

Anything two people know is not a secret

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the Associated Press threatened the Cheyenne Herald

by Dave FEATHERLY

I know. I know. Most people in the United States don't even realize the Associated Press is still around. Many mistake it for the former United Press International (UPI) that pretty much went down the toilet years ago. Others think Reuters absorbed the AP because they break more stories. Or, Bloomberg. Even the Huffington Post. Most do know that the AP is less significant than it once was as a news source - a "news agency" - a credible wire service. More of their work is overseas now.

Another interesting thing is that when I have mentioned "AP" to people over the last several years, they don't know what that is. There was once a grocery store chain "A&P" but the Associated Press has diminished to the point that few know what they do or who they are. Or even if they "do." Perhaps the demise of Great Atlantic & Pacific Tea Co, Inc. (A&P) confused people - thought it was that other "AP." Who knows. The fact is that few now know there is such a business as the Associated Press.

I do. Not only because of what I do but because they have hijacked stories broken by The Cheyenne Herald and have never shown the courtesy (let alone professional integrity) to attribute The Cheyenne Herald as their source. I can't think of a story they pilfered off these pages or from the Cheyenne Herald website where the AP attributed the source of their story - or their knowledge that there even was a story - to the Cheyenne Herald.

They have, though, called me for information on stories broken here. I have never asked an AP reporter anywhere for help. Being first means never having to say "Help!" from other media as they frequently do from me. You name it, print or broadcast, several here in Cheyenne and from Casper have asked for help on their stories.

Quite often that story was "borrowed" from me (the Cheyenne Herald) and whatever guidance my story gave them for their "own" story always was taken (stolen) from the Herald without attribution. So, my cooperation ended. Recently, a new television station reporter from Casper asked to be told from whence my information came. And, would I be interviewed for his story? The answer to the first was that I no longer cooperate with competitors and the second was, "are you kidding?"

Radio stations have also sought details from me on stories first written about on these pages. Because they didn't use words from the interview verbatim, I stopped cooperating. Same with Channel 5. I used to refer tips to Justin Joseph because he was tenacious and would follow up. There is no longer a person like Justin in this town - no one that does more than "chase" stories generated by press releases and/or press conferences. And seldom does a local resident contact another media type because they have come to learn it is a waste of their time.

The "Associated Press" I am slinging barbs at is the Wyoming AP. The national AP does publish ballgame scores and has probably even uncovered a story or two of their own. Here in Wyoming, however, it was Reuters that did the investigative report on an office in Cheyenne that is the address for a couple thousand business registrations. An outfit with a German name and London address, not a U.S. news agency, did a story from the hinterlands of Wyoming. Quite a credit to the "news gathering" organizations sitting in Cheyenne, wouldn't you say?

In the last issue, I picked up a story I read on the Casper Star-Tribune website that gave me a lead-in to make more fun of Tom Buchanan, the professor-chosen president of the

University of Wyoming, the state's only four year institution of higher learning. A quote in the story, presumably taken from a press release from UW, made a reference to Tom's high standards of allowing the sharing of "open ideas" on the UW campus. I could not resist reminding the most intelligent readers of words in Wyoming (readers of the Cheyenne Herald) about the financial loss Buchanan caused by banning Obama friend and retired terrorist Bill Ayers from speaking at the very same UW campus. A judge said, "yes, he can" after Tom said "no, he can't" and the rest is an example of checkbook journalism. Paying a guy you did not want to speak in your surrounds to speak - the irony is so delicious.

There were 123 words in that throw-away story with a Gillette dateline.

Probably at the behest of one of AP's lackey customers like Reed Eckhardt, the AP "bureau chief" from Denver called twice on the same day, the first time leaving a message asking me to call him. Before I had a chance to do that, he called again.

I understand that I am supposed to quake when someone affiliated in some way with a once proud and once important organization calls to demand answers, help or explanations from me. I don't. I've learned over the years, including working in Manhattan, that those guys are nothing special. So forgive me if I'm not impressed by a "bureau chief" over two Wyoming AP reporters. That's like the largest bakery in Buford.

He scolded me for using the story about bark beetles in Laramie (I didn't know what he was talking about until going to the page he referenced) without paying AP for them. I had anticipated the purpose of his call and was hoping he was upset with my using a few words of a story filed by the AP. He opened a door.

He couldn't have taken the bait any better if I were using 10 lb test line.

I pointed out to him that he had a lot of chutzpah to contact me about such a trivial matter when "his" AP had often and repeatedly stolen important stories, stories they could take nationwide or worldwide, from me and never once had given attribution as to where they had stolen that story or which non-AP, non-dues-paying, non-genuflecting publication had provided them the story basis to begin with.

It is good journalism and professional to at least put "as first reported by the Cheyenne Herald" in the stories they hijacked from these pages or my website. Never have they, the WTE, or CST done that. But he was apoplectic about my publishing ten dozen unimportant words from one of their forgettable stories? The words were in quotes so it was evident I was not plagiarizing them and there was a statement that they had come from "other Wyoming media." Because the WTE, CST and AP will not acknowledge my publication, I will not recognize theirs. Fair is fair.

In my memory, only one Wyoming newspaper has ever credited the Cheyenne Herald with breaking the story they were piggybacking. That was the Riverton Ranger and it had to do with former Wyoming Superintendent of Schools Jim McBride's superintendent evaluations from Bennett, Colorado that I posted.

This "bureau chief" (what's a bureau chief in tiny Wyoming?) weakened and I offered that if he would stop stealing my stories without attribution, I would promise that during my remainder of publishing the Herald, I would never publish anything an AP reporter originated. He threatened an attorney. I told him I'd publish that letter. Send it. He gulped and the conversation was over.

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