

The Cheyenne Herald has become the hottest ticket in town

All the water cooler talk is now about what the Herald has on its pages



by Dave FEATHERLY

One issue away from issue number 100, the Cheyenne Herald, without any special effort or intention, has become the focus of more love / hate feelings than anything or anyone since Howard Cosell.

When I started this publication back in January of 2002, I was regularly appearing on a radio call-in program so I had some measure, beyond just knowing that the papers being printed were being picked up at various redemption points, of what at least some people thought of the effort.

At the time, it seemed that a lot of people were listening and I had comments from many every time I was on the program.

Then, I was reliably told, the LEADS group went to station management and said my take on what was going on in town was not consistent with theirs and was hurtful to their efforts and I was declared "persona non grata." LEADS coveted only praise and I had criticized their efforts and pointed out their failures.

Media, be it newspaper, radio or television, that is advertiser-driven have great fear that their revenue stream will be affected and that is why they are so cautious about disclosing the truth - if it is embarrassing to the "powers-that-be."

By that point in time, fortunately, the Cheyenne Herald had become established and could do without the limited radio audience exposure. It had reached a level where my appearance on that radio program was more beneficial to them than to me so it was a blessing in disguise to be blacklisted from the program.

I've considered going to another AM station in town and produce a call-in program but am not certain it's something I want to do or could handle well enough in addition to publishing this paper. There is such a lack of that type of programming now that a good one would be successful and presents both an opportunity and a challenge. Maybe at a later date. For now the Herald is the focus.

Just before I started the Herald, a couple guys had published a few issues of a "newspaper" of sorts. It was so like the one at 702 W. Lincolnway that it had no chance for success. Readers were not looking for an echo. They were looking for an alternative. That's what I've tried to provide. And it seems to be working.

The daily decided, at our beginning, to never mention the Cheyenne Herald on their pages. But they were, and are, willing to steal our stories and present them as their own. There are readers of the printed word here in Cheyenne who have still not discovered the Herald and continue to read the Tribune-Eagle. Those people don't always know who did the investigative work or first published the stories pilfered by the Tribune-Eagle, the AP and the Casper Star-Tribune.

But our readers do.

And there are now thousands of them. Many thousands of them.

For that, I am very grateful.

But the printed paper you may now be holding isn't the only place our words are being read.

Last September, I set up a website and now anyone anywhere in the world who is hooked up to the internet can access www.cheyenneherald.com and read not only a selection of the stories from the printed version, but also entire lawsuits and exhibits to those lawsuits.

Many who read the postings on the website have access to the printed Herald but there are many others who don't. In the few months the website has been available on the internet, over 16,000 visits have been made to it.

It is possible to determine when people visit the website, how many visits there are for each day, and what they are viewing (reading) on the website. Not surprisingly, people at work during the day are most likely to visit the website. Week-days are much more popular than weekends and the day that the paper comes out and the following day have been the most popular for visits.

Recently, there has been a leveling out of visits and the number has grown to about 3,000 a month. When a "Breaking Story" is posted (one that has not yet been in the printed Cheyenne Herald), it usually goes to the top of list of our stories read on the Cheyenne Herald website. But virtually every article posted has heavy readership.

There are also other websites that have "linked" to the Cheyenne Herald.

Any story having to do with the incident at the Outlaw Saloon in April of 2005 that led Dwayne Sells' death has had great interest. In fact, for months after the first Sells story was available on the website, it remained among the highest four stories read in that month. Different websites involving either Dwayne Sells or motorcycle issues have linked to the Cheyenne Herald.

In addition to the printed Cheyenne Herald that are picked up and read, or read by multiple people in public places, and the Cheyenne Herald website which is viewed by a few thousand every month, there is another place where articles from the Herald, wherever they have been read, provoke criticism and praise. That is a forum on the internet that allows people to express themselves - often in anonymity. Most often in anonymity.

An amazing thing about the local forum is that there are some who profess to despise, dispute, dismiss or disregard every word presented in the Herald, yet they hang on our every word.

Someone recently told me that the mayor was on that local radio call-in program and was asked a question by the hostess about something that had appeared in the Cheyenne Herald. The mayor told her he didn't read the Herald, then quoted from an article in that issue.

He is not alone in his denial. There are those who read every word, sometimes more than once so they can understand the detail being provided, and then claim to their friends that they would never stoop to reading our pages.

In spite of these thumbsuckers contention that what is presented on our pages is untrue - even comparing us to the National Enquirer - no one has ever legitimately disputed the truthfulness or accuracy of our writings. Only twice has anyone even suggested, "you'll be hearing from my attorney." Both times the threat was empty and such contact would have been welcomed. What such a threat has a tendency to do is push me to look deeper into the issue - to be prepared in case such a threat is pursued and I find more. In both cases referenced, they would have rued their action had they sicced some local doofus attorney on us.

The number of people, although unknown by name and intellect, who read the forum, may be sizeable. The number who post, anonymously or known, is minimal. A lot of the numbers represent the same person reading something over and over again. Suffice it to say that if the count shows 8,500 people read a thread about the Herald, at least a few thousand were not repeat visitors.

I can also tell from my website reports that the minute articles are posted, reading begins and posting to the forum starts. In the afternoon that the paper gets to pickup points, the numbers spike. For days, the critics are beside themselves. Apoplectic. Some are so desperate for attention in their lives that they dissect each word, every paragraph, page and subject in the latest issue. I am considering reducing the number of pages made available to the Kaczynskis of the internet so they have to leave the computer screen and get a little fresh air on their way outside to pick up a Herald.

Stories in the WT-E or presented on Channel 5 don't evoke water cooler talk or debate. Forget radio coverage of stories or issues of interest. Only those appearing in the Herald provoke thought, talk, support or discussion. That's good.

The tormented and lonely souls stuck in front of a computer screen, having become captive or addicted to the lure of posting venomous messages anonymously, can't get enough of what they often claim upsets them to the point of nausea or sleeplessness. You have to wonder why they keep reading the Herald. Are their lives so empty they have to read material they claim to dislike, disagree with or regard with disdain?

They're like a discussion group in prison - sitting in a circle venting about unpleasant and miserable lives. There's no love or respect for one another but each is all the other has - so the posters continue to type in their anguished words, hoping to be read by a least a few of their fellow tormented souls on the internet.

We have the normal people who read the Herald either in printed form or selected stories on the website. We have the intelligent and the tortured. We have the concerned and the angry. We have professionals of all types, the retired, the young, the blue collared, those nearby and distant - we have all types of readers. When asked about the demographics of Cheyenne Herald readers, I just say I don't know. So long as the paper is being read and the comments are mostly positive and supportive, I just don't care what a reader's education is, what their income is, how many and what kind of vehicle anyone drives. I just don't care.

There is some satisfaction in driving those troubled few whose only opportunity to be published is to post anonymously to a forum with a few others, to distraction. They've probably covered the toilet stall walls and have no blank spaces thereon for their juvenile rantings. The Cheyenne Herald, in four-plus years, is the hottest ticket in town. It is the only "must read." There is no other.

THE CHEYENNE HERALD IS INDEPENDENT - NOT A MEMBER OF THE WYOMING PRESS ASSOCIATION.