

High Plains Journal

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

July 30, 2014. Indianapolis, Indiana. The American Agricultural Editors' Association is announcing its national awards, including the Story of the Year. And the winner is: The High Plains Journal from Dodge City, Kansas. Today we'll learn about this remarkable publication and its emphasis on quality and innovation. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Tom Taylor is publisher and Holly Martin is editor of the High Plains Journal, which was originally a local newspaper in Dodge City. During World War II, a young Air Force pilot named Joe Berkely came from Chicago to Dodge City to help train French pilots. He met and married a Kansas girl and decided to stay. He bought the Dodge City Journal in 1945. The paper had five employees and only 132 subscribers. Ouch.

Leaders in the community, including the local county extension agent, asked for agricultural coverage in the paper. In response to the community need, Joe included more ag stories and the paper grew. In 1949, the paper was renamed the High Plains Journal.

Tom Taylor grew up at Dodge City, went to K-State, and began a career in business. Joe Berkely brought Tom on board as a salesman for the High Plains Journal in 1974.

"When I began, we were doing hot typesetting," Tom said. "Our photographs were produced in Oklahoma City which took five days lead time. Now it's all digital. It's a very streamlined process, from computer to plate."

Holly Martin joined the Journal as a reporter after graduating from K-State in 1993. Her husband is from the nearby rural community of Bucklin, population 713 people. Now, that's rural. Holly became editor in 2004.

There is great continuity at the High Plains Journal. After Joe Berkely retired, Duane Ross became publisher. After Duane retired, he was succeeded by Tom Taylor.

"Tom is the third publisher and I am the third editor that the High Plains Journal has ever had," Holly said. The newspaper continues to embrace new technology and special projects to serve its subscribers.

"I don't care if it is delivered through print or producer meetings or online videos, as long as we are providing high quality content to our farmers and ranchers," Holly said. One innovative project is found at www.allaboardharvest.com, which chronicles the annual progression of the wheat harvest. In addition to print, this includes blogging, video, and social media to reach a broad audience. "One couple from New York drove out to Nebraska just to meet a harvest crew," Holly said.

Today the High Plains Journal produces five editions weekly, tailored to the cropping regions which it serves. These different editions serve western Kansas, the southern plains, the western plains, and eastern Kansas. The fifth edition is the Midwest Ag Journal, which serves Iowa, northern Missouri, and eastern South Dakota and Nebraska. All told, the publication reaches all or part of ten states.

The High Plains Journal now has 75 employees and nearly 50,000 subscribers. "Many other newspapers have been cutting back but we've been able to grow," Holly

said. "That is a testament to the high quality employees that we have here," Tom Taylor said. "We're like a family."

For more information, go to www.hpj.com.

"The High Plains Journal has shown that community or niche publications can succeed in today's tough market," said Gloria Freeland, director of Kansas State University's Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media. "By covering topics that are of vital interest to their audience — and producing them in print, online, video and blogging formats — they provide an essential service."

It's time to leave Indianapolis, where the American Agricultural Editors' Association presented the Story of the Year award to The High Plains Journal. The winning article was titled "A Story of a Steak," which described the progression of calves in Wyoming all the way through to processing (see www.storyofasteak.com) The next part of this story in the Journal will include an interview with a chef in Denver. It's an innovative way to tell agriculture's story. We commend Tom Taylor, Holly Martin, and all those involved with the High Plains Journal for making a difference with innovation and quality. For ag journalism, the High Plains Journal sets the standard high.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.