



Iowa Newspaper Association Bulletin

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WEBINARS

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Thursday, March 25

MEETINGS

INA, INF, INA Services
Company Board Meetings
Friday, April 23
@ 10 a.m. via Zoom

Iowa should stop keeping police discipline secret

RANDY EVANS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
IOWA FREEDOM OF INFORMATION COUNCIL

The actions of journalists and police officers were in the spotlight last week in a Des Moines courtroom.

The scrutiny came at the trial of Andrea Sahouri, a Des Moines Register reporter. She was arrested while covering a chaotic protest last May 31, six days after George Floyd died under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer.

The jury sorted through questions and allegations about the actions of Sahouri, who has worked for the Register since 2019, and Officer Luke Wilson, a Des Moines Police Department employee for 18 years.

In the end, jurors believed Sahouri, not Wilson.

Polk County Attorney John Sarcone made an interesting comment in defending his decision to charge Sahouri: "No one is above the law," he said.

The jurors who decided Sahouri did not overstep her rights as a journalist announced their decision in open court. But when police officers are accused of violating a statute or departmental policy, the public rarely learns how these complaints end.

This needs to change. Keeping the outcome of citizen complaints and internal police investigations secret only erodes public trust and confidence in law enforcement.

Here's how this problem developed.

In 2017, the Legislature amended Iowa law to require information from the personnel files of government employees to be made public if certain disciplinary action is taken. With the change, the law says the "documented reasons and rationale" for firing or demoting an employee, or for the employee resigning in lieu of termination, must be made public.

But if the employee is not demoted to a lower job classification, then the public typically remains in the dark --- although police chiefs, sheriffs and top officials

of other law enforcement agencies have authority, but no obligation, to share the disciplinary action they take against employees.

Some recent cases show the need for more transparency:

KATIE AKIN: One day after Andrea Sahouri's arrest, another Register reporter, Katie Akin, covered a Black Lives Matter protest on the grounds of the Iowa Capitol. She was standing well away from the demonstrators, recording video and narrating the events.

As police officers and Iowa State Patrol troopers started moving in a line to clear demonstrators from the Capitol grounds, Akin began retreating to get farther away. You can hear her repeatedly telling officers, "I'm press! I'm press! I'm with the Register! I'm going! I'm going! I'm press!"

Suddenly, you see a Des Moines police officer rush up and pepper-spray her in the face. She shrieks in pain.

The newspaper asked the police department to conduct an internal review of the officer's actions. Officials agreed. But nine months later, the newspaper has been told nothing about that investigation --- or even if it occurred. There has been no announcement of whether the officer was reprimanded or cleared of any misconduct.

STEPHANIE SWARTZ: Des Moines police officer Stephanie Swartz exited Interstate Highway 235 at 42nd Street on a December night in 2019. There was a red light at the intersection, and a sign warned, "No Right Turn on Red."

Swartz was on her cellphone and made the turn anyway. Her police car struck Shirley Streiber, 70, who was crossing the intersection on a "Walk" light with her dog. Streiber suffered a concussion.

Swartz did not receive a ticket for her improper turn. Instead, police said she was disciplined --- although officials refused to say what that punishment was.

TRAFFIC STOP: On the evening of July 15, 2018, officers Kyle Thies and Natalie Heinemann pulled over a car near a Des Moines city park after it supposedly



Randy Evans

POLICE DISCIPLINE - cont. on page 2

POLICE - cont. from page 1

rolled through a stop sign after being in the park after hours.

For the next 15 minutes, Thies grilled the driver, Montray Little, and his passenger, Jared Clinton. The men were compliant and polite as Thies repeatedly told them he suspected they had marijuana and a gun --- accusations they denied.

Thies ordered Little out of the car and threatened to take him to jail if he didn't comply. Little was handcuffed, but no gun or marijuana was found in the car. The men finally were released without any tickets.

The men filed a civil rights lawsuit against the city, alleging they were victims of racial profiling. The city paid \$75,000 to settle, but taxpayers do not know whether Thies and Heinemann faced any discipline.

Law officers have much more authority over the lives of Iowans than other government employees have. Officers can deprive people of their liberty by arresting them, and officers have the ultimate power, the use of deadly force.

It's time for lawmakers to require state and local governments to make public the outcome of citizen complaints and internal investigations of job-performance allegations against officers. It's good government --- and common sense.

Randy Evans is executive director of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council. He can be reached at IowaFOICouncil@gmail.com.

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Becoming Modulist: How we built our team and platform to partner with publishers

LIZ BEAM

MODULIST CONTENT PRODUCER & CLIENT REPRESENTATIVE

A city's newspaper records the rough draft of history and connects community members through our shared stories: milestones, professional achievements, treasured memories and even our obituaries.

Modulist — a company built to share these kinds of stories with the community — first grew out of Forum Communications Co, a multi-faceted media organization.

"We love reading about your families, pets and professional success stories and have been inspired by you to tell our own story," said Liz Beam, a Modulist client representative and customer service specialist who's helped people to place their stories for more than three years. "We also want to connect with and form lasting relationships with our clients and newspaper partners."

Today, Modulist is a turnkey solution for newspapers to process their user-generated, community content submissions for any media type, regardless of size, frequency or distribution platform.

But the team, intuitive platform and its newspaper partners did not grow overnight. Here's a snapshot of the last 10 years and how this media services company intentionally built a plug-in order processing system with sincerity, empathy and expertise.

SIMPLIFYING A CONVOLUTED PROCESS

Forum Communications Co. executives asked Devlyn Brooks, Modulist's founder and president, to fix the family-owned newspaper company's obituary submission process and simplify the processing of obituary submissions for all of Forum Communications' publications to create a more effective, user-friendly and cross-functional process.

- Jan. 2012: Forum Communications Co. executives asked Devlyn Brooks, founder and president of Modulist, to fix obituaries.
- Dec. 2012: In December 2012 Brooks hired the first full-time team member, Nichole Seitz, Modulist's operations manager.
- Oct. 2017: All Forum Communications newspapers integrated the Modulist system.

After the first major hire was complete, Brooks began bringing more of Forum Communications' properties under his obituary umbrella. While integrating Forum Communications Co.'s newspapers, Brooks and Seitz and their growing team standardized the onboarding process and platform, which was ultimately completed in October 2017.

DEVELOPING A USER-FRIENDLY PLATFORM

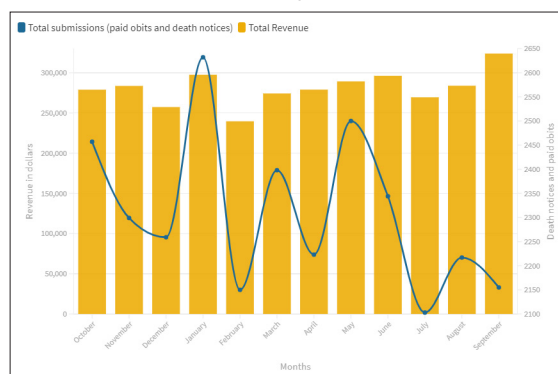
Developing a user-friendly platform during the later months of 2017, what was known as the company's "Obit Team" absorbed other miscellaneous responsibilities

for Forum Communications, and was rebranded as the Forum Communications Content Services Team.

This team gained a reputation for being able to quickly learn, master and take ownership of new tasks for the company. The traction and success of these efforts — as well as Brooks' proven track record of resolving "problem areas" in Forum Communications' newspaper design hub — inspired the development of Modulist's customer-facing platform to empower readers and publishers alike.

- Nov-Dec. 2017: Modulist expanded their services to include the processing of milestones, business announcements and paid political letters for all of Forum Communications' newspapers.

During the 2018 fiscal year, all Forum Communications' newspapers were onboarded to the Modulist system by March 2019, and which resulted in a steady increase revenue to the Fargo, N.D.-based company, eventually peaking at \$323,86.



This graph shows the trend in revenue vs. death notices and paid obit submissions during the 2018 - 2019 fiscal year.

- January 2018: Brooks meets with MentorMate as the discussions and planning for Modulist began.

These meetings sought to establish Modulist's services, branding and mission as well as a timeline for the rollout and success of its initiatives. Brooks worked closely with his existing team of Modulist members and frequent obituary submitters to get feedback and guidance on what the people who would use the service the most wanted out of it.

By gathering user feedback and implementing it into the software as it was developed, Brooks ensured that the end product would be one that both his employees and customers would find easy and enjoyable to use.

- March of 2019: Modulist officially launched with a team of seven full-time employees and Brooks as its president.

"Modulist seeks to build lasting partnerships with newspaper companies to help them decrease their production costs and increase their revenue in these

This content was provided by Modulist, one of our generous 2021 Tri-State Newspaper Convention sponsors.

INA's 'In Focus' project gains national recognition

ERIC FERRERO, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FUND FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM



A collaborative investigation among more than 50 reporters from 30 different newspapers and universities to uncover how police body-camera footage is treated and shared.

Through the Iowa Newspaper Association, and with a grant from the Fund for Investigative Journalism, the group obtained body-camera footage from more than 220 law enforcement agencies across the state. Their first story shows vast discrepancies in policies and includes a map with a database of all of the policies they collected.

Erin Jordan, an investigative reporter at the Cedar Rapids Gazette, helps coordinate the group. I talked with her about how the collaboration came about, her advice for other reporters and the critical role of local newspapers. Our conversation is below.

Q: It's remarkable that so many reporters at so many newspapers are working together on this series. How did the collaboration come together initially, and how did you structure it to make it workable for everyone involved?

A: The project idea came about in the Iowa Newspaper Association's government relations committee, which monitors legislation and other non-legislative government activities that might affect Iowa newspapers or their readers. From that conversation, a core working group formed with representatives from three Iowa newspapers and INA Executive Director Susan Patterson Plank. That group devised a plan for the series and asked for help from Iowa newspaper reporters to request policies and video from law enforcement agencies. We have used Google forms to collect responses and a whole lot of emails. Meeting weekly on Zoom helps us stay focused.

Q: What advice do you have for other investigative journalists who want to develop collaborative reporting projects?

A: You need buy in and to get that, reporters and editors need to be passionate about a topic. And they have to see the final product – stories, photos, online interactives – being something that will interest their readers. After you find that topic, identify a few key players who agree to carry out the project, seeking help from others as needed. Communication throughout the project is key. News outlets need to know when the stories are coming and what they will get so they can plan accordingly.

Q: One of the most interesting findings in this first story is that only half of the law enforcement agencies in the state treat video footage as a public record. Are you seeing increased momentum to enact clearer and more consistent statewide policies on police video footage?

A: Not really. The bills we've seen in the Iowa Legislature this year have been more about protecting police (penalizing cities that cut police budgets, letting officers know more

about complaints against them) than setting a higher bar for accountability. But some attorneys who handle open records cases say there is a growing body of court rulings showing video is part of the "immediate facts and circumstances" of a case and should be made public in most cases.

Q: An important part of this project is the database and map of 220+ policies across the state. Once all of the reporters across the state obtained the policies, how did you analyze them and how did you create the database in the map?

A: On a Google form, we asked reporters to upload police policies and answer some basic questions, such as "does the policy mention video as a public record?" John McGlothlen, an online editor at The Gazette, took those responses and created the interactive map, which allows users to click on a community and see the local agencies' video policies and the responses to the questions answered by reporters. The responses also informed our reporting for the story, pointing us to agency heads we should interview and giving us examples to cite. The FIJ grant allowed us to reimburse Iowa newspapers for the cost of requesting public records and for the development of a site we can use to store police video associated with high-profile cases.

Q: You've been working at local newspapers in Iowa for more than 20 years. This project is such a powerful example of the continued importance of local newspapers in investigative reporting. Your grant proposal noted that there are more than 250 newspapers in Iowa, including 23 dailies – and that 86% of Iowans read local newspapers. Why was it so important that local newspaper reporters lead this project, and what do you think we can all do to help strengthen investigative reporting in local newspapers?

A: Local newspapers are on the front lines of pushing for police accountability. Trevis Mayfield, who is publisher of the Maquoketa Sentinel-Press and is on the INA government relations committee, wanted Iowa newspapers to do this series because his paper struggled to get video of a July 2019 incident when a 22-year-old man died after being Tasered by police. Doing a statewide story on his own would have been tough, but joining forces with the INA and other Iowa news outlets made it possible. Funding organizations, like FIJ, help by removing roadblocks, such as the cost of filing public records requests, and providing resources, such as mentoring and, in some cases, legal review of stories. This kind of support feels kind of like a "we got you" that can help motivate small newsrooms to do great work.

For more information about the project visit: <https://inanews.com/membersonly/infocus/>

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FEATURE/SPORTS REPORTER. Feature/Sports reporter needed for The News of Kalona Iowa. Must be able to cover meetings, do features and help with covering high school sports events. Full or part time position Must also be able to do some photography. Hourly pay depends on ability and experience. Contact Ron Slechta, The News 319-400-7072 or publisher@thenews-ia.co.m

MANAGING EDITOR. Enterprise Media Group, a progressive regional publishing company headquartered in Blair, Neb., is seeking a managing editor for our community newspaper group based out of Seward, Neb. Duties will include managing an editorial staff, story assignments, reporting, photography and oversight of our online digital products. If you're an experienced journalist, with good management skills, this could be a great opportunity for you. We're looking for someone who has a love of community journalism, and can bring new ideas to the table to help us better serve our communities. At Enterprise Media, you'll know your bosses. We have been a family-owned media company for six generations with 12 community newspapers in Nebraska and Iowa. We offer competitive pay, paid vacation, health insurance, retirement plan and other benefits. Let us tell you more about this great opportunity. Please send your resume and cover letter to Group Editorial Director Leeanna Ellis: editor@enterprisepub.com

NEWS REPORTER. The Le Mars Daily Sentinel, a four-day-a-week newspaper in northwest Iowa, seeks a motivated news reporter who can generate ideas, turn in accurate and well-organized stories, meet daily deadlines and work well with our newsroom. The ideal candidate must have experience using InDesign and be comfortable with digital photography. The Daily Sentinel also offers a competitive starting salary and solid benefits package. Please forward resume, cover letter and clips to Kim Fickett, senteditor@gmail.com, or mail to Editor, Le Mars Daily Sentinel, 41 First Ave. N.E., Le Mars, IA, 51031.

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of the Kossuth County Advance in Algona, where you will plan, write, shoot, design and impress the community with a great product? Are you ready to step in where our retiring ME is leaving off? Email your credentials, list of skill sets, accomplishments and resume to publisher@algona.com. This position requires relocation to the immediate area. All applications held in the highest confidence.

REPORTER. The Southeast Iowa Union is a regional daily newspaper searching for its next rising star reporter to cover stories throughout Southeast Iowa communities including Mt. Pleasant, Fairfield and Washington, Iowa. This position will be based in our Washington, Iowa, office. Our ideal candidate is hard-working, motivated and a self-starter willing to work with a team to produce exciting print and digital news products. You'll cover a wide variety of topics, from government meetings to community celebrations throughout Southeast Iowa. We are a part of a progressive employee-owned print and digital media company including our daily regional publication, as well as our parent company, The Gazette in Cedar Rapids.

Our ideal candidate will be someone who is curious about our communities and residents and is as comfortable covering a city meeting as you are writing a great feature or diving into an in-depth story. You'll work on multiple stories simultaneously and can jump between projects easily. We're looking for a candidate that has solid news judgment and is someone that finds themselves asking why or how, in addition to just telling readers what. You should be comfortable shooting video and still pictures and able to write a good cutline.

You'll be thinking about engaging with the audience through digital channels and be thinking how to present news and connect to the audience in an ever-changing media landscape. You should enjoy trying new things. Benefits: This is a full-time position with benefits including health, dental, vision, 401k, and participation in the employee stock ownership program.

Requirements: You should have an undergraduate degree in journalism, English, communications or a related course of study. Prior experience is desired, but we'll consider you if you are a recent college graduate. You'll need a valid driver's license, a dependable car and a history of safe-driving habits.

EOE pre-screening drug and background tests required.

SPORTS EDITOR. The Tipton Conservative, a weekly newspaper in eastern Iowa, is seeking as sports editor. Strong writing, photo and layout (InDesign) skills required. Send cover letter and resume to Stuart Clark c/o The Tipton Conservative, Box 271, Tipton, Iowa 52772 or stuartC108@aol.com. 0414

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For sale: Northwest Iowa weekly newspaper with supplement and printing shop. County legal plus legal for four towns. Newly remodeled brick/block building, equipment, large inventory included.

MEMBER EXCHANGE - cont. on page 6



Iowa Newspaper Association

Bulletin

www.INAnews.com

IN THIS ISSUE...

- Programmatic Advertising Demystified

local & personal

The Iowa Supreme Court appoints Kelby Wingert, reporter with the Fort Dodge Messenger, to serve as the news media coordinator for Region 4, which includes Boone, Calhoun, Carroll, Greene, Hamilton, Hardin, Humboldt, Pocahontas, Sac, Webster, and Wright counties. This order takes effect immediately.

MEMBER EXCHANGE - cont. from page 5

Selling because of age/health. Phone 712/230/1405 or e-mail rouse@nethtc.net

Considering a sale of your newspaper but not sure where to start? Iowa's newest media broker, Scenic Trail Media Brokers, LLC, is here to help you. Scenic Trail Media Brokers will work with you in every step of the process to properly market your newspaper to help you attract the right buyer for your property. We'll work with you until the final closing to make sure you get top dollar. Call Ryan Harvey today at 515-689-1151 or reach him by email at scenictrailmediabrokers@gmail.com for more information.

View and submit ads on the Internet at www.INAnews.com. Students and professionals may also submit their resumés for online viewing.

There is no charge for most of these ads. They are a free service to INA active (newspaper) members only. The name of the newspaper in the ad must be the same as published in the current INA Directory.

If you are trying to help an employee relocate, please send us the ad information on your letterhead, rather than having the employee write us. We will not run ads for persons living in a member's town without first clearing the ad with the publisher.

Please have copy to the INA office no later than noon on Monday. The INA will make the determination of whether an ad qualifies for free or paid publication. If payment for an ad is not enclosed with the ad, the INA will require payment in advance before the ad will be published.

Ads for products or services which could be marketed for a profit may be published for a fee of \$10 per insertion, paid in advance, with a 40-word maximum.

Recruitment (help wanted) ads for positions in states other than Iowa may be published for a fee of \$25 per insertion, with a 100-word maximum.

For more information, contact Cicely Gordon at cgordon@inanews.com.

MODULIST - cont. from page 3

integral content categories," says Forum Communication Co.'s Vice President Newspaper Operations Aaron Becher. "Modulist will add depth to your professionalism and add overall efficiency to your operation."

Brooks emphasizes since Modulist's external launch, he and his team have built relationships with our customers, partners and prospective clients.

"One of the main guiding principles of Modulist was creating a user-friendly platform," Brooks said. "So that we can establish a trusted partnership with our clients that will last."

Wondering how your publication can benefit from partnering with us?

Connect with us at devlyn@modulist.news.



An Iowa Newspaper Foundation webinar...

PROGRAMMATIC ADVERTISING DEMYSTIFIED



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Thursday, March 25 · 1-2 p.m.

Registration fee: FREE · Deadline: March 22

IN THIS WEBINAR...

Whether the digital advertising you're selling is restricted to your own newspaper's Web site or you're already selling programmatic advertising, this Webinar is for you.

That's because, likely there are now ad agencies and local media companies who are offering your current and prospective advertisers a different kind of online advertising, called programmatic advertising, that can reach the exact audience a business is targeting—on virtually any device on any Web site in any area at any time.

The session will also give a great refresher to salespeople, ad managers, and publishers at those newspapers who are already selling programmatic advertising. Bring your questions and the experts will answer them!

THE PRESENTER...

Bob McInnis

Bob McInnis is a 30-year veteran of the business side of the newspaper industry. After graduating from Dartmouth College in 1984, he got a job as a newspaper ad rep at his hometown's weekly newspaper group.

He eventually served as ad director there and at a larger group of 10 quality community newspapers before being hired by 750,000 circulation Newsday/New York Newsday as their training manager, responsible for the training and support of over 100 ad reps.

He then launched his consulting practice and has spent the years since working with over 1,000 newspapers and newspaper associations throughout the world. While the variety of products have evolved over the years to include digital, the motivations behind why local businesses buy advertising has not, making the integration of paid digital—and even selling against social media—seamless.

McInnis teaches the latest techniques in digital lead generation, revenue generation, and marketing automation at Hofstra University's Zarb School of Business in New York City. He also speaks extensively about programmatic advertising. You can learn more at www.ads-on-line.com.



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