

Chris Walker – Emporia Gazette

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

Sallie magazine, *La Voz Latina* and the *Emporia Gazette*. Those publications are produced by the Emporia newspaper, in order to respond to changing needs and markets within its community. Today we'll meet a long-time Kansas newspaper family which is expanding its commitment to journalism in Kansas. It's today's Kansas Profile.

Chris White Walker is publisher of the *Emporia Gazette*. He is also the great-grandson of the legendary William Allen White, about whom we have learned during the past two weeks.

Chris grew up in Emporia. His first experience in the journalism business was as a paperboy, delivering the *Gazette*. He later worked in the production department. Chris went to the journalism school at the University of Kansas and then worked for alternative publications in Lawrence and Kansas City after college.

In 1995, he and his wife Ashley came back to Emporia to help his parents run the paper and eventually assume ownership. Chris became editor in 2000. Today, Chris is publisher and Ashley is editor of the *Emporia Gazette*. The newspaper has changed and evolved, but it continues the legacy of William Allen White.

"His writing transcends time," Chris Walker said. White's observations on politics and community seem particularly prescient. "Many of the things he wrote about are applicable to the present day," Chris said.

Unlike White's time, however, people in modern society are getting much of their news online. What does this mean for print media?

"Most newspapers are delivering some sort of product to the doorstep of most homes in the community," Chris said. "The model will definitely change, but we connect with lots of people. We're still creating the stories that people want to read, and we're reaching more consumers than ever before," he said.

Technology creates competition, but it also creates opportunity. "Everyone's extending their reach in various ways," Chris said. "When I read about William Allen White trading subscriptions for eggs in the depths of the Great Depression, I tend to think that newspapers are pretty resilient," he said.

One way the newspaper has diversified is with the publication of special sections or magazines, such as *Emporia Living* and *Sallie* magazine. *La Voz Latina* is the *Emporia Gazette's* Spanish-language section which is produced monthly. This is important in Emporia, where a large segment of the workforce is Hispanic. "(The Spanish-language section) is a way to help them feel included and to let them know about goods and services in the community," Chris said.

Five years ago, the paper launched *Sallie*, a women's magazine named after William Allen White's wife. "My wife Ashley edits that one. She frequently reminds me that it is doing better than our other publications," Chris said with a smile. *Sallie* has twice won the award as the best magazine in the state.

The family has also expanded its reach by purchasing other Kansas newspapers. The business model retains local reporting while a central location can help out with some production services, billing, and other back-office operations. Again, modern technology makes this possible. "We can utilize our technology to deliver an even better

product for our communities,” he said. The family now owns daily papers in Junction City and Abilene, plus weeklies in such rural communities as Wamego, St. Marys, Chase County, and Madison, population 701 people. Now, that’s rural.

“Real journalism becomes even more valuable as people seek reputable outlets for the real story,” Chris said.

"Chris Walker and other journalists in Kansas and around the U.S. work tirelessly every day to report the news that's important to their towns," said Gloria Freeland, director of the Huck Boyd National Center for Community Media at K-State. "I admire those editors and publishers who value their history and connection with those towns and yet seek to reach new audiences with their news products."

From *Sallie* to *La Voz Latina* and beyond, the *Emporia Gazette* is helping community journalism move into a new era. We commend Chris and Ashley Walker for making a difference by continuing the legacy while embracing new technology. As Chris Walker said: “Whether it is in digital form or whatever, we are putting the words together and serving the community.”

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