



# Iowa Newspaper Association Bulletin

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## An obit lover took her passion, and dead people's life lessons, to TikTok

*Tips From Dead People gets at the stories between the lines*

KRISTEN HARE  
POYNTER

One year at Christmas, Mary McGreevy's family went around the table and shared headlines for their obituaries. McGreevy's mother, who worked as a journalist, journalism professor and later a personal historian, thought her own headline should read that she "never got hair right," McGreevy said. "That's completely me now."

She is getting TikTok right, though.

McGreevy, a Minnesota-based video producer, took her love of obituaries and the lessons she finds between the lines and created Tips From Dead People, an account with more than 20,000 followers.

"It's been in my blood for a long time," she said, "and I've always, always, always been an obituary reader."

From years of reading obits, McGreevy would see details about a person's life and want to know more.

"You make these assumptions and you have these questions about the stories that aren't told," she said, "And then when you get older you realize the stories aren't told because they're too expensive."

McGreevy reached out to me after she came across the work I've done around reported obits. I'm also still writing obituaries for the Tampa Bay Times, and I write a weekly newsletter about obits.

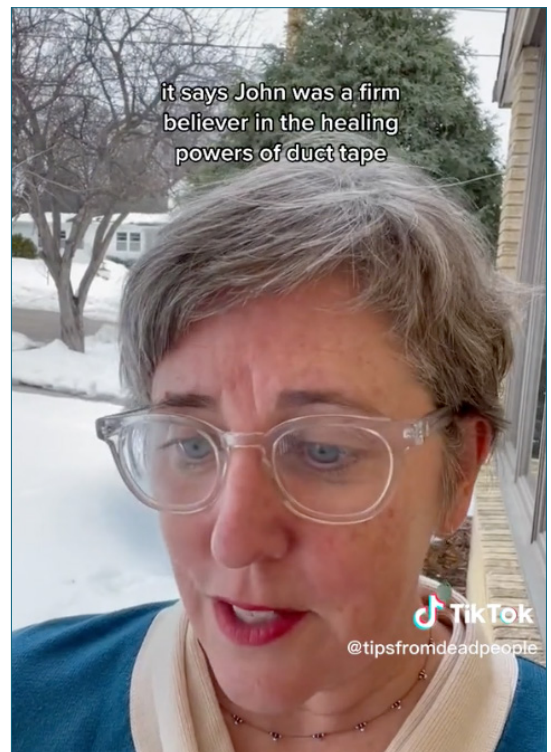
Before we talked, I fell into the TikTok hole with Tips From Dead People and told McGreevy that I wished I'd thought of it. I still do.

"What I like about them is that it sort of gives me little insights on what is 'the good life,'" she said.

They can be irreverent, like Travis, "cause of death: pure stubbornness."

They can be funny, like Renay, who "didn't cook, she didn't clean, and she was lousy with money, too. Here's what Renay was great at: dying her red roots, weekly manicures, dirty jokes, pier fishing, rolling joints and buying dirty magazines."

And they can be inspiring, like John, who served



in the Army and died in Vietnam. He wrote his own obit one year before he died. "The Army let me live in Japan, Germany and England, with experience in all of those places that others can only dream about. I have skied in the Alps, killed a scorpion in my tent camping in Turkey, climbed Mount Fuji, visited the ruins of Athens, Ephesus and Rome, gone to the opera in Munich, plays in the West End, seen the Oxford-Cambridge Rugby match, gone for pub crawls through the Cotswolds, seen the nightlife in Hamburg and earned a master's degree in a foreign university."

McGreevy is also the co-founder of Epilogg, a free online platform for people to publish stories, photos and memories of their loved ones.

"As anyone who has written an obit knows, you

OBITS - cont. on page 5

### CALENDAR of EVENTS

#### MEETINGS

INA, INF, INA Services  
Company Board Meetings  
April 21, 2023

#### WEBINARS

6 Sales Tactics You Need  
To Do In 2023  
March 30, 2023

# A dangerous consequence of public-notice bill: Iowans won't know what they don't know

DOUGLAS BURNS

**W**hat separates average-to-good Iowa towns from thriving ones, former Governor Terry Branstad often said, is the presence of locally owned banks and a dedicated community newspaper.

Community newspapers are a big part of what makes Iowa, well, Iowa.

And that's why it's so troubling that some in the Iowa Senate are considering requiring legal notices to be posted on some to-be-created state-run website and would not be required to be published in a local newspaper.

Senate File 546 would in practical terms eliminate an essential part of your newspaper, limiting the news, and in so doing, cripple many newspapers, many of which are already facing financial struggles.

In an age where reality is in rare supply and social media feeds ugliness and division, Iowa's community newspapers serve as something of the last bastion of collective truth. Readers are close to the local news, so they either know stories to be true and accurate — or if in doubt they can easily find the reporters and owners.

Of Iowa's 240 newspapers, 80 percent are privately owned. More than 100 Iowa newspapers have fewer than 1,000 subscribers. What these newspapers print is local, local, local. It's stories on eight-man football, and City Council proceedings, celebrations of new business openings, and the solemn and sacred responsibility, what I always considered the soul of the newspaper, the timely and careful collection and publishing of obituaries.

The newspapers of Iowa are generally practical, not ideological. Most small-town newspaper owners are busy running from the Rotary meeting for a photo to the high school for a story and, later, to the council meetings. They have no time to weigh in with views on national and state government. Some do, yes. but the vast majority of papers keep it local.

A big part of newspapers: public notices. Local ones. Information on how your small town is spending money, what the schools and counties in your area are doing, are best presented in newspaper as the content is relevant and easily accessible.

Unlike the California-based social media Goliaths with deep tentacles into our lives, newspapers are responsible for their content. Facebook and Twitter are considered "platforms," and are not liable for anything users post. We correct our mistakes in the newspaper business, and if the errors are damaging enough, aggrieved parties can seek remedies in Iowa's District Courts. Ever try getting a correction on Facebook?

The most distressing unintended consequence of these detailed public records not being printed in your local newspaper will be more division in Iowa, and if you can imagine, an ever-more ugly politics as fallen newspapers, and the people who care about community first, leave a content void that big-dollar donors from the coasts will be all-too-happy fill with ideologically-oriented "news" sites — with writers who are more scalp hunters for Republicans and Democrats than reporters.

Many local newspapers, the sources Branstad always saw as central to economic and community development, are dutiful in running columns from their local legislators — mostly Republicans — in rural Iowa. The legislators can relate items of local interest, which is essential. In the absence of newspapers, which will be a result in many areas of Iowa of Senate File 546, the even-handed, trusted local folks at the paper will be quickly replaced by purveyors of political distortion.

Our state needs its community newspapers, and reliable, accessible public notices.

Without them, Iowans won't know what they don't know.

*This column was written by Doug Burns, former Vice President for News and Co-owner of Herald Publishing which previously owned the Carroll Times Herald and the Jefferson Herald.*

***This article is free to use and publish in your publication.***

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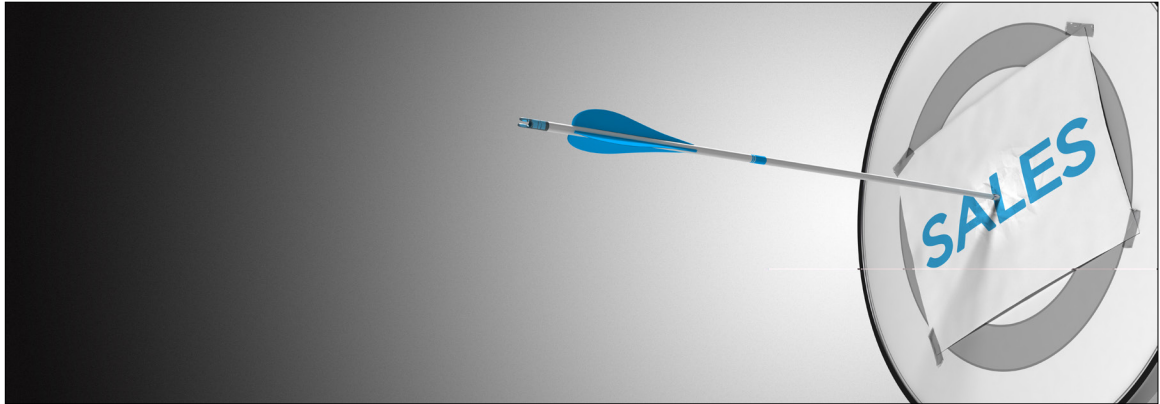
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# WEBINAR SPOTLIGHT

Visit [www.onlinemediacampus.com](http://www.onlinemediacampus.com) to register today!



## 6 Sales Tactics You Need To Do In 2023

**MARCH 30 FROM 1-2 P.M.**

### IN THIS WEBINAR...

If you are in a transition, a sales leader acquiring new talent, or want to stay ahead of the curve and better situate yourself for sales success for 2023 and beyond, these six sales techniques should help tremendously. This training is for sales leaders at all levels and will help reconstruct a solid sales strategy you can enhance and build upon throughout the year!

### ABOUT THE PRESENTER...

Richard E. Brown is a News/Media Alliance Rising Star recipient, the former director of renewals and digital sales strategy at LPi, and the former director of digital operations and sales of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. He recently served as the head of digital subscriber churn for Gannett | USA TODAY NETWORK and is now the senior director of retention for The Daily Beast. He is also a member of the board of directors for the Wisconsin Newspaper Association Foundation.

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# FREE MEMBER EXCHANGE

## ▼ HELP WANTED

**SENIOR STAFF WRITER.** Business Publications Corporation (BPC), an award-winning media and communications company, is seeking a full-time journalist to cover business news in Greater Des Moines for the Business Record, our flagship division. The right candidate will join our experienced staff to lead the Business Record's coverage of the people, issues and trends affecting the business community as the region continues to grow and transform. This reporter's primary focuses will include real estate, development and local government; the role will also encompass producing a variety of business stories.

The position requires a strong writer who can develop a beat and write in-depth analysis pieces on a variety of business topics for our weekly print edition, website, e-newsletters and specialty magazines. This person must function with a great deal of autonomy, building sources on their beats and managing their story schedules.

This person is also given freedom to generate a majority of their own story ideas. The ideal candidate must also be able to report and write daily business news items quickly and efficiently for our website and be able to keep a daily pulse on the community.

Previous business writing experience is a plus; however, it is not a requirement. The candidate must have a solid foundation in AP style, the principles of journalism and have a desire to represent the Business Record at a large number of community events and network with the community both in person, virtually and via social media. In addition, this person must have comfort leading panel discussions in front of an audience.

Basic photography skills, video production experience and the ability to help our organization move forward in the digital world are major pluses, but not required.

Management experience, project management and editing skills are not required, but the role has the flexibility to be adapted to utilize skills of this nature.

A passion for the Des Moines and Iowa, and a desire to tell the story of our communities is a priority.

Visit <https://recruiting.paylocity.com/Recruiting/Jobs/Details/1287240> to apply. Please include a cover letter with your resume.

**SUBSCRIPTION MANAGER.** The Indianola Independent Advocate and Record-Herald, an independent, Iowa-owned digital plus print newspaper, is seeking help managing our Town News, Audience Plus subscription environment. The job will be a flexible, part-time, remote position setting up subscriptions and rates in the Town News offer-builder environment on an occasional basis and helping troubleshoot user issues when needed. Happy to work through a newspaper that uses this service and is willing to make its team available or an individual who works in this environment and would like to earn some extra income outside of regular work hours. Call 515-250-3698 or email amy@indianola-ia.com to discuss options. 0101

## ▼ FOR SALE

**WANTED:** Old Apple Laser Writer printer. Laser Writer 16/600 or Laser Writer Pro, working or parts. Call the Don at the Avoca Journal Herald 402-681-4763.

*View and submit ads on the Internet at [www.INAnews.com](http://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](mailto:cgordon@inanews.com).*

are quickly confronted with the Business of Death,” the site’s About Us explains. “The cost to submit an obituary in the U.S. is hundreds of dollars for one day ... and what you get is a cold, incomplete snapshot of a full and vivid life. Social media hasn’t provided a permanent and decent alternative to the newspaper obit ... We knew all along that there is a better way to get the word out about a death and celebrate a life. Using our experience with web development, digital storytelling, and start-ups, we dug in.”

Think The Knot for death, McGreevy said. So far it has about 3,000 tributes.

There’s space out there for thinking in new ways about obituaries, McGreevy told me, and it goes beyond local newsrooms embracing them as great stories again. She’s not the only one thinking about this.

Steven Waldman, whom you may know from Report for America and now the nonprofit Rebuild Local News, previously created a platform called LifePosts, meant to be a place to mark births, deaths and everything in between. I’ve also had a few calls with Ari King, the founder of Homage, which takes an audio approach to sharing life stories.

And while paid obits still make big money for newspapers, a handful of publications are starting to publish them for free, including Richland Source, Ashland Source and Knox Pages in Ohio, according to a Nieman Lab piece from last year, and Berkeleyside and The Oaklandside in California.

I’m guessing we’ll see more of this, especially from newsrooms that don’t already rely on the revenue. Free obits can build loyalty with a community, and they mean that anyone can submit one without worrying about the cost. That means obits sections could better reflect the place where they’re published.

“You shouldn’t have to be rich or famous to have your story in a public space and to tell the world that you matter,” McGreevy said.

Over on TikTok, she’s sharing life lessons, big and small, from the dead. It’s a way she’s staying connected to what matters to her the most about obits – that people’s lives mean something.

“And now I don’t have to be employed by a newspaper or a magazine to say something about it.”

*Kristen Hare teaches local journalists the critical skills they need to serve and cover their communities as Poynter’s local news faculty member. Before joining faculty in 2021, Kristen spent eight years covering the people and business of local news for Poynter. She writes Local Edition, a weekly newsletter for and about local news.*

*This article was originally published by Poynter. Visit <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2023/an-obit-lover-took-her-passion-and-dead-peoples-life-lessons-to-tiktok/> to read the article online.*



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