk to people about what you read in the weekly papers?
- Have you ever written a letter to the editor?
- Do you know who owns the weekly newspapers? Where the offices are?
- Are the newspapers important to Laurel? To your life in Laurel?

#### NEWS AND POLITICS

- What is the relationship between the local newspapers and the Laurel government like?
- Can you think of an example of an interaction with a local journalist that went well? When there was a misunderstanding?
- How would you evaluate the overall coverage of Laurel by the local newspapers? Can you compare the two? Is the coverage fair?
- Does Laurel government actively attempt to create/sustain a sense of community in Laurel? How? What other elements are important to creating community in Laurel?

#### *Questions for Business Owners/Advertisers*

#### ROLE

- How did you become a business owner in Laurel?
- How long have you operated here?
- Do you have regular customers?

#### COMMUNITY/LAUREL

- Do you also live in Laurel?
- Can you tell me about Laurel? What's it like?
  - How does Laurel compare to other places around it, like Columbia, for instance?
  - How does Laurel compare to Washington D.C. and/or Baltimore?
  - How does it compare with other places you've lived in the past?

- When you refer to Laurel, in your mind do you make distinctions between Laurel “city” and the outer parts of Laurel (like North Laurel, West Laurel, Montpelier, Russett)?
- What are the attributes of Laurel that you like/appreciate?
- What, if anything, don’t you like about Laurel?
- If you had to define or describe Laurel to an outsider, what words would you use?
- How would you characterize the people that live in Laurel?
- Are you involved in any clubs or organizations in Laurel?
- Is Laurel a place you plan to stay long-term? Why? Why not?
- Do you consider Laurel to be a community? Why/why not?

#### NEWS IN LAUREL

- Do you use the weekly newspapers to advertise your business? Why?
- What kind of a response do you get as a result? (Do clients reference your ads, other things they read/see in the newspapers?)
- Does the content of the newspaper influence your willingness (or unwillingness) to advertise?
- How else do you advertise your business? (Other mediums, etc.)
- How do you stay connected to/informed about what’s going on in Laurel?
- What kind of information (about Laurel) is important to you? Where do you get that info?
- Do you like the weekly papers in Laurel?
  - What do you like about the *Leader*? *The Gazette*?
    - Are there any specific features about the paper you particularly enjoy?
  - What don’t you like about those papers?
- Other than advertising, has your name ever been in the paper?
  - Has a story ever been written about your business?
  - How often does the paper mention someone you know?
- Are the newspapers important to Laurel? To your business in Laurel?

## Appendix 6: Consent Form for Anonymous Sources

### CONSENT FORM

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Project Title</b>	Community Journalism
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	<i>This is a research project being conducted by Lindsey Wotanis at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a resident of Laurel, Maryland. The purpose of this research project is to learn more about the relationship between communities and media.</i>
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	<i>The procedures involve informal and/or formal interviews pertaining to your experience in Laurel with local news and media. The location, time, number, and extent of the interviews will be verbally agreed upon and scheduled at the conveniences of both the researcher and the participant. Interviews may be digitally recorded upon your consent. I will be the only researcher with access to the material and you may ask for information to be "off the record" at any time. Materials will be destroyed after the completion and publication of the project.</i>
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	<p><i>By signing this consent form, you understand that you will be given a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality. In addition, no individuals or places (organizations, businesses, etc.) will be named to protect the confidentiality of those not directly involved in this research.</i></p> <p><i>Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p> <p><i>In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, I will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to my attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.</i></p>
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	<i>There is no known risk for participating in this research project.</i>
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	<i>The benefits to participants include learning more about and reflecting on the ways they share news and shape communities. I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the intersections of communities, media, and news and how those intersections impact our societies.</i>

**CONSENT FORM**

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Project Title</b>	Community Journalism	
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	<i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i>	
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Lindsey Wotanis, doctoral student in the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Lindsey Wotanis at The University of Maryland, 1117 Journalism Building, College Park, MD, 20742-711, by phone at 570.499.1829 (cell) or via email at <a href="mailto:lwotanis@jmail.umd.edu">lwotanis@jmail.umd.edu</a>. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Linda Steiner, at 1117 Journalism Building, Room 4101, College Park, MD, 20742-711, by phone at 301-405-2426, or by email at <a href="mailto:lsteiner@jmail.umd.edu">lsteiner@jmail.umd.edu</a>.</i></p> <p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b></i></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
<b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b> [Please note: Parental consent always needed for minors.]	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ you are at least 18 years of age;</li> <li>→ the research has been explained to you;</li> <li>→ your questions have been fully answered; and</li> <li>→ you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</li> </ul>	
<b>Signature and Date</b> [Please add name, signature, and date lines to the final page of your consent form]	<b>NAME OF SUBJECT</b>	
	<b>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</b>	
	<b>DATE</b>	



## Appendix 7: Consent Form for Named Sources

Page 1 of 2

### CONSENT FORM

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Project Title</b>	Community Journalism
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	<i>This is a research project being conducted by Lindsey Wotanis at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you currently a public official or journalist in Laurel, Maryland. The purpose of this research project is to learn more about the relationship between communities and media.</i>
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	<i>The procedures involve informal and/or formal interviews pertaining to your experience in Laurel with local news and media. The location, time, number, and extent of the interviews will be verbally agreed upon and scheduled at the conveniences of both the researcher and the participant. Interviews may be digitally recorded upon your consent. I will be the only researcher with access to the material and you may ask for information to be "off the record" at any time. Materials will be destroyed after the completion and publication of the project.</i>
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	<i>By signing this consent form, you understand that your name, position, and employer will be disclosed in any published report. However, no individuals or places (organizations, businesses, etc.) will be named to protect the confidentiality of people or places not directly involved in this research.</i>  <i>Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i>  <i>In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, I will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to my attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.</i>
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	<i>The risks involved for you will be social. Because your comments about your work will be made public if a paper is published, you may face repercussions in your community relationships. However, I plan to work with you to minimize such risk. You will have the opportunity to review drafts of the project. We will work together to ensure that you are comfortable with the information that is presented. It will be a collaborative effort. No drafts will be sent for publication without your consent.</i>
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	<i>The benefits to participants include learning more about and reflecting on the ways they share news and shape communities. I hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of the intersections of communities, media, and news and how those intersections impact our societies.</i>

**CONSENT FORM**

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Title	Community Journalism	
Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?	<i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i>	
What if I have questions?	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Lindsey Wotanis, doctoral student in the Philip Merrill College of Journalism at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Lindsey Wotanis at The University of Maryland, 1117 Journalism Building, College Park, MD, 20742-711, by phone at 570.499.1829 (cell) or via email at <a href="mailto:lwotanis@jmail.umd.edu">lwotanis@jmail.umd.edu</a>. You may also contact my research advisor, Dr. Linda Steiner, at 1117 Journalism Building, Room 4101, College Park, MD, 20742-711, by phone at 301-405-2426, or by email at <a href="mailto:lsteiner@jmail.umd.edu">lsteiner@jmail.umd.edu</a>.</i></p> <p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742; (e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</i></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Age of Subject and Consent [Please note: Parental consent always needed for minors.]	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>→ you are at least 18 years of age;</i></li> <li><i>→ the research has been explained to you;</i></li> <li><i>→ your questions have been fully answered; and</i></li> <li><i>→ you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></li> </ul>	
Signature and Date [Please add name, signature, and date lines to the final page of your consent form]	NAME OF SUBJECT	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	



## Appendix 8: Interview Data

<b>Interview Master List</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Time (h:mm)</b>	<b>Location</b>
<b>Laurel City Government</b>			
Craig A. Moe, 49, mayor, government employee	2/26/2009	0:43	Mayor's Office, Laurel City Hall
Fredrick Smalls, 58, councilmember, financial director	2/26/2009	1:15	Council Chambers, Laurel City Hall
Michael R. Leszcz, 63, councilmember, manager	3/17/2009	1:05	Council Chambers, Laurel City Hall
Donna Crary, 50, councilmember, attorney	3/19/2009	0:39	Law Offices of Donna Crary, Laurel
Jan Robison, 59, councilmember	3/26/2009	0:42	Council Chambers, Laurel City Hall
Kristie Mills, 60, city administrator	6/9/2009	1:10	City Administrator's Office, Laurel City Hall
<b>Laurel Leader</b>			
Melanie Dzwonchyk, 53, editor	2/27/2009	1:22	Conference Room, Patuxent Publishing Co., Columbia, MD
Daniel Schwind, 26, education reporter	3/13/2009	1:04	Einstein Bagels, Route 1, Laurel, MD
Patricia Farmer, 65, editorial assistant	3/17/2009	1:02	Conference Room, Patuxent Publishing Co., Columbia, MD
David Driver, 47, sports reporter	3/25/2009	0:44	Lunch Room, Patuxent Publishing Co., Columbia, MD
Michael McLaughlin, 56, neighborhood columnist	4/20/2009	1:07	Einstein Bagels, Route 1, Laurel, MD
Christine B. Folks, 52, neighborhood columnist, administrative assistant	4/29/2009	1:18	Christine Folks' West Laurel Home
Gwendolyn Glenn, city government reporter	5/1/2009	1:01	Conference Room, Patuxent Publishing Co., Columbia, MD
Paul Milton, 49, executive director of news operations	5/15/2009	0:42	Conference Room, Patuxent Publishing Co., Columbia, MD
<b>Laurel Gazette</b>			
Frank Abbott, publisher	4/28/2009	0:32	Conference Room, Gazette Co, Laurel, MD
<b>West County Gazette</b>			
Elizabeth Ysla Leight, 54, Russet/Laurel columnist, attorney	6/10/2009	1:01	Panera Bread, Route 198, Laurel, MD

<b>Businesses</b>			
Anne, 62, administrative assistant and Nate, 64, real estate agent*	3/18/2009	1:30	Real Estate Office, Laurel, MD
Ginger Reeves, 46, owner, Toucan Taco	4/21/2009	0:30	Toucan Taco, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Joan Kim, 39, pharmacist/owner, Main Street Pharmacy	5/4/2009	0:22	Main Street Pharmacy Office, Main Street, Laurel, MD
Robert J. Mignon, 59, owner, Minutemen Press	5/27/2009	0:51	Minutemen Press, Beltsville Office, Beltsville, MD
<b>Residents</b>			
Hannah, 40, registered nurse*	2/22/2009	1:01	St. Mark's Baptist Church, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Paula, 54, paralegal*	2/22/2009	1:01	St. Mark's Baptist Church, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Sam, 44, salesman*	2/22/2009	1:01	St. Mark's Baptist Church, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Olivia, 84, retired teacher's aide*	3/26/2009	0:46	St. Mark's Baptist Church, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Fran, 88, retired*	3/26/2009	0:46	St. Mark's Baptist Church, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Ellen, 80, retired*	3/26/2009	0:46	St. Mark's Baptist Church, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Kathy, 60, retired teacher*	3/26/2009	0:46	St. Mark's Baptist Church, Route 198, Laurel, MD
Melissa, 25, museum professional*	4/6/2009	1:35	Laurel Museum, Main Street, Laurel, MD
Irene, 78, retired*	4/6/2009	1:35	Laurel Museum, Main Street, Laurel, MD
Theresa, 59, public relations*	4/6/2009	1:35	Laurel Museum, Main Street, Laurel, MD
Doug, 76, retired*	4/15/2009	1:32	Participants' West Laurel Home
Carol, 75, retired*	4/15/2009	1:32	Participants' West Laurel Home
G. Rick Wilson, 51, blogger, government employee	4/29/2009	1:54	Silver Diner, Route 1, Laurel MD
Segundo Mir, pastor	4/30/2009	1:04	Pastor's Office, First Baptist Church, Laurel, MD
Ray, 76, retired*	5/1/2009	0:38	Participant's Old Town Laurel Home
Lara, 67, retired teacher/counselor*	5/4/2009	0:50	Einstein Bagels, Route 1, Laurel, MD
Gina, 20, college student, part-time leasing agent*	5/17/2009	1:48	Researcher's Apartment, Main Street, Laurel, MD
Julie, 22, unemployed, recent college graduate*	5/17/2009	1:48	Researcher's Apartment, Main Street, Laurel, MD
Brian, 21, police officer*	5/17/2009	1:48	Researcher's Apartment, Main Street, Laurel, MD

## **Appendix 9: Segundo Mir's ideas for Hispanic newspaper column**

### **SUGESTED TOPICS TO WRITE IN THE "LAUREL LEADER" IN SPANISH**

1. Jobs offer and opportunities.
2. Insurance and Health Plans.
3. All type of emergencies and alerts.
4. The advantages of becoming a citizen.
5. Get counted in the census.
6. Be careful against predators.
7. Respect the laws.
8. Don't drive without licenses.
9. If you drink don't drive.
10. Put your money in the bank.
11. Don't be fooled or deceived.
12. Learn English for free.
13. The new immigration laws.
14. The immigrant's rights.
15. Be careful of HIV
16. If you are pregnant.
17. Protection against domestic violence.
18. The danger of drug used.
19. Cigarettes kill both you and your family.
20. When to call 911.
21. Fire detectors for the home.
22. Be careful crossing the streets.
23. Respect the STOP sign.
24. Secure your backdoor.
25. Don't leave your children home alone.
26. Don't use medicine without prescription.
27. How to start your own business.
28. Don't be afraid of the police but of the robbers.
29. Don't leave your car running in the garage.
30. Save your money.

**Appendix 10: Newsstand Locations for the *Laurel Leader***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Address</b>
SAVAGE MILL MARKETPLACE	8600 FOUNDRY ST SAVAGE, MD 20763
LAUREL DODGE	10052 WASHINGTON BLVD LAUREL, MD 20723
FOX CHEVROLET	501 WASHINGTON BLVD LAUREL, MD 20707
CENTRAL PLAZA(PASTA PLUS)	201-222 GORMAN AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL CENTER MALL/LAUREL SHOP	14828 BALTIMORE WASHINGTON BLVD LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL LAKES SHOPPING CTR	14390 BALTIMORE AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL EXECUTIVE PARK	8301-8387 CHERRY LN LAUREL, MD 20707
PIER 1 SHOPPING CTR	14201-14217 RT 1 LAUREL, MD 20707
WEICHERT REALTORS	10830 GUILFORD RD ANNAPOLIS JUNCTION, MD 20701
BOWLING BROOK-LEASING CTR	KNIGHTS BRIDGE RD LAUREL, MD 20724
COUNTRY MEADOW APT	KNIGHTS BRIDGE RD LAUREL, MD 20723
THE SEASON APT-LEASING CTR	OLD LANTERN WAY-NECT TO MGMT LAUREL, MD 20723
THE SEASON APT-MGMT OFFICE	OLD LANTERN WAY LAUREL, MD 20723
SOMETHING SPECIAL	504 MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL POST OFFICE	MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL POLICE STATION	350 MINICIPAL SQUARE LAUREL, MD 20707
SELBORNE HOUSE	501 MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20707
PHELPS SENIOR CENTER	701 MONTGOMERY ST LAUREL, MD 20707
PARK TERRACE APTS	PARK AVE & 8TH ST LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL LIBRARY	7TH & RT 198 LAUREL, MD 20707
NEAR LAUREL LIBRARY	7TH ST & RT 198 LAUREL, MD 20707
PARK SHELL	6000 SANDY SPRING RD (RT 198) LAUREL, MD 20707
NEAR WESTGATE APT	RT 198 NEAR 11TH ST LAUREL, MD 20707
WESTGATE APT(STAIRWELL)	8114 GORMAN AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
TOWER FEDERAL CREDIT UNION	7901 SANDY SPRING RD(NEAR VAN DUSEN) LAUREL, MD 20707
CITY HALL MINICIPAL CENTER	8103 SANDY SPRING RD LAUREL, MD 20707
ARBORY	N ARBORY WAY LAUREL, MD 20707
ARBORY	S ARBORY WAY LAUREL, MD 20707
CHERRYWOOD CONDOS	CHERRY LANE & CHERRY WOOD DR LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL REGIONAL HOSPITAL	7100 CONTEE RD LAUREL, MD 20707
HEALTH CARE NURSING HOME	14200 LAUREL PARK DR LAUREL, MD 20707
CENTRAL PARK AT VICTORIA FALLS	13701 BELICHASE BLVD LAUREL, MD 20707
NEAR LAUREL PARK APTS	8TH ST NEAR RT 198 LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL PARK APTS	801 8TH ST LAUREL, MD 20707
LAURELTON CRT APTS	704 GORMAN AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
VILLAGE AT LAUREL	GORMAN RD (RT 198) FAIRLAWN AVE LAUREL, MD 20707

BALT-WASH CORRIDOR CHAMBER	312 MARSHALL AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
BOX	CORNER OF 4TH ST & MONTROSE LAUREL, MD 20707
MIDDLETOWNE APT	14800 4TH ST LAUREL, MD 20707
BOX	4TH ST NEAR MIDDLETOWNE APTS LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL CROSSING APT	4TH ST NEAR CHERRY LN LAUREL, MD 20707
BOX	CHERRY LN NEAR ASHFORD BLVD LAUREL, MD 20707
AVONDALE APTS (MAILROOM)	8301 ASHFORD BLVD LAUREL, MD 20707
MORNINGSIDE HOUSE OF LAUREL	7700 CHERRY LN LAUREL, MD 20707
BOX	CORNER OF CHERRY LN & AYLESFORD LN LAUREL, MD 20707
MARYMOUNT-LAUREL LAKES(MAILROO	8220 MARYMOUNT DR LAUREL, MD 20707
BAY & SURF RESTAURANT	14411 BALTIMORE AVE (RT 1) LAUREL, MD 20707
CHERRY LANE HOME	9001 CHERRY LN LAUREL, MD 20708
CHERRY BRANCH-TH (BOX)	8900 CHERRY LN-NEAR MAILBOXES LAUREL, MD 20708
CHERRY BRANCH-TOWNHOUSE-MGT	8900 CHERRY LN LAUREL, MD 20708
FOX REST APTS- LOBBY	13913 BRIARWOOD DR LAUREL, MD 20708
FOX REST WOODS-HALLWAY	8801 HUNTING LN LAUREL, MD 20708
TOWN CENTER BARBER SHOP	13300 LAUREL-BOWIE RD (RT 197) LAUREL, MD 20708
LAUREL SQUARE APTS-OFFICE	CONTEE RD PAST DEERFIELD RD LAUREL, MD 20708
LAUREL SQUARE APTS-BOX	CONTEE RD NEAR ARDEN LN LAUREL, MD 20708
FOXFIRE APTS (BOX)	8700 CONTEE RD LAUREL, MD 20708
VILLAGE SQUARE NORTH (BOX)	CONTEE RD PAST DEERFIELD RD LAUREL, MD 20708
CRESTLEIGH APTS (BOX)	9400 MUIRKIRK RD LAUREL, MD 20708
MUIRFIELD AT-MONTPELIER (BOX)	9591 MUIRKIRK RD LAUREL, MD 20708
MUIRFIELD AT MONTPELIER	9500 MUIRKIRK RD LAUREL, MD 20708
VILLAGE AT MONTPELIER (BOX)	11728 SOUTH LAUREL DR LAUREL, MD 20708
VILLAGE AT MONTPELIER APT(BOX)	11658 SOUTH LAUREL DR LAUREL, MD 20708
TOWN & COUNTRY-WILLOWLAKE	OLD STAGE COACH RD & RD 197-CONTEE LAUREL, MD 20708
STEWART MANOR APTS	106 MORRIS DR LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL PINES APTS	RT 197 NEAR RT 198 LAUREL, MD 20708
SPRING HOUSE APT	SPRING HOUSE LN LAUREL, MD 20708
STEWART TOWERS APT	200 FORT MEADE RD LAUREL, MD 20707
NAILA'S FAMILY STYLE SHOP	336 BROCKBRIDGE RD LAUREL, MD 20724

PARKWAY MOBILE HOME-OFFICE	1 ELLEN ST LAUREL, MD 20724
HORIZON SQUARE APTS	3563 FORT MEADE RD (RT 198) LAUREL, MD 20724
ASHLEYL APTS	RED CLAY RD LAUREL, MD 20724
WOODLAND JOB CORPS	3300 FORT MEADE RD (RT 198) LAUREL, MD 20724
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY LIBRARY	3501 RUSSETT COMMON LAUREL, MD 20724
STARTING GATE SERVICE CENTER	3521 WHISKEY BOTTOM RD LAUREL, MD 20724
MD CITY FIRE STATION	3495 FORT MEADE RT (RT 198) LAUREL, MD 20724
LAUREL HYUNDAI	3516 FORT MEADE RT (RT 198) LAUREL, MD 20724
LAUREL JAGUAR	3516 FORT MEADE RT (RT 198) LAUREL, MD 20724
DANNEMANN'S AUTO REPAIR	100 LAFAYETTE AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
MIDWAY MOBILE CENTER	1000 BLK 2ND ST (RT 1) LAUREL, MD 20707
COLDWELL BANKER	6031 UNIVERSITY BLVD ELLICOTT CITY, MD 21043
REMAX REALTY	5575 STERRETT PLACE COLUMBIA, MD 21044
CRAIG NORTHRUP REALTY	5570 STERRETT PL COLUMBIA, MD 21044
HT BROWN/CENTRY 21 REALTY	6301 STEVENS FOREST RD COLUMBIA, MD 21045
PATRIOT HOMES	HARPERS CHOICE VILLAGE CTR COLUMBIA, MD 21044
CRAIG NORTHRUP REALTOR	12345 WAKE FOREST DR (COR OF RT 108) CLARKSVILLE, MD 21029
REMAX REALTY	8171 MAPLE LAWN FULTON, MD 20759
ST. MARYS	106 ST MARY'S PL LAUREL, MD 20707
PALLOTTI HIGH	113 ST MARY'S PL LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL HIGH	8000 CHERRY LN LAUREL, MD 20707
BOND MILL ELM	16001 SHERWOOD AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
DEERFIELD ELEM	13000 LAUREL BOWIE RD LAUREL, MD 20707
OAKLANDS ELEM	6 OAKLANDS ELEM LAUREL, MD 20707
HARRISON ELEM	7 HARRISON ELEM LAUREL, MD 20707
MONTPELIER ELEM	9200 MUIRKIRK RD LAUREL, MD 20707
EISENHOWER MIDDLE	13725 BRIARWOOD DR LAUREL, MD 20707
MLK MIDDLE	4545 AMMENDALE RD LAUREL, MD 20707
SCOTCHTOWN ELEM	15950 DORSET RD LAUREL, MD 20707
MURRAY HILL MIDDLE	9989 WINTER SUN RD LAUREL, MD 20707
HAMMOND ELEM	8118 ALADDIN DR LAUREL, MD 20707
HAMMOND MIDDLE	8118 ALADDIN DR LAUREL, MD 20707
GORMAN CROSSING ELEM	9999 WINTER SUN RD LAUREL, MD 20707
BROCKBRIDGE ELEM	405 BROCK BRIDGE RD LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL LIBRARY	527 7TH ST LAUREL, MD 20707
SAVAGE LIBRARY	9525 DURNESS LN LAUREL, MD 20707
LONG & FOSTER LAUREL	14405 LAUREL PL #103 LAUREL, MD 20707
REMAX LAUREL	13994 BALTIMORE AVE LAUREL, MD 20707

LONG & FOSTER BURTONSVILLE	3901 NATIONAL DR BURTONSVILLE BURTONSVILLE, MD 20866
DANNEMAN AUTO	100 LAFAYETTE AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL RAQUETBALL CLUB	204 FORT MEADE RD LAUREL, MD 20707
PARKVIEW NURSING CTR 1	9000 BRIARCROFT LN LAUREL, MD 20708
PARKVIEW NURSING CTR 11	9010 BRIARCROFT LN LAUREL, MD 20708
OLD GLORY HARLEY DAVIDSON	11800 LAUREL BOWIE RD LAUREL, MD 20708
TAMPICO GRILL RESTAURANT	42 WASHINGTON BLVD LAUREL, MD 20708
WEISS MARKET	GORMAN RD & RT 1 LAUREL, MD 20723
W-B SHOPPING CTR	9100 ALL SAINTS RD LAUREL, MD 20723
MORNING RACK	N. LAUREL & ALL SAINTS LAUREL, MD 20723
HIGHS STORE#14	500 MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL MEAT MARKET	347 MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20707
MORNING RACK	MAIN-NEAR RT 1 LAUREL, MD 20707
MORNING RACK	RT 1 NEAR MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL TRAIN STATION	MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20707
TASTEE DINER	118 WASHINGTON BLVD LAUREL, MD 20707
MCDONALDS	RT 1 & DOMER AVE LAUREL, MD 20707
SANDY SPRING PARK & RIDE	SANDY SPRING & VAN DUSEN LAUREL, MD 20707
LAUREL REGIONAL HOSPITAL	7100 CONTEE RD LAUREL, MD 20707
SILVER DINER	LAUREL PLACE NEAR RT1 LAUREL, MD 20707
NEAR COMFORT INN	LAUREL PLACE NEAR MULBERRY ST LAUREL, MD 20707
NEAR SUBWAY	LAUREL LAKES SHOPPING CTR LAUREL, MD 20707
7-11 STORE#26849	14001 BALTIMORE AVE (RT1) LAUREL, MD 20707
BOTTOM DOLLAR PLAZA-POST OFFIC	12655 RT 197 LAUREL, MD 20708
7-11 STORE#26800	12009 LAUREL BOWIE RD (RT 197) LAUREL, MD 20708
BURGER KING-CORRIDOR MKTPLACE	CORRIDOR MARKET PLACE & RT 198 LAUREL, MD 20724
STARTING GATE LIQUORS	RT 198 OLD ANNAPOLIS RD LAUREL, MD 20724
OLD LAUREL LEADER BUILDING	OFF MAIN ST LAUREL, MD 20724
BOTTOM DOLLAR PLAZA-NEAR GOODW	12655 RT 197 LAUREL, MD 20708

## **Appendix 11: Participants' involvement in local organizations**

### **Academic Organizations**

- American Association of University Women

### **Business Organizations**

- Laurel Board of Trade
- Laurel Business & Professional Women
- Laurel Regional Hospital Board of Directors
- National Active and Retired Federal Employees (NARFE), Laurel Chapter

### **Cause Organizations**

- American Cancer Society/Relay for Life
- Friends of the Patuxent Wildlife Refuge
- Patrons for Peace

### **Laurel Organizations**

- Friends of the Laurel Library
- Laurel Citizens Police Academy
- Laurel City Emergency Services Commission
- Laurel Civic Improvement
- Laurel Historical Society
- Laurel Moms Club
- Laurel Neighborhood Watch Group
- Laurel Senior Friendship Club
- Laurel Tree Board
- Laurel Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad
- Laurel Advocacy Referral Services (LARS)
- Neighborhood Watch Group
- PTA
- Women's Club of Laurel
- Various homeowners associations

### **Social Organizations**

- American Legion, Post 60
- Lions Club
- Phelps Senior Center

### **Religious Organizations**

- Faith Baptist Church
- First United Methodist Church
- Laurel Presbyterian Church
- St. Mark's United Methodist Church
- St. Mary's Catholic Church
- St. Nicolas Catholic Church

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