

WTE Top 10 Stories of 2009

There was one thing strikingly obvious about the WTE's choice of its Top 10 stories of the past year.

Every story was one they did little more than write the words from press releases, wire service reports or information provided to them by third parties.

There is not a story among the ten that a reporter wherein the WTE "broke" the news - that they ferreted out a story on their own. They just repeat what they read.

The closest was their "Top" story of 2009 - the Hitching Post closing. But, credit for the first story concerning the travails of the Hitch must go to Amie Meneghetti, former Channel 5 "do-everything" gal.

I had been contacted a couple months before Amie broke the story about employees not receiving their paychecks by an employee who told me much the same thing. I arranged to meet with him outside the Hitch that night at 10:00 pm but he did not show. I waited around for awhile and then dropped the story. It has been my practice not to go after businesses - not to try to become another Tom Martino - so I did not find it difficult to drop the matter. Amie did a very good job covering the story later and I commended her on her work.

The real story on the Hitching Post closing should have been how long they were allowed to stay open with multiple fire and building code violations and health department citations. That is still the story. The Cheyenne Herald has been informed by reliable sources that the Hitching Post had become a very dangerous place to

stay as a guest or eat as a customer. By a remarkable coincidence, the City did not find it necessary to close the Hitch until after yet another Frontier Days had come and gone. City officials knew how dangerous conditions were at the Hitch well before Frontier Days and allowed it to remain open. But, the WTE is unaware of that evidently and ran a story provided them by the City and let it go at that.

Their choice for their second "top" story of the year was the Guard deployment of 900. No question, that's important but there were other Guard deployments during the year and each is equally important - regardless of number of Guardsmen or women involved.

Others of what the WTE considered "top" stories for 2009 included the large fine levied on Frontier Refinery. If they did more reporting on a steady basis, they would know that Frontier Refinery is not a stranger to fines or settlements for their actions at the refinery.

And the WTE wrote about the loss of Strawberry Fudge at CFD this summer as though it was the first horse to die there. It's hard to put a number to the importance of any story in which a person dies or one or more animals die. Why, for example, was the loss of a single horse at CFD more newsworthy than the deaths of multiple cats in the recent recovery of dozens of cats from two houses belonging to animal "collectors?"

Sierra Trading Post laying off a few dozen employees - their first layoff in Cheyenne in their time here - was more noteworthy than the closing of long-standing retail

chains like Circuit City, Rex Electronics, C.B. & Potts and the continuing deterioration of downtown from the loss of Grier Furniture, Z's, and Dinneen's?

As so often happens in Cheyenne, there is great excitement when an announcement is made about the coming of a new business. Then, there is no comparable announcement when that business does not come to Cheyenne or chooses another city instead of Cheyenne. Jubilation about new businesses should have the Prescott Rule applied: "Don't announce until you see the whites of their eyes." Then LEADS and other faux economic development groups wouldn't look as foolish as they do so often.

The WTE finds "stories" about the Cheyenne Community Clinic closing important but they don't dwell on whose fault it was. The United Way is slowly killing off worthy organizations that provide services to those most needy. Just by withholding support for those groups, the United Way has become a local executioner. Yet, businesses will allow them to petition for employees to grant payroll deductions to enable their taking such actions. When employees and other donors to charitable causes determine that they can make their own donations - that they don't need third party salaried persons to make their decisions for them - these valuable groups like Cheyenne Community Clinic and Prevent Child Abuse Wyoming will continue to provide their needed services.

If the Tribune-Eagle would advocate on behalf of those organizations ministering to the most needy in our community, some of the draconian decisions that led to the demise of those groups won't be made. The WTE has lost their "bully pulpit" and that is unfortunate. But it wouldn't hurt them to try. Try to do the right thing.

In their judgment, there was no news to both the Marriott franchisee and the "Foreclosure King" withdrawing interest in redeveloping the area across from the Wrangler. Nor the hospital CEO who initiated confiscation of Nob Hill properties losing his job. Nor of all the degree sellers having to leave their Wyoming bases, close or take their nefarious operations elsewhere. They never reported a word on that. Because the Cheyenne Herald led the charge to rid Wyoming of those worthless operations. That would have required the WTE to once again follow our lead and they avoid that if they can. They can't always do that so when they do pirate our stories, they simply do so without giving us credit. So be it.

The only reason they knew that Sierra Trading Post laid off "66 people in Cheyenne" is that management of STP told them so in a press release. Other major employers who have terminated greater numbers of employees haven't made press releases about their action so the WTE remains in the dark.

Reviewing all 24 issues of the Herald that were printed in 2009, I can not pick ten stories out of all of them that were "best" or "top." That's because the stories appearing on these pages are the result of initiating the action that resulted in the stories being developed and written. Not using press releases, press conferences or a wire service to complete stories is quite different from the WTE. That is all they do. They have not had an investigative reporter for years and their lack of interest in original material has caused locals to stop going to them with tips.

That is unfortunate. We could use the help. Since Justin Joseph, Chris Jose and Amie Meneghetti have left KGWN, there is no one with whom to share the load. It is more likely that a Denver media outlet will break a Cheyenne story than any local media other than the Cheyenne Herald getting to it first.

The WTE ranked a family murder / suicide as a top story but ignored the multiple other murders committed in the city during the past year. Neither did they consider the death of a man in a local motel room where the battery had been removed from a smoke detector a major story of 2009.

The WTE used to ask readers to help determine which stories should be ranked for the year. When WTE readers did not agree with the dubious and uninformed choices of insiders, that, along with other "stunts" they've used to suggest readers' opinions are important to them, was discontinued. Just as they have no "community representatives" on their editorial board, and no readers voting on most popular businesses by product or service category (because the fraud did not result in the additional advertising revenue they had hoped for), and the "entrepreneur" section was ended for the same reason. They don't want to risk readers' judgment making much more sense than their own so they canned them.

"Top 10" lists of any sort are subjective and rife for criticism. This one from the WTE was no exception. The problem is they would not recognize a "top story" is it bit them on their ample fannies.

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The Jessica Venable Compassion Fund

Several readers of the Cheyenne Herald have asked me to let them know when they could contribute funds to help Jessica Venable buy the necessities she otherwise would have to do without while she's confined. To provide money for her personal account in the Lusk Women's Center, one has to be on the approved visitor's list. I have been approved and have forwarded money donated by Cheyenne Herald readers and my wife and myself to her twice now. If you want to help, please send a check to the Cheyenne Herald at the address below. I will convert donations to the necessary money order to send up there in your name. She is assured of having adequate money to at least buy the basic things she's had to do without - through the generosity and concern of Herald readers to date - but if you also want to be involved, you can now do so. You can also send her a card or note. Contact me for her mailing address. And, on behalf of Jessica, I thank you.