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SEPTEMBER 26TH 2019
6:30PM TO 8:30PM

Halton Hills Cultural Centre Studio
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OPINION

WHO OWNS THE NEWS?

JOURNALISM IS PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT LAWS, WRITES LEE ANN WATERMAN



LEE ANN WATERMAN
Column

It's about trust. Our relationship with our readers is built on transparency, honesty and integrity. As such, we have launched a trust initiative to tell you who we are and how and why we do what we do. This article is part of that project.

The news is yours. The way we tell it is ours. Let me explain.

At its core, the role of a journalist is to share what they know with the public. And yet, the work they produce - be it a quick story on a collision that closed a highway during rush hour or an in-depth series on toxic substance use - is subject to copyright.

Under Canada's Copyright Act, copyright gives an individual or organization who owns a work like a news story "the sole right to produce or reproduce that work or any substantial part thereof in any material form." No one is allowed to copy or reproduce

copyrighted work without the owner's permission.

To put it another way, the information or news or facts contained within an article published in our newspapers or on our website is considered part of the public domain, but the words and sentences our journalists use to tell that story are not.

What does this mean for you as a reader and sharer of community news? Here's an example: If you're reading this column on our website and you want to share it with your Facebook friends, you can share a link to the column and some information about it, such as "I read this column on journalism copyright and wanted to share." But you shouldn't copy and paste the entire article on your Facebook page. The same holds true for breaking news, council stories or court reporting.

Beyond the legal issues involved, copying and sharing journalists' work in this way threatens their ability to continue to do that work. Journalism is expensive, requiring time and expertise to produce. An organization's exclu-

sive right to that content helps cover the cost.

Requiring readers to register on our website by providing their name, email address and postal code to get access to our local news and information - as I wrote in a previous column - is a key part of our business model. We use the trends that emerge from that data to help guide us in the issues you want to read, and how we present that information to you. It allows us to ensure our online advertisers that they are reaching an engaged local audience.

We define ourselves through this partnership with our readers. In short, for us to keep bringing you the news, everyone has to come to us to get it.

-Lee Ann Waterman is editor-in-chief of Torstar Community Brands, York Region and chair of Torstar Community Brand's trust committee. You can reach her at lwaterman@yrmg.com.

We welcome your questions and value your comments. Email our trust committee at trust@metroland.com.

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