



SEGUE: Jay Tebbe's Commitment to the Metro East

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On this week's episode of Segue on WSIE 88.7 FM, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville's premier radio show that outlines events, activities and accomplishments on the University campus, Chancellor Dr. Randy Pembroke sat down with *Belleville News Democrat (BND)* president and publisher Jay Tebbe to discuss his career, the changing journalistic landscape and the "Get to know m.e." campaign.

Tebbe has been with the *BND* in some capacity since 1976. Originally planning to work as a part-time truck driver for the organization while he was in school, his intrigue with the business grew with his fascination for management and strategy.

"Along the way, I got involved and deeply interested in what we were trying to accomplish - spreading journalism and trying to do things that are good for the Metro East," Tebbe says. "One thing led to another and before you know it, one job led to another. In my mind for a long time, all I really wanted to do was to become the circulation director."

From his position as circulation director, the corporate hand that led the *BND* suggested that Tebbe learn more about the other aspects of the business as it related to advertising and its weekly publications.

"Before I was named publisher, I was already overseeing the *Highland News Leader*, the *O'Fallon Progress*, the *Command Post* and the *Legal Reporter*, which were other products we published," he says. "It gave me the opportunity to dip my toe in the overall management of newspapers."

Like most print publications, wide use of the Internet changed the game for the *BND*.

"We had two choices - we could either pretend like it did not exist, or we had to dive into the pool," he says. "Everything we have published has been online for 13 or 14 years now."

"The good news about it is that people like us and follow what we do," he says. "It takes a bit of adjusting of your perspective. Some people want to have and hold that legacy product, the print product. On the other hand, some people are going to go to Facebook or Twitter for their news."

The shift to maintaining their news on not only their physical edition, but their online edition, took a bit of adjusting. Before, writers and editors waited until that fateful moment when they turned the press on and their "news day" was over. Now, all reporters and journalists are required to tweet during meetings, take small photos or videos and to even upload content before an event is finished.

"The good news is that people are really absorbing the content," he says. "The unique, local content is what separates us from other news organizations."

Fans of the physical copy of the *BND* will not see the publication removed from newsstands any time soon.

"I believe there will be some sort of print product as long as I'm involved in the business," he reassures, "I do think that there's an important group of people who still want it in that format."

Tebbe takes pride that his publication has always been considered a leader in watchdog journalism. Holding local politicians' feet to the fire in regard to their promises, keeping an eye on taxpayer dollars, and exposing the truth when it works against the general public makes the *BND* stand out from its competitors.

"We have a journalistic responsibility to not bury the news or look the other way," he says. "If there's an unfortunate crime down the street, everyone will want to know about it. People do need to know, and they deserve to know."

Finding an outlet for everything positive that happens in the Metro East has been a focal point in the “Get to know m.e.” campaign.

“The Metro East is in a unique place,” he says. “We are across the river from the major metropolitan area, but we’re not in the same state. That river is sometimes wider in one direction than the other.”

The campaign kicked off in March 2015 by project manager Carol Bartle with a goal to engage people living in the Metro East to learn about their community and embrace one another as neighbors, while working together to improve the image of the area. In their flagship project, the campaign designed and placed park benches donning the “Get to know m.e.” logo.

“The idea for the bench was something that would be physical and permanent,” he says. “Our project manager, Carol Bartle, said that if you want to start tearing down the divisions between people, sitting down on a bench and having a discussion is a great way to do it.”

From there, the campaign has held photography, video and essay contests to hear why people within the community love the Metro East. Over the last two years, the campaign has awarded \$28,000 in scholarships.

Recently, Leclaire Elementary School in Edwardsville won the “Got Spirit?” video contest held by the campaign, earning a \$5,000 grand prize. The first 20 schools who uploaded their videos also received \$500 each.

In 2017, the “Get to know m.e.” campaign hopes to grow bigger and better, and continue working toward its goal of bringing the community together in a positive light.

Tebbe and his team from the *BND* are continuously searching for the best and brightest within the communications field.

“We have several former *Alestle* staff members who work for us today,” he says. “Our city editor, Gary Dotson, teaches a journalism class at SIUE. We’re very involved and committed to continuing journalism.”

With a constantly changing environment for both print and online publications, Tebbe reassures readers who continue to want unique and local content. By what means they choose to read it, however, should not concern journalists.

“They shouldn’t worry about people wanting to read what they are producing and what they are creating,” he states, “there will always be jobs for journalists.”

Tune in to WSIE 88.7 FM every Sunday at 9 a.m. as weekly guests discuss issues on SIUE’s campus.

From SIUE Marketing & Communications