

The Essex Free Press is an independent weekly newspaper, locally owned and operated by The Essex Free Press Limited

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Defending tradition, striving for style

Has factual and objective reporting by community newspapers gone out of style? Should a newspaper that respects and attempts to uphold the time-honoured standards associated with the news industry be considered 'old-fashioned'?

free press

editorial

laurie brett

These are two questions that were on our minds when Free Press staff recently engaged in a community

newspaper review. Through an exchange program coordinated by the Ontario Community Newspaper Association, we were paired with The Minden Times, a paid-circulation newspaper of comparable size. We reviewed two editions of their paper and they reviewed two editions of ours using a set of general excellence criteria developed by OCNA for their annual Better Newspapers Competition. What made the exercise especially valuable for us was the fact that The Minden Times is considered to be "Ontario's best small town newspaper" for its circulation.

So, what did we learn? We learned that relevant, well-sourced, informative news stories are still the industry's touchstone for excellence. Opinion pieces and advertorials masquerading as news have not replaced quality mainstream news reporting. Tradition triumphs.

We also learned that powerful presentation is important. Creative design and well-composed photography offer the reader a more enjoyable experience that has greater impact. Style rules.

Best of all, we learned a lot about our vision for the Free Press and the direction in which we want to go. We're proud of the fact that the Essex Free Press is "The best read community weekly newspaper in the Essex area". Now we want to be "Ontario's best small town newspaper".

To that end, you will notice a few changes this week – the use of placelines at the beginning of stories, the first appearance of our new "Business" section, and a new editorial feature called "Question of the Week" where we invite you to tell us what you think about a specific issue. Randy Chedour's new monthly column "I've Got Issues" debuted in last week's edition and other new columnists are in the works.

So watch what happens in our pages in the coming weeks. We think you'll like what you see.



Mayor Ray Nagin is a man in the spotlight these days. The mayor of New Orleans is on all the news and talk shows as the one-year anniversary of the disaster called Katrina is marked.

The first reconstruction year has showed promise. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has rebuilt the levees bigger and stronger than ever before. The Superdome is renovated and ready for the New Orleans Saints first season game. But several hospitals remain closed. A crime explosion forced Mayor Nagin to call in the National Guard to augment city police. But most telling of all, about half the dispossessed population has never returned and remains scattered across the country. These people are mostly black and poor.

Developers want the land their ruined homes sit on for high-priced condos and luxury homes. Mayor Nagin is caught in the middle. He steadfastly maintains that all the Crescent City's

citizens will eventually be allowed to come home. Few agree. Planners say the results of Katrina will



opinion
bill gay

turn a predominantly black city into a rich white community that will become the new Las Vegas East.

Nagin says federal funding is being funneled through the state and has not reached New Orleans yet to make a real difference. He points out the hard truth. If Katrina had hit a white area like Orange County, or even a Hispanic area like West Miami, help would have come faster from the

very beginning. So, years after the landmark Civil Rights Bills of 1964-65, African-Americans still feel alienation from the white establishment.

A study released by the Ipperwash Inquiry last week revealed that blacks and First Nations people are much more likely to be shot by police here in Ontario than white people are. So much for any feelings of superiority we might have here in Canada that we treat minorities better than they do south of the border.

The people of New Orleans are our relations, so to speak, as that city and the State of Louisiana were settled by the same French explorers who were among the first Europeans to come to this part of Ontario and Michigan. They have retained some of their French heritage but, as here, not enough. Let us wish Mayor Nagin and the citizens of New Orleans all the best as they rebuild a grand city. They're going to need all the help they can get.



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