



To the journalism teachers of Nebraska:

Journalists' foremost duty is to serve their community. They hold those in power accountable and give a voice to their neighbors. That's never been more important than it is now. But journalists' ability to do that has also never been more threatened, especially in Omaha.

For the first time in its history, the Omaha World-Herald is no longer locally owned. This spring, Warren Buffett's company sold the OWH and several other papers in Nebraska to Lee Enterprises, a newspaper chain that operates more than 70 papers nationwide. The consolidation of newspaper ownership is one of the greatest threats to journalism, and its impacts are now being felt in our city and state.

Companies like Lee do not care about communities. Their first priority is to make enough profit to satisfy stockholders and fund exorbitant executive salaries. Though newspapers are still profitable, revenues are dropping due largely to a steep loss in print advertising and circulation. Digital advertising and subscriptions are increasing — web traffic is at an all-time high, and the OWH often leads Lee in these metrics — but those returns don't quite measure up to what print traditionally provided. When faced with these losses, though, Lee doesn't support growth by reinvesting in newsrooms. Instead it cuts costs by getting rid of journalists and diminishing its product.

Since 2018, when Lee Enterprises first took over management of the OWH, our newsroom has been cut in half, and we'll be down to about 60 journalists by the end of this year. We've been through layoffs and buyouts. We've seen coworkers leave — many into public relations — and never get replaced. These cuts have made it harder for us to do our jobs, to cover every story that deserves attention and to serve our community.

This was the driving force behind why we formed the Omaha World-Herald Guild in 2018. Earlier this year we successfully negotiated our first contract that improved conditions through raises, just cause protection and other benefits that were previously never provided or guaranteed. Though we have made things better for our newsroom, we as a Guild must also do more to fulfill that commitment to our community, even in the face of all these challenges.

Part of that starts in our schools, and we want to take an active role in improving media education in Nebraska. As journalism teachers, you have a unique opportunity to influence not only future journalists, but also future readers. It's more than just teaching students how to write and interview. It's helping them understand what role journalism plays in their communities and how it impacts their lives.

We hope The World-Herald can be an example for your students. Not only to show what a newspaper is and how it operates, but to also demonstrate the issues journalists face every day. It may be an interesting project for your students to report on the OWH, identify what we do well and what we miss — we definitely aren't perfect — and study what a path forward for this industry might be. We'd love to see the next generations of Nebraskans speak up about the importance of journalism in this city and state.

We hope this serves as a way to connect the OWH with journalism students, and we can help in other ways:

- Sharing more resources and information about the issues facing newspapers today and the history of the OWH.
- Making our journalists available to speak to your classes, be interviewed by your students or participate in live Q&A town halls.
- Providing mentorship opportunities with interested students.
- Connecting you with other organizations that assist with journalism education.

We'd love to hear more ideas from you, so please don't hesitate to reach out. And if you'd like to send a message to Lee Enterprises about the importance of the Omaha World-Herald, you can email [OmahaletterstoLee@gmail.com](mailto:OmahaletterstoLee@gmail.com).

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