

Newspapers

Probably the most important weapon in your water safety campaign arsenal will be the local newspaper. Many Corps employees shy away from the paper. However, most newspaper reporters and editors are career-minded human beings who have the same likes and dislikes as you do. Understanding newspapering is most important. Once you have mastered what makes a newspaper tick, then you are ready to “attack.”

They are divided into basically six categories: national-international, regional, state, large metro, medium city and rural. You will probably never work with a national or international newspaper, like the *New York Times*, *USA TODAY*, *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, or *Los Angeles Times*. It is very likely you will also not work with regional papers like *The Atlanta Constitution*, or the *Chicago Tribune*. Statewide newspapers like *The Detroit News*, *The Oregonian*, *Dallas Times Herald*, *St Louis Post-Dispatch* and the *Louisville Courier-Journal* will send reporters to your lake rarely. There is a close relationship between statewide newspapers and large metropolitan papers like *The New York Post*, *Newsday*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Miami Herald* and the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. You will have some contact with these, but not as often as one might think. Usually, it will take a concerted effort on your part or some controversy to get a reporter from the above newspapers to come to your lake. Normally, USACE, Districts, Divisions and Labs work with them.

Now we're getting closer to your newspapers. Medium city newspapers like *The Chattanooga Times*, *Terra Haute*, *Indiana Tribune and Star*, and *The Forum* from Fargo, North Dakota, will print your articles, but, too, will require forethought and planning. These print thousands of copies daily.

Not all medium size cities print a daily newspaper, some arrive at the stands only two or three times each week. Examples of these are: *Southern Standard*, McMinnville, Tennessee, and the *Potomac News*, from Dumfries, Virginia. These newspapers have small staffs, but most actually print their papers in-house. Here is where you begin to shine. They are always searching for copy and will often come out and cover your events.

Now for your rural weekly newspapers, you might be surprised to learn there are more weekly newspapers than all the others combined. This is “the” newspaper, which is read, many times from front to back by the folks who live near your lake. They have small staffs and most do not print their papers. Usually, Wednesdays and Thursdays are printing days for them. Personnel at small newspapers range from two staffers to ten or twelve. The information is collected and sometimes laid out locally. Some even “shoot” the large-page negatives and take them to the large city newspaper to

However, some smaller weeklies gather the advertising and editorial copy/photographs during the week and drive to the printing facility. There they lay out and design the entire paper in one morning. It is printed in the afternoon and distributed in the early evening and mailed the same day. These weeklies depend on others, like your self, to bring them story ideas, copy and photographs.

They are underpaid, usually work from 60 to 80 hours each week, and are so short-staffed they cannot get out and report on lake activities. You may want them to come out and cover an event and they are busy stuffing business inserts into the newspaper, by hand. Or the editor may be out delivering the weekly edition to the stores or placing them in the racks. Or, instead of paying the bills, the accounting-receptionist is in the darkroom developing photos for the front page. They do

everything at the small newspapers from paying bills, to collecting advertising, to reporting crime, sports and weddings, to writing obituaries to changing the oil in the delivery truck to repairing the mechanism in the newspaper racks to changing fluid in the copy machine to painting the layout room to adding wax to the waxer.

They desperately want and need your local news. Does this sound like someone who is going to throw you out of their office or write adverse articles about your lake when you bring in the copy and photos to fill up their editorial space?

There are two types of newspaper space: advertising and editorial. Simply put, advertising you pay for and editorial space is free. The newspaper owner/operators will tell you the ad space is “yours” and the editorial columns are “mine” (the newspaper’s to control). You will be trying to “get” some of the editorial space away from the newspaper, while the editor may have promised that space to someone else.

There is just so much free space and everyone and their brother and sister are vying for it. Grandparents, for example, want the editor to print the photo of their grandbaby because it is the ONLY one on earth ... free. They may have given the editor the baby photo the week before and didn’t see it in the next edition. After the newspaper is on the streets a hypothetical newspaper office scene might look and sound like this, “I have subscribed to this paper for umpteen years, have bought umpteen ads for photo. Why didn’t you print my baby’s photo instead of that 01’ lake story? Just think if you had printed my grandbaby’s photo I would have bought a dozen copies to send to the folks out of state. See, you lost all those sales because of the lake coverage.”

Newspaper publishers will always plan for more advertising percentage than editorial space. They like to have anywhere from 60-40 to 65-35 percent. Extra editorial space is always available during local elections. In fact, the best possible edition to get space in is the week prior to election day.

It will be up to you to make it easy for the newspaper in order to get your material in print. Meeting their deadline is

paramount. Take a look at when the paper is printed. Let’s say Wednesday is publishing day. The worst mistake you can make in your life is to bring something in on Wednesday and ask for it to go in that week. You might get “strangled.” Seriously, back up your time to bring in the photo and copy the previous Thursday or Friday. If you want a reporter to come out to the lake, Thursdays and Fridays are great days for weekly newspapers.

Remember, newspaper people try and take off on the weekends, but rarely do. So, think of them when you are planning an event. If you must conduct it on a weekend, let the paper staff know as far in advance as possible.

Get to know every staff member so well they call you by your first name and you them. When you see them away from the newspaper office, say hello just like you would anyone else. Be friendly, not pushy nor demanding. It will pay in “inches” for the lake. They are people too, trying to earn a buck just like everyone else ... and it’s a tough job. Keep in mind what each person does at the newspaper’s office so you ask the correct person to approve whatever you want. Find out what their titles are simply look at the newspaper’s masthead. Most mastheads are located on the editorial page. You might jot down the names and titles so when you make your first media visit you will be able to match the face with the name.

Let’s say you have accomplished the above, now it’s time to get the water safety word out with the newspaper’s help. Here are some ideas for you. Take print slicks to the correct staff person before the boating season. You might want to call ahead and make a quick appointment on a Thursday afternoon or Friday morning. Show them the slicks and explain how you are trying to reduce boating accidents and drownings on the lake this summer and you need his or her help. These slicks are camera-ready, and the newspaper will use them as fillers.

If possible, get the decision maker to wax a selection of each size and get them placed above the layout table in the “waxed filler” area. So, when the layout person is on ultra deadline all he or she needs to do is “pull and paste” on the “blue line” (layout paper). After the page is “shot” the person pulls the waxed fillers off and places them back up for future use. The more you get up on the “filler wall” the better chance you have of seeing more and

more water safety slicks in print.

There is a possibility the editor might want to write a story about the new upcoming water safety program and use some of the slicks. Be ready just in case.

Another idea is a story about the history of the lake. Then, during one portion, the fatality rate could be brought out and your plan for informing the public weaved into the copy.

An accident fatality/drowning “stat” story is easy to obtain, but you must be careful how you approach it. The key is, “What are you doing to lower the numbers.” If you have a plan, then gather the number of boating accidents, boating fatalities and drownings, by year. This will be the writer’s background for the body of the story. Your plan could very well be the lead of the story.

Not everyone is a journalist so if you are one of those who hate to write, then getting the reporters to the lake might be your cup of tea. If you do most of the “leg work” for the reporter and make it easy for them to get a good story, your mission will be accomplished without writing articles.

In fact, if the reporter comes to the lake then 90 percent of the time you will receive more coverage because the reporter will know how much space he or she has and will actually lay out the photos and copy in their head while at the lake.

Reporters love good human-interest feature stories. People like to read features, too. Especially if the writer can come up with one of those award-winning punch endings, like, “... o yes, there is one small detail I forgot to tell you (the reader), So ‘n- So is BLIND!” It’s up to you to keep your feature antenna up and turning at all times.

When you are keeping the local newspaper in mind, remember internal Corps publications, too. *Engineer Update*, the USACE-PA monthly newspaper, is always looking for good stories. There are also the District and Division and Lab newspapers.

If you can, try to keep a 35mm or digital camera “loaded” and handy at all times. A good, strong, photograph will “sell” a story many times. A reporter can create what

occurred with words and your photo will prove it happened.

What if you are so lucky as to have a line artist at your lake? This person, if professional, can prove to be invaluable. Line art will also “sell” a story, if you happened to leave the lens cap on or forgot to reload the film or forgot the camera. Yes, the artist can be a great backup.

Special events, such as cleanups, “Blessing of the Boats”, festivals, a new boat arriving, another agency testing a BWI breathalyzer on the lake, etc., are stories the local newspaper should give you pre-coverage, hopefully coverage during (where the reporter covers the event), and post-coverage (when you normally provide the story or the stats to the reporter after the event).

Water-related awards are news and will provide your lake space ... like magic. While some may seem trivial to you, the local weekly will print them. On the spots, special acts, letters of commendation or appreciation, life-saving medals and plaques will find their way into the paper.

The new addition to the lake family and the departing or retiring Corps employee articles are good, too.

If you are visiting a school to give a water safety presentation, ask the reporter to come out and cover the event. Let the school teacher and principal know if the reporter is coming. Let’s say the editor says, “Sorry, we’re too busy. I can’t spare anyone.” Your immediate answer is, “If I provide you a photograph and a small amount of copy will you print them?” if the editor says “yes,” ask another Corps person to accompany you and take photographs. Remember the teacher’s name — spell it correctly -- and any of the children’s names in the photographs. If you can’t identify all the students, don’t I.D. any of them. Simply say “Freddie the Fish” visits with students from Mrs. Goodteacher’s sixth grade class, for example.

It’s parade time and the lake has a float. Tell the reporter what’s on the float, especially if it’s something unique. The reporter might want to get on top and shoot the crowd from your float or get a special angle with, let’s say the bandstand in the background of your float. Photo angles are so important to a photo jour-

nalist If you can come up with a terrific angle suggestion you might get your float or whatever on the front page ... maybe in color.

When something new happens at the lake, remember to bring in the newspaper reporter and keep in mind the possibility of a series or chronicle/progression type articles. For example, let's say the power plant at your lake is getting a new electronic board to warn anglers in the tailrace. Once the plan is approved, that's part 1 of the series. During installation is part 2. Maybe nearing completion could be part 3. Lastly, when the big board is lit up for the first time, that's part 4. If someone is saved because of the power-plant sight, that's a quasi part 5.

Keep the reporters informed of all public meetings, whether they come and cover them or not. Anytime the lake is forming an association or group to do anything, inform the newspaper reporter. Build a strong "stringer"-type relationship.

And, most of all, when something bad occurs at the lake, inform the same reporter. Being the first to call "your" reporter will help build rapport. Your call might sound something like, "Sue, there's been a boating accident down at Holmes Creek Boat Dock. The sheriff's and rescue team are on their way."

Is it time to visit the local newspaper offices and start laying the rapport foundation? In this case, your water safety successes are measured in "inches." Good luck with your new "lifesaving journalism" career.