

PUBLISHER'S

Caroline Titus Ferndale Enterprise

Give a brief recap of your time operating The Enterprise.

I began writing for The Enterprise when I moved to Ferndale in 1991 after working as a reporter and assignment editor at various news radio and television stations in and around Sacramento. I began as managing editor in 1996 and bought the paper in 1998.

Tell us something about the community The Enterprise serves.

Our paid circulation is about 1,500 in a town with a little over 800 households. Many of our loyal subscribers are from outside of Ferndale, but still within Humboldt County. Another large portion are living outside the county – either they lived in town once or would like to. The town's economic base is agriculture and tourism. There is a large retired population but at the same time we have not suffered any decline in our local schools' enrollment. Our city's per-capita income is second in the county.

You wear all the hats. Explain.

Each issue begins with my role as assignment editor – finding and deciding on stories to cover for the week's issue. I then become the reporter and photographer, going to meetings, interviewing subjects for features and checking in on my regular beats. I handle all production aspects of the paper and correspond with all current and potential advertisers – selling, placing and designing ads. On distribution day, I update our circulation database with renewals and new subscribers and file the postal report. I help distribute the paper to our outlets and make sure the weekly mailing is at the post office by 8:45 am. Finally, I cover the business aspect of the paper by doing the billing and dealing with accounts receivables and payables, not to mention taxes.

How do you fit it all into a week?

I don't. Inevitably I'm at the office or working from home on the weekends.

Tell us a little about your contributors and how they help.

A former big-city newspaper reporter recently moved to town, and I've used her to help cover features and other assignments. I have an array of dedicated columnists who cover everything from social notes to art and cultural news. I also have an editorial cartoonist.

How do you ensure that you're learning something all the time?

I'm constantly learning while covering all aspects of local government from school board to city council. For example, just when I think I know all there is about the Brown Act, a situation arises that challenges my knowledge and prompts another call to CNPA's Jim Ewert. I have trouble, however, keeping up with the latest in technology. Also, design improvement is way down on the list. I try to pick up other papers whenever I travel. Inevitably, by doing so, I see what I could be doing better.

At a small paper in a close-knit community, is it ever hard to track down information?

There are no secrets in a small town, but it is difficult to get people on the record. After this many years of doing the job, there's a certain amount of trust that one develops that can both work for you and against you.

Do you get a chance to talk shop with other editors and publishers?

It's not often I get to talk shop with any of them. While Humboldt County is rich in community journalism, we are all so busy churning out our respective products that



Caroline Titus, right, handing over a tub full of outgoing Enterprises to Ferndale Postmaster Pam Mauney: "There are no secrets in a small town, but it is difficult to get people on the record."

it is hard to connect. Once in awhile, I will talk to fellow weekly Editor Kevin Hoover of the Arcata Eye and Editor Hank Sims of the North Coast Journal.

How hard would it be to do what you do anywhere else?

I'm not sure. Since our community is extremely small, I don't have any commute issues. I can jump from a city council meeting to a basketball game to a fire call in a matter of minutes. Small towns also mean you know everyone's name, so I don't waste a lot of time figuring out who my sources or connections are. I also connect with advertisers, for instance, while I'm gardening in my front yard and they happen to stroll by. I'm sure elsewhere, geographical issues would make my job more difficult.

What's the main reason for not posting your content online?

I always felt uneasy giving away content that I had just spent four hours producing – one hour finding and preparing, two hours at the actual meeting and an hour writing, for instance. I also always knew I was covering a niche that the daily paper just didn't have the resources to cover or the institutional knowledge to do the stories justice.

My subscription income has always been a substantial part of my revenue, and I knew that I couldn't make up the difference by local online advertising. It wasn't that I was smart enough to realize posting content online would be the kiss of death for many; I just wanted to protect what I work so hard to produce each week. Plus, my readers seem, despite lousy postal service, to like holding a hard copy in their hands and putting the issue on the living room coffee table for the week to either cuss at or commend. Then there was the additional technical cost and time to post the content online.

Recently, we have offered an e-subscription along with the regular edition. To this day, we haven't received any requests for the electronic issue.

The national spotlight hit your town with the recent Humboldt Creamery news. What made you decide to publish news of it on your website?

The long-time CEO of our local creamery moved to Arizona overnight, and his lawyer warned that there could be financial inaccuracies in the books. Our local dairy industry is the backbone of our economy, and eight weeks later, the creamery was filing for bankruptcy protection. We immediately jumped on the story and even hired a freelance reporter to knock on the former

Enterprise gets regional exposure.

How's the USPS doing by you?

Our local office works very hard to accommodate us, but we receive complaints constantly and consistently from our out-of-county subscribers. The paper either arrives on time or there are no papers for several weeks and then it rains Enterprises.

Describe your readers in under 10 words:

Deeply engaged and hungry for news they can relate to.

How has the economy affected your area and your advertising base?

So far, so good, although the creamery, discussed earlier, has filed for bankruptcy, so we are all waiting for the other shoe to drop. Other than that, advertising has never been so good. We have a base of loyal and consistent advertisers that have helped keep us afloat as we approach our 131st anniversary.

Where's the nearest Wal-Mart?

Crescent City. About 80 miles away.

Your motto, "It's all about us," conveys both an insiders' perspective and offers a bit of a boast, yes?

Since we are extremely local, we wanted a motto that reflected our efforts to report only on Ferndale. Residents are extremely proud of this unique and picturesque town, its success stories, its struggles, as are we.

What are you most proud of?

The fact that our three children are emerging into productive, strong, resilient, hard-working and socially aware young adults. We've worried that the drama that surrounds being an editor of a small-town paper could have a detrimental effect on our children. Quite the opposite seems to have occurred, however. Our children have learned so much from our kitchen-table discussions about politics; dealings with disgruntled public officials; the courage it takes to challenge popular institutions and, sometimes, friends; the importance of convictions; giving back to our community and above all, democracy and the importance of the fourth estate.

I'm also extremely proud of the 19 state and national awards and recognitions we have received since I began editing the paper, and the gains we have made in our community insisting that our local government do its business in the open and with plenty of light. It's been a struggle and some of the battles fierce, but overall our community government is functioning (for the most part) lawfully and open with access and input opportunities for all citizens.

Finally, I'm proud of the impact The Enterprise has in our community. From helping to raise tens of thousands of dollars for various causes, to righting social injustices, The Enterprise has been an integral part of Ferndale for more than 130 years. I'm proud of keeping The Enterprise tradition going and ensuring that it stays viable and healthy, hopefully for years to come.

Any regrets?

That I don't seem to find the time to keep a personal journal of this ride. One day I hope to attempt to put on paper the behind-the-scenes stories of a small-town editor. I know it's been done before by many editors, but this is going to be a good read and will include it all – the good, the bad and the ugly.

You get to pose yourself one question. You also have to answer it.

Q.: What's for dinner tonight?

A.: I have no idea.

PERSONAL STATS

Name: Caroline Titus

Born: March 29, 1962, Guildford, England.

First job: Delivering my neighborhood weekly from horseback in Woodland Hills, Calif.

Current job: Owner/publisher/editor The Ferndale Enterprise

Family: Married for 21 years to Stuart Titus. Three children: Elizabeth, 19, sophomore at Stanford University and reporter for the Stanford Daily; Abigail, 16, sophomore in high school and Grady, 13, eighth grade.

Education: Bachelor of Arts in government journalism from California State University, Sacramento.

Community involvement: Founding member of the "Amaysing" Grace Foundation, which provides funds for families who have to travel outside the area for medical treatment for their children. Member, Ferndale Chamber of Commerce.

Diversions: Raising a family, running, traveling back to England to see relatives.

CEO's door in Arizona. Our confirmation of his location and a glimpse of his arm, before he slammed the door shut, were mentioned in a New York Times column.

While we don't have a reporting staff, we covered every angle we possibly could and earned recognition from a local media critic for our coverage compared to the county's daily newspaper. The story is of such importance locally and has enough interest nationally, that we realized the public service aspect of putting our stories online. We have garnered new subscriptions because of our decision and commendations from outside of the county.

You offer a news podcast on your website. Explain how you do it.

We have a local radio station in town that I visit each week after I complete the issue. I give listeners a preview of the next day's paper during an interview by the afternoon personality. He records the interview and podcasts it for listeners. I just have a link on my website. It's a win-win for both of us. The station gets local news and The