

He speaks for newspapers, coast to coast

By Roy Downs
Canadian Community Newspapers Association—the name is emblazoned on the door.
It's an office on the second floor of an ancient office building on Shuter St. in Toronto—just a stone's throw from the

hubbub of Yonge St. and the Eaton Centre.
He sits behind a wooden desk in a small office in the front corner—a telephone, an in-out basket, filing cabinet, a briefcase, a few shelves and a window that looks out at Massey Hall across

the road, the only props for the scenario.
Behind the desk sits Jim Dills, Executive Director of CCNA, the man with his finger on the pulse of the community (or weekly) newspapers of Canada.
Until two years ago this

week, Jim Dills sat in an office on Main St. in Milton, keeping his pulse on the community, in his role as publisher of The Canadian Champion. He had been there since 1952 when he graduated from a journalism course at Ryerson Institute of

Technology (now re-named Ryerson Polytechnic Institute). He was managing editor of the paper several years, then publisher since 1966.
Two years ago this week he and his brother Dave, owners of the Dills Printing and Publishing Co. Ltd., sold The Champion, The Acton Free Press and The Independent, Georgetown plus the central printing plant in Acton to Douglas Bassett, President of Inland Publishing Co. Limited.

The sale was a traumatic experience for Jim Dills. On one hand, he relished the newspaper life, and his work at the paper gave him a chance to carry out his main hobby, community service. It was that service that had earned him, earlier that same year, the title of Milton's Citizen of the Year for 1977.

But faced with growth and a dulled enthusiasm to finance the expansion that seemed necessary, coupled with the realization that none of his family appeared ready to step in and take over, it made the Inland offer to purchase appear to be the only answer.

It was with a touch of sadness he emptied his office of all the personal mementos that had built up over a span of 26 years, and closed the door to that part of his life.
His "retirement" didn't last long—eight months, to be exact.
For several years, he had assisted the national weekly newspaper association by publishing its monthly bulletin. His son Steven, a Ryerson grad like his father, had been assistant to CCNA's executive director and one of Steven's responsibilities was putting out the monthly bulletin his father had published for several years.

Shortly after Jim and Dave sold The Champion, Steven resigned his CCNA post to become publisher of a new weekly paper in Onoway, Alberta. Shortly afterward, CCNA's executive director resigned his post. The national office was left with no leader, and no assistant.
Because he now had the time, and because he had experience with the monthly CCNA publication, Jim and his sister-in-law Kay Dills of Acton filled in voluntarily to make sure The Canadian Weekly Publisher continued to come out monthly. Kay is the former editor of The Acton Free Press.
It wasn't long before

the CCNA executive approached him to be the new executive director. The Association spent six months without one, and it needed someone with Jim's background and administrative experience to step in and take over.
Jim had put the eight months of "freedom" to good use. A keen chronicler and collector of Milton's history, he had spent the interval organizing his voluminous file of clippings, pictures, notes and dates.
He served ex-officio on the town's Downtown Business Improvement Association, and spent a lot of time on Milton Historical Society's research and planning for the future of the old Halton court house.
And he worked on the Rotary Club project, the development and implementation of the plans for former Kernighan House beside the mill pond into a community use building.
He didn't spend much time in carpentry and picture-framing, his other two hobbies. "I'm lousy with my hands, I just don't have the patience I guess," he admitted.
But time lay heavy on those hands, that had always been so busy in the work of publishing an award-winning community weekly. "Without deadlines to live to, you get a frustrated feeling," he recalled.
After eight months of putting at various projects and living without the deadlines to which he had become accustomed, the CCNA invitation to step in as executive director was readily accepted.
If he wasn't going to be a newspaper publisher any more, his life's work, his administrative talents and his participation in a host of community activities had prepared him for just such a post.
Today, he's a commuter. He catches the GO Bus to Toronto at 7:35 a.m. and it brings him home again around 6 p.m., every Monday to Friday. He tries not to bring office work home evenings and weekends, but it's difficult. Sometimes he does his "extras" on the bus and to work.
At first he thought he might be able to do a lot of the work from his home. But so far the job has meant his full-time attendance at the Toronto office.
His support staff includes two women.
Sister-in-law Kay Dills has since taken over the



Jim Dills, two years later. Former publisher of The Canadian Champion, Jim Dills is enjoying his new job as Executive Director of the Canadian Community Newspapers Association. The national office is a liaison with six provincial newspaper associations and covers 546 members from coast to coast. Pins on a map on one wall of his Toronto office indicate the location of the member weeklies.

CCNA: Small office, big role

Jim Dills' role as executive director of Canadian Community Newspapers Association is mainly a desk job, but it does get him from one end of the country to the other, at least once a year, with some shuttling back and forth to Ottawa.
His greatest role is in liaison with the six provincial associations that represent the 546 member community weeklies all the way from Ucluelet in British Columbia to Carbonear in Newfoundland. That means attending all the provincial conventions, which are held annually, as well as the national convention which moves from province to province each year.
Last year's national in Edmonton, which he helped to co-ordinate, drew 400 representatives from 150 papers. Next year's is in Halifax and he is already deeply involved in its planning.
One provincial group covers British Columbia and the Yukon, one serves Alberta and Northwest Territories, a third covers Atlantic Canada, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario each have their own

provincial associations. Jim's "boss" is an executive committee, drawn from the national board of directors. There are 17 directors, four from Ontario and two or three representing the other federated provincial associations. The board meets three times a year; the executive committee monthly.
Directors don't pop into the office every day of the week, so Jim is pretty well left alone to run the CCNA's affairs. He describes his work as being "like a one-man band."
CCNA began as Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association 62 years ago. The "weekly" part of the name was changed to "community" a few years ago, to represent the changing style of the member papers, some of which are now published twice or three times a week.
"CCNA represents the weeklies in a number of different areas," Jim explained.
One role is education—the upgrading of people in the community newspaper field. The group works with various educational institutions

in upgrading the journalism and advertising programs, helping them send better-trained beginners into the field. The association also helps upgrade the qualifications of people in the industry, through regular bulletins to publishers and the monthly magazine. Seminars and annual "better newspaper" contests are also held.
Representation of the industry in government circles is another CCNA service. Jim often sees federal government representatives, sometimes in reaction to pending legislation that would hamper newspapers, sometimes seeking interpretations of legislation.
The association also represents its members in the field of advertising. At the moment, CCNA does not have a sales force promoting weeklies to the large national advertisers, but all that will change soon when the office expands and adds a presentation bureau.
The bureau would require two full time staffers. They will present information on the newspaper industry to major

advertisers and advertising agencies, when the new arm of CCNA is established early in the new year.
In the field of education, Jim has plans for a national affairs conference for newspaper editors, to be held in Ottawa. "It would give local editors an insight into federal affairs. We need the knowledge, and access to the knowledge," he suggests. "I hope I can bring it off."
He has already been to Ottawa several times, studying legislation that affects the weeklies, such as the post office act and the elections act.
The weeklies have never yet sought any specific legislation, he said, but the association plans to draft a brief to the Royal Commission on Newspapers in the near future. One area of concern right now is a federal proposal to tax advertising supplements in the weeklies.
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Publisher of the Drayton Valley weekly in the same province. Mark is due to graduate in marine biology from University of Guelph this year, and Paul is working full time at the Inland Publishing plant in Acton, apprenticing in the photo-mechanical department.
Daughters Catherine and Carolyn are still in school.
The Dills have no plans to leave the Milton they have come to love. They are currently expanding their Campbell Ave. home.
As for The Champion, Jim admits he still enjoys reading the paper. He pointed out the enjoyment is increased now, because it's all new to him, compared to the years when he knew in advance what was being published.

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