

100!



by
Dave
FEATHERLY

Someone, at some time in the past, decided that anniversaries 25, 50 75 and 100 should hold special significance. Maybe it was Hallmark or Fanny Farmer. Centennial, bicentennial, millennium - occasions marked by multiples of 100.

So when the Cheyenne Herald hit issue No. 100 with this one, I thought I should take advantage of an occasion that will come around only every four plus years and commemorate in some way, that longevity. Not many make it this far.

As the front page notes, the first issue of this specialty paper, later dubbed the "local advocacy journal" by Reed Eckhardt of the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle, was published on January 30, 2002. By the way, I cannot thank Reed enough for coming up with a tagline that I had been unable to find. And I also thank Reed for taking the WT-E to depths that makes a paper like mine so attractive to readers.

During these last four years and four months, I have met some incredible people. People I likely would not have met had it not been for establishing the Cheyenne Herald. And I've done stories with people who I have yet to meet. As time goes by, the paper's reach extends further and further from the base in Cheyenne, Wyoming. In the past month, I've received "packages" of information from a lawyer in Albuquerque, New Mexico and from an inmate's friend in El Centro, California. A week or so before that, I received an e-mail and follow-up telephone call from a reader of ours on the website from Las Vegas, Nevada.

I won't try to list all those I've met in the course of producing this publication because that would be impossible and I'd leave someone out and they'd think I forgot them. And I won't name some of my best sources from within the bowels of government - for obvious reasons.

Early on, I became acquainted with Gay Woodhouse, local attorney extraordinaire. I was familiar with her name because she had just been Wyoming Attorney General but I don't frequent courtrooms too often and had never even seen her before she took on the annexation case for Betty Cox, Ann King and their neighbors west of town. In my opinion, Gay has done more for this community than any and all elected officials put together. Many readers of these pages know her for her tireless and successful work on the multiple illegal annexations approved by the mayor and city council. But she has done so much more for residents of this city and county. Has she, as the WT-E charged, made a "cottage industry" of representing the people's

interest's against intrusion of government or neighbors? God, I hope so. I hope she never wearies of being a champion for people who otherwise could not find representation.

Where would we be today in this city (and county) had Gay Woodhouse not come along when she did? I shudder to think.

Early on, I met Jim Mathewson. Jim is, in my opinion, the area's best researcher and will not be deterred, frightened or discouraged from pursuing the truth. His investigations and writing won awards for the WT-E before he ended his relationship with them. Not with his name attached. They were brazen enough to hijack his stories as their own.

I've met a bunch of political candidates and discussed political campaigns with several. Many, I shared nothing in common with except my love for political campaigns. I make it known that my role ends when a campaign ends. I love campaigns but believe governance is too often "filthy." I told Jack Spiker that in 2001 after directing his mayoral campaign and look what has happened.

Late in the second year of the Herald, I met Ronda Lovett. Several months earlier, her 29 year-old daughter, Cathi Blevins, had died for want of an organ transplant for which the State's Medicaid program would not pay. Ronda told me she had sent letters to most, if not all, of the state's media outlets, state legislators and the governor's office. None replied. She had promised her daughter, who had an 11 year-old daughter at the time of her death, that "your life will have meant something." Ronda wanted a change in state law so the same thing wouldn't happen to another person between the ages of 21 and 64. Younger and older are protected.

I sat with her for an interview and she has more courage in her little finger than most of us have in our entire body. She had spoken with the new governor, Dave Freudenthal, and been told that the next session was a budget session and such an effort would not even be heard.

The headline of the September 15, 2003 Cheyenne Herald read:

How could we?

We allowed a young mother to die.

The three words and subhead took up the entire area above the fold.

A bill to change Wyoming Medicaid rules was introduced in that budget session. It passed and in our March 8, 2004 issue, we showed the Governor signing the bill, with Ronda, Cathi's daughter and Cathi's sister who helped care for her in the last months of her life and others in attendance and observing.

I was invited but that's not what I'm in this for. The fewer people who know what I look like, the more things I can overhear out in public. I don't use my picture on these pages and I don't appear on television. Robert Geha once invited me to do a segment with him on Friday nights - to discuss city affairs. I declined. My pursuit is not celebrity.

I met a person who became probably the most important person to the survival and success of the Herald. Phyllis Atchison was introduced to me through a mutual friend. She had read the Herald and listened when I used to appear regularly on Jill Cumer's program on KGAB. Sometimes she would call while I was on the air but more often she would call later and either praise my efforts or offer suggestions for improvement. (That, of course, was seldom.) She came along at a time when I wondered if I could continue to produce the Herald, with uncertain financial award.

Let's just say that she was good for the Cheyenne Herald's future just as she was good for so many other causes here. Until she passed away in November of 2004, we spoke almost daily - often at great length. We laughed. Phyllis was terminally ill from the day I met her and she outlived her doctor's prognosis for her by two and a half years. My goal in every conversation was to make her laugh. Near her end, when she was in more pain than medication could dull, she would cry out when she laughed and I would apologize.

"No, no," she would say, "I need to laugh."

She was intensely private and I never knew very much about her. She offered just what she wanted to about herself. She could back up the positions she took. She was incredibly intelligent, involved, committed and experienced. Anytime I'd mention a name, it seemed she had something to tell me about them. When she liked you, she was an invaluable friend. When she didn't, she could be your worst nightmare. She didn't suffer fools lightly and the fools knew that.

Our final conversation was election night of 2004. She sounded great. She asked me at 6:00 pm how the election was going. I told her, "Phyllis, I'm good, but the polls haven't even closed, I don't know." She laughed one final time.

Phyllis Atchison was a blessing. To me personally. And, to this publication. There are many more, including Dr. Jean Cotton, Dennis Rafferty, and on and on.

The first couple years, I tried to put together a year-end review story about the best or most important stories we'd done that year. It became impossible because judging all of the stories and picking the best ones was like choosing your favorite child. Well, I can do that but I couldn't pick the best stories - so I stopped trying. (*Just kidding about the favorite child, of course. They both think they are.*)

We've had more stories first and more "scoops" on these pages than any other media in this market - in my opinion.

The initial issue of the Herald had a front page story about the downtown garage and the second about illegal annexations. Those two kicked things off. Looking back four and a third years, we couldn't have hit the ground better or faster. Thanks to readers, we're still here.

SANDWICH SPECIALS

French Dip Sandwich
Large Drink
Large Fries thru June 1

all for only **\$5.75** plus tax

Begins Friday, June 2

Burger Inn
Pershing & Randall

Double Cheeseburger
Large Drink
Large Fries

all for only **\$4.95** plus tax

MAXIE MONDAYS - \$1.25

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