

Guiding the Media

by
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A few years ago, long before my name ever appeared in this newspaper, I felt that the media had irresponsibly distorted truth on a particular story. Since I knew Congressman Klink had been a newscaster, I took a wild shot and made a phone call to his office. Amazingly, Mr. Klink who did not know me, called me back within a couple hours.

I told the Congressman the problem. I don't remember his exact words, but he said something like this: "If you believe strongly in what you hold true then please do not quit. If you do not get satisfaction at the media source, work your way step by step until you take it all the way to the top. You can make a difference but you cannot quit." The passion behind his words got me pumped up. I took his advice to heart. It worked.

From this experience, I began to understand that good information was my ally and that if I had the truth and was persistent, I had a good chance of being heard. As a businessman, I know there is nothing more persuasive than a polite customer that has a well constructed speech or letter pointing out something previously unrecognized. Since customers use our services, their concerns mean a great deal to me. In the same way, since we all are media consumers, we each have the ability to persuade if we present good information in the right manner.

Businesses routinely advertise through the media for one reason - it works. By using the media to get out a message, customers are often influenced. Clever, innovative messages are the most effective. That same technique can be used by each of us to get out the message about our communities.

Former Pirate player Andy Van Slyke used to say "there are three kinds of people: those that make things happen, those that let things happen and those that wonder what the hell happened." When the Valley News Dispatch asked for community columnists, I was reluctant but I knew I had to jump on it. I didn't want to be left wondering what happened. I knew the media could be used to help affect positive change and was an important component in the future of the Kiski Valley's quality-of-life.

While doing research in early May about the deplorable condition of the Apollo bridge, I learned from PennDOT that it was not included in the 12 year plan. It was outrageous to me. I was tired of the Kiski Valley being Pennsylvania's "banana republic". It was a subtle but real exploitation of the working, tax-paying people in the valley. It was indisputable that the bridge was a detriment to economic development. Our people deserved better than a bombed out third world bridge.

Last week I learned from PennDOT that the Apollo bridge was now miraculously included in the 12 year plan. In fact, PennDOT official Bill Piper of Uniontown hopes to

have a preliminary study begun next spring for a brand new bridge. This occurred because this newspaper exposed an injustice within our community. Staff reporter Charles Brown followed the determination of local people who wanted to make a difference and were not going to take it any more. I am convinced that his careful probing of the issue became a public relations concern to the state.

Factual information (the awful condition of our bridge) was presented by the media. The media in turn influenced the minds that counted.

While the media is a necessary watchdog for such things as abuses in government, we need to be watchdogs of the media. If the media is presenting erroneous information, we need to look at ourselves and ask how we can deliver accurate information to them. As Mr. Klink suggests, we need to make our voices heard and persevere when the doors slam in our faces. We do not have to accept the way things are. Freedom of expression is our right. We cannot change truth, but as media consumers, we have a great influence on the product delivered.



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