



Jerry Holbert | Boston Herald

AROUND RHODE ISLAND

Group helps to protect our greatest asset

It's August and our beach communities are bursting with activity. Beach rentals and restaurants are full and it seems there's traffic everywhere you turn. Residents and visitors alike are out in force keeping local cash registers ringing, or more appropriately in 2013, beeping and blinking.

And a large part of this annual surge in our local economy comes from those taking advantage of the shoreline not at the beach so much, but on the water, as in boating and all the ancillary businesses associated with boating. Our harbors and rivers are just as filled — some might say congested at times — as our beaches and roadways. The coastline in this region offers some of the best boating along the greater shoreline area. Boating is more pleasurable when there is a destination involved and with our islands and sandbars and harbors and rivers we have plenty of destinations. And we have clean water.

These two elements draw boaters from outside our immediate shoreline towns, preferring to keep their boats here and travel our local waters than their home waters. The nonprofit organization, Clean Up Sound and Harbors, which seems to be growing at an exponential rate, has recognized these facts and is doing something to keep our waterways busy and clean.

The group published a brochure for boaters with helpful information for locals and visitors alike, focused on letting them know how to boat as environmentally friendly as possible. With a grant from the BoatU.S. Foundation and input from the Stonington and Mystic harbor masters, the brochure makes it easy for boaters to find pumpout stations and the area pumpout boats so they can

properly empty their holding tanks of waste.

There are 13 land-based pumpout stations in our area, a significant number for our small region and something that should be considered a source of pride for those in the marine industry and those who take advantage of our shoreline. The brochure includes contact information for the Westerly pumpout boats, which provide services from Watch Hill to Stonington and up the Pawcatuck River.

With both states and neighboring New York, just across Fishers Island and Long Island sounds, designated as no-discharge areas, boaters have no choice but to do the right thing, and making the information easily available is a big help. CUSH has done much to keep our coastal waters clean and to help others do so.

CUSH started years ago by focusing on alternatives to standard lawn fertilizers that can pollute local harbors and rivers through runoff, and moved on to taking an active role in monitoring the quality of our local waters through an organized volunteer effort. This latest effort, which includes environmentally friendly cleaning products — most homemade — for boaters, makes it easy for boaters to keep their favorite spots clean and healthy for both humans and marinelife.

CUSH deserves a huge "thank you" for its efforts in keeping this vital resource, and a major economic force, appealing and healthy for all.

♦ Westerly Sun

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Bezos, our hope and savior?

Here's hoping Washington Post sale can give journalism a future

Newspapers have become the bullied school kid of American journalism.

Meaning that, as a small child will surrender his lunch money to bigger kids and spend the noon hour watching other people eat, so have newspapers wound up in the ignominious position of surrendering our product — information — to Internet and cable outlets and watching them reap handsome profits from aggregating and re-reporting it while we furlough employees and cut back home delivery. They take our product and kick our butts with it.

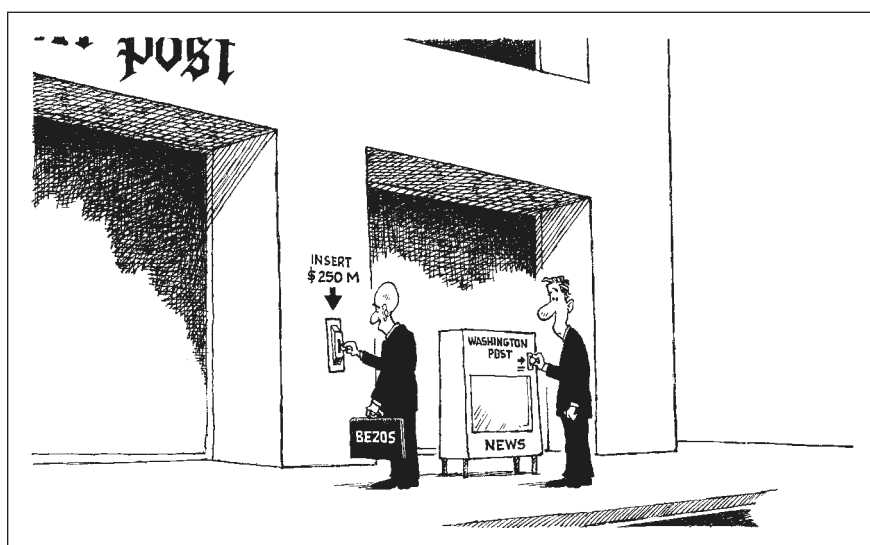
So it was with no small interest that I received last week's news of the sale of The Washington Post. After 80 years of stewardship by the storied Graham family, the Post will become the property of Jeff Bezos, the man who founded Amazon.com. Sale price: \$250 million.

But what happened last week represents more than a transfer of assets. No, it embodies a generational shift that will, let us fervently hope, resurrect an industry that has somehow managed the odd paradox of being vital, yet moribund.

To put that another way: One gets tired of providing the boots with which someone else kicks one's backside.

If that state of affairs represents a humiliation for the newspaper business, it should be regarded warily even by those who draw their paychecks from other industries. They should ask themselves what will happen to the electronic media that use and aggregate our product in the event we are no longer around to create it. And if that information is no longer available anywhere, what happens to the people who need and depend on it?

It is not often remarked upon, not much appreciated and little understood, but newspapers — yes, I mean the



Robert Ariail | Spartanburg (S.C.) Herald-Journal

old-fashioned business of printing on dead trees accounts of things that happened yesterday — are the foundation of American journalism.

Think about it: How often do you see a cable news station, local TV news outlet or blog originate — not aggregate or opine upon, but originate — some story of major local significance not involving violent crime? As a rule — yes, there are exceptions — they don't do that. They are not designed to.

Cable puts its resources into national and international coverage so you need never suffer for lack of information about Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin and various real housewives. Local TV news puts its resources into the "Breaking News" graphics they use to announce seemingly every armed robbery, house fire and freeway pileup. Bloggers don't have resources.

Yes, when the governor takes kickbacks, when the mayor stuffs the ballot box, when the innocent man winds up on death row, the story may migrate to one of those platforms. But you can be reasonably sure it will originate in a newspaper that takes seriously its obligation to watchdog journalism.

Such papers are in trouble neither because watchdog journalism ceased to be critical, nor because people stopped reading or needing it. Truth is, we have more readers than ever. Unfortunately, most of them pay nothing for the privilege because they read online and we've failed to figure out how to leverage that popularity to support our (very expensive) operations.

Hence, the hopes that are pinned on Bezos. As a man who revolutionized American retailing and became a digital pioneer in so doing, perhaps he has ideas those of us born and raised in the world of news on paper are incapable of having. Perhaps he can help the Post — and by extension, the rest of us — keep our lunch money and more effectively monetize our product. Perhaps he can show us how to save journalism.

This, anyway, is my hope. If you regard an informed electorate as critical to the function of a democracy, it should be your hope, too.

Leonard Pitts Jr., winner of the 2004 Pulitzer Prize for commentary, is a columnist for the Miami Herald. Send him email at lpitts@miamiherald.com.

READERS' LETTERS

Cosmetic changes won't help business climate

I have been reading in the Rhode Island newspapers for these past couple of months about the revamping of the Rhode Island Economic Development Corp. Since the 38 Studios issue took place and the financial ramifications of bonds involved, both the executive and legislative branches have put forth solutions involving the EDC. A new director of the EDC was appointed and now a public relations firm was hired at some expense to clean up the image of the agency.

My question is: Why the hand-wringing and the expense concerning the EDC when Rhode Island's real problem in attracting and holding businesses is the internal infrastructure of its political makeup? Rhode Island's standing nationwide in terms of a business climate stands at 50th in the country. That has nothing to do with the EDC. The EDC discussion is moot in comparison the state's real problems in this area.

One can see this as a jewel of a business area like the Quonset Development Corp. area — with large tracts of industrial lands, a port facility, rail access, large airport and new road access — stands, for the most part, underutilized. In such a beautiful and compact state like Rhode Island, why is this the way it is?

The business community nationally understands that the Rhode Island General Assembly runs the state, with the governor being little more than a figurehead. Being a one-party state does not help. Additionally, not since Bruce Sundlun was governor has Rhode Island had a governor with leadership qualities required to make a difference.

The legislature is made up greatly of existing or former public employees whose

influence can be seen continually in the legislation that is emitted on a yearly basis. On-the-job or retired teachers, education administrators, police officers, firefighters, public employee union representatives, state employees, local public servants and those related to such dominate the House and Senate. It makes one long for the days of the lawyers running the state, God help us.

This has come about because business people small and large must be present at their establishments to operate their businesses and make a living. People working in the private sector, for the most part, need to be at their jobs. This does not leave time to serve in the legislative body as was intended from the beginning. No one wants to cast aspersions on those serving, but people will do what is in their and their family's best interests as well as their organization's best interest. In the long run, what is in their best interests is not in the state's best interest for business retention and development.

Competing with states like Alabama and South Carolina is impossible. I do not see the wealth generation of private business, which is needed in Rhode Island, changing anytime soon without a major infrastructural remake of the legislature. This is one man's opinion.

Bill Falcone, Newport

The writer is the retired staff director of the Rhode Island Water Resources Board, past president of the Rhode Island Water Works Association, and chair emeritus of the Nationwide Public Projects Coalition. He resides in Sarasota, Fla., and Newport.

Welcome center at The Breakers is inappropriate

Supporters of the planned welcome center at The Breakers have recently argued that the opponents of the proposal believe that the property must be frozen in time, stating that the proposal is merely one of the core principles of historic preservation: adaptive reuse. In the Aug. 3 edition of The Newport Daily News, Nicholas Brown, the brother of the Preservation Society of Newport County's board of trustees vice chair, mentions that principle in his opening statement.

The notion of adaptive reuse is misapplied to the planned welcome center at The Breakers. The plan to construct a new building on historic, unaltered grounds is not adaptive reuse. In this plan, the gardens and original pathway are going to be removed or permanently altered to make way for a 3,700-square-foot modern building. Between 1893 and 1896, the site was intentionally landscaped as a thicket of planted specimen trees, shrubs and seasonal flora to act as a screen between the nearby houses on Ochre Point Avenue and the main house at The Breakers, just a few hundred feet away.

While the property was adaptively reused from a residence to a museum, accomplished in 1948, the mission of the Preservation Society is to display the houses in their original, built environments to educate the public of their architectural, social and artistic histories. That is what its nonprofit status hinges on. Furthermore, in 1994 The Breakers was designated a National Historic Landmark for its unaltered and superb representation of Gilded Age architecture. This is simply at risk with the current proposal.

To say that a new structure to serve the needs of the visitors — restrooms, tickets and

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food service — will help display and exhibit The Breakers is entirely wrong. The Breakers has been speaking for itself for 118 years. The welcome center is really a revenue-generating venture for a tax-exempt institution and will only diminish use of area restaurants, museums, shops and institutions. This is the mind-set of the architect planning the center, Alan Joslin of Epstein, Joslin Architects in Cambridge, Mass. At the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission's hearing on the matter, Joslin stated that "having amenities will keep the tourists near the mansions instead of going back downtown to the beaches and the shops."

Recently, the subject of the Newport Gateway Center's fate was questioned. A central visitors center in Newport serves not only the mansions, but the many other institutions that exist in town. Area restaurants, shops, hotels, attractions, transit agencies and other businesses benefit from the Gateway Center. So my question regarding The Breakers welcome center is: How does an inappropriately placed, multimillion dollar sidebar serve either the nonprofit mission of the Preservation Society or the Newport community?

Jason Bouchard, Providence