

CCL's adventures on line

By Julian Sereno

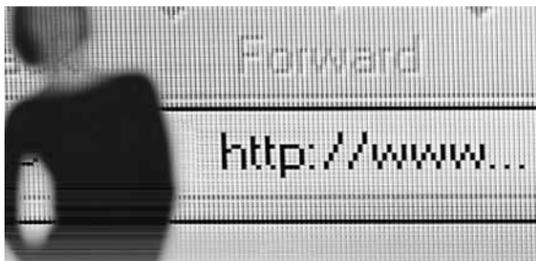
Last September I wrote about *Chatham County Line's* foray into the future, in particular the revamping and redesign of our web site, www.chathamcountyline.org. Almost a year later, I can report that our website is working well, and in ways I never anticipated.

We have gone from a few hundred hits to more than 1,100 unique hits for each monthly issue. Many of those hits, I hope, are young people who no longer read anything on paper. But I can't say for sure. I can say that our web site has saved on printing costs, gas, and has made *Chatham County Line* available not only all over the Triangle but all over the world.

Our blog, however, has not been similarly successful, and will be discontinued. I'm not a blogger and only wrote for it when I introduced it. Our blog drew a total of two comments after my introduction, both suggesting that the paper be made available through RSS Feeds. I initially thought the writers were talking about a farm supply store where I should drop off papers, but I could find no such store in the phonebook. I have since learned that RSS Feeds is a way that Internet publishers can update articles and make them available to online readers.

It also pulls the articles from the newspaper so that the advertisers who pay the freight for

newspapers being published in the first place get no benefit when the articles are read online. I believe that is part of the reason that major metropolitan dailies, from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to the Raleigh



News and Observer, have more readers than ever but at the same time are hemorrhaging money and axing staff.

When we redesigned our web site, I resisted calls to make it more like the websites of other newspapers and insisted on our PDF format. The paper online looks exactly like the one delivered throughout Chatham and southern Orange Counties. Even though it is a little slower for readers, no one can read our paper online without seeing the ads that keep the newspaper in business.

This approach works for our advertisers. And there is evidence to prove it. Carole Hoffman, who practices neural depolarization therapy and both advertises with and occasionally writes for *Chatham County Line*, offers the following testimonial:

"Recently a woman came all the way from California to

Pittsboro for treatment of her Neuropathy with NDP™ Nervous System Therapy. She learned about NDP™ by doing an Internet search and came across an article and ad in your on-line version of the *Chatham County Line* newspaper."

This past year, www.chathamcountyline.org helped land a California client for a Chatham advertiser. Next year, who knows?



Mark Schultz, the editor of the *Chapel Hill News* and the Orange and Durham Bureau Chief for the *Raleigh News and Observer*, told me that my premise for the column I wrote last month was wrong. Disclosure: he and I have been colleagues and associates for nearly 20 years and he is a good guy with as much integrity as anyone in this business.

I wrote that the *N&O* had become mean and petty because it criticized the *The Carrboro Citizen* without naming it. Mark said that the name had appeared in the second sentence of the first paragraph, but the night editor blundered and cut it out when adding new information that the reporter called in after the story had been filed. The correction the next day explained none of this, but corrections never do.

No malice, just a mistake.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.

Durham's Herald-Sun shrinking fast

The poor Durham Herald-Sun is like the Indian captive staked out under the blazing desert sun watching the circling buzzards get closer and closer.

Circulation is down again—20 percent from last year. An industry reporting service called Fas-Fax reports the newspaper's daily 2009 circulation was 26,112, down 6,700.

Sunday was not quite so bad. It was down only 9.6 percent (29,566) but overall it means the Paxton Group has lost about half the circulation it bought in 2004. It only adds to the agony to report population in the Durham area is still going up.

Nothing has gone right at the Herald-Sun since the death of publisher Steed Rollins in 1985. It is as if his successors mapped out every large iceberg in the ocean and set out to ram all of them.

The first major blunder was the new offices on U.S. 15-501 bypass. That site was chosen because 55,000 cars passed there every day. It would be the perfect place to display the new Zanadu, a monument of historic propor-

tions—or something like that. They slapped down a million bucks for the site that was virtually invisible from the highway. It cannot be seen driving north and

gives southbound drivers only a four-second glimpse.

The building itself was too big, filled with offices that would never be used and others that were used too much. The business office had space for 22 clerks to ride herd on business. A cafeteria

was quickly abandoned. Corridors were jammed with meeting rooms, large, small and numerous.

The only good thing at that time was circulation was holding steady at about 50,000 for the Herald and 22,000 for the afternoon Sun. It was understood that every time the newspaper ran an obituary the Sun lost a subscriber.

When they finally decided to combine the two papers they hit one of the smaller icebergs. It was logical to believe total circulation would settle down about 60,000. Alas, it dropped down to about 54,000 before it stabilized.

The major result was they had built a building to publish two

newspapers with two news staff and now had twice as much space as they needed. The iceberg was little larger than they thought.

Management then made that stupid promise that no one would be fired when the two papers were merged. Duh. Of course they had to fire a lot of people. It was necessary but they fired the wrong people. That team had editors in charge of editors and executives had secretaries. Old fashioned department heads became "Division Director" and had MBO's (bonus stuff). If some of the peons got in the way of a bonus, the peon lost.

In that atmosphere, the Herald-Sun drifted downward and it came to pass that the owner might have had troubles paying the banks for all the improvements from the past.

And golly Moses, right out of the blue, the Paxton Group bought the paper and suddenly the paper would provide us magic management techniques.

It cut all executives, all the executive editors and all those clerks in the business office and finally got them a nice, tight ship. With that done, they fired all the

SHRINKING continued on page 10.

Another green implosion

By Don Lein

The current eco-bubble appears to have run its course. Like all bubbles it had unrealistic expectations and a Ponzi-like postponement of inevitability. Beginning in 2006 with the publication of "An Inconvenient Truth," we saw an upsurge of companies pledging to go carbon neutral and green investments were hot. Acts such as screwing in light bulbs, buying thrift store clothing, recycling, inflating tires, confessing to your analyst your angst about the polar bears became transcendental expressions. Everyone was expected to feel guilty and perform acts of contrition, even while acknowledging they had only a psychological impact and would do nothing to avert the upcoming apocalypse.

Between January 2008 and January 2009 in a Pew survey the number of Americans who listed environmentalism as a top priority fell from 56 percent to 41 percent. A more recent Gallup Poll indicated that a record high of 41 percent said that the seriousness of global warming is exaggerated – a 6 percent increase from the 2008 poll. Shell has recently halted its investment in wind and solar power. When the administration justified its expenditures in energy efficiency and renewables, it did it on the basis of jobs created.

Eco-bubbles bursting is not unique to our current situation. In 1969 when the Cuyahoga River caught on fire there was justifiable outrage. In 1970 there was the first Earth Day and the Nixon Administration passed comprehensive environmental legislation. This bubble burst in 1973 when soaring oil prices pushed our economy into a recession and green issues assumed much less import in the public policy arena.

Although there are parallels to previous bubbles, there are some elements of the present bubble that are unique. Utopian environmentalists have always held that the Earth is a place of halcyon purity, that all cells are created equal. Recently the Swiss government contemplated legislation to protect the rights of plants. The current bubble stresses societal and individual guilt, requiring each individual to assuage this guilt by adopting more conservative buying patterns. In a 2007 survey published in the *NY Times*, 57 percent of Prius owners bought the car because "it makes a statement about me" versus 36 percent for better gas mileage and 7 percent for new technology.

Another current thrust has been to "buy less and use less." While this may make a statement about hyper-materialism and a smaller carbon footprint and make sense environmentally, when consumers stop spending, that is an economic disaster. Indeed, as noted in the surveys above, the two competing sides are growth and environmentalism and a majority of the public are opting for growth and jobs. We see ecologically friendly California with its "green jobs" approach, pleading with Washington to bail them out of their economic mess.

Apparently, no one has been able to reach the Nirvana of an economically sound/environmentally sensitive state. Until they do, America, China and India when asked why they are turning away from environmentalism, use the words of that famous American thinker and Presidential Adviser, James Carville "It's the economy, stupid."

Don Lein is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A Chatham resident, he is involved in a variety of civic organizations.



Media Meditations

by R.L. Taylor



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