

STORM LAKE



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ABOUT INDIE LENS POP-UP



Indie Lens Pop-Up is a neighborhood series that brings people together for in-person and virtual film screenings and community-driven conversations. Featuring documentaries seen on PBS's *Independent Lens*, Indie Lens Pop-Up draws local residents, leaders, and organizations together to discuss what matters most, from newsworthy topics and social issues to family and community relationships. Make friends, share stories, and join the conversation at an Indie Lens Pop-Up screening: pbs.org/indielenspopup.

LETTERS FROM THE FILMMAKERS



I was drawn to this story as soon as I started reading about a fellow North Iowan—Art Cullen—who had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Writing in 2017. I grew up about an hour from Storm Lake on a hog farm in Buffalo Center, a small town of under 1,000 people set amidst the vast Midwest prairie with cornfields stretching as far as the eye can see. If Art's writing had earned him a Pulitzer, he must have something important to say. I started reading his paper and immediately felt in sync with its Iowan voice—this at a time when local perspectives are seldom heard. Once I started to spend time with Art, I came to appreciate not only his own challenges as a newspaperman, but those of his tight-knit family.

Unfortunately, my local newspaper, *The Buffalo Center Tribune*, went the way of many independent papers like it—once run by an enterprising local and a few staff writers, it's now owned and operated by Mid-America Publishing, a corporation that owns 22 newspapers across the state. The stories that make the fabric of the town are largely gone. It's been a loss for me, for my parents who still live there, and for the Buffalo Center community.

Thankfully, the people of Storm Lake are more fortunate than so many other communities around the country. Despite their struggles, they are connected by their biweekly paper, in part because hometown journalism is nothing short of a mission for all the Cullens—Art, Dolores, John, Tom, and Mary. In production, Beth Levison joined me as my directing partner, and we both found ourselves inspired by the Cullens' love for their town and their commitment to keeping it alive while making it a more sustainable and inclusive place. And we cannot help but think that if a local newspaper can rally a town as diverse as Storm Lake around hard facts and the common good, there may be hope for all of us. We hope this film will help to ensure the survival of *The Storm Lake Times* and of local papers like it across the country that serve communities with their own challenges, achievements and concerns.

—Jerry Risius, Director/DP

LETTERS FROM THE FILMMAKERS



I am inspired by people who have the courage to raise their voices above the crowd and effect change. It didn't take long for me to realize that I had never heard a voice quite like Art's before. I was deeply drawn to what he had to say—about Storm Lake, the struggle of immigrants there, and the role of credible journalism in a healthy community. The more time that Jerry and I spent in Storm Lake with Art and the Cullens in that industrious newsroom, the more I found myself revisiting my own relationship to the newspapers that have shaped me over the years—from the hometown paper of my youth, *The Berkshire Eagle*, to my local newspaper today, *The New York Times*. I came to realize how vital these newspapers have been to my own understanding of the world and my place in it.

And yet, *The Storm Lake Times* does struggle, like all newspapers now. Jerry and I set out to make a very intimate film about a family, a newspaper and a community on the edge, but our vision all along has been for the film to resonate more broadly. Our hope is that through the story of the Cullens and their paper, we might inspire viewers to care more deeply about their own local news source (if they're lucky enough to have one)—and community. Maybe a newspaper really is something that can unite us and not divide us.

And, like the newspaper we endeavored to bring to life, this film was made possible by its own committed crew. As the film's producer, as well, I'd like to acknowledge the film's production team and incredibly generous funders. Additionally, our work on this guide and the film's national impact campaign would not have been possible without our outreach and engagement funders: Ford Foundation|JustFilms, Good Gravy Films, The Fledgling Fund, The Harnisch Foundation, Chicken & Egg Pictures, The Philadelphia Fund, The New York Community Trust—Nola Safro Fund, Foothill Productions, Produce Iowa and the Kind World Foundation. For this experience and the support of *Storm Lake*, I am forever grateful.

—Beth Levison, Director/Producer

ABOUT THE FILM



How to Watch the Film

Indie Lens Pop-Up Screenings:

October 16–November 29, 2021

Independent Lens Broadcast Premiere:

November 15, 2021

Stream online at video.pbs.org:

November 15–December 14, 2021

“A pretty good rule is that an Iowa town will be about as strong as its newspaper and its banks. And without strong local journalism to tell a community’s story, the fabric of the place becomes frayed.”

—Art Cullen, Editor, *The Storm Lake Times*

ABOUT THE FILM

Film Synopsis

Storm Lake, Iowa, has seen its fair share of changes in the 40 years since Big Agriculture came to town. Farmers blow their life savings on new equipment they hope will keep their livelihoods intact while migrant workers flock here, welcome and not, to achieve the American Dream. Corporate, political, and environmental forces—and even a global pandemic—threaten to overwhelm the already precarious existence of the people in Storm Lake.

Enter: 63-year-old Art Cullen, an old-school journalist who has dedicated his life to his family's biweekly newspaper *The Storm Lake Times*. In 2017, Art challenges powerful corporate interests and local county officials about the pollution of local waterways that wins him a Pulitzer. While he has the power to change minds and rally votes, his pugnacious voice makes waves; disgruntled residents don't always agree with his point of view and have been known to write him and his paper off entirely.

Nearly 2,000 local papers have shuttered in the last 20 years, a crisis accelerated by COVID-19. The stakes have been especially high for the Cullen family; they comprise half of *The Times'* 10-person team. Art's 27-year-old son Tom is lead reporter, his wife Dolores the photographer and culture reporter, his older brother John the publisher, and John's wife Mary the recipe columnist. Against tight deadlines and slimmer margins, the Cullens doggedly report on their town, and wonder how the paper will survive as readers cease to support journalism like they used to.

By 2020, things start to take a dire turn. In May, Storm Lake becomes a COVID-19 epicenter in the state. The public health catastrophe poses an existential crisis for *The Times* as ad revenue and newspaper sales suffer a serious blow. And yet, the need for *The Times* is more vital than ever as credible journalism is under siege and America's democracy hangs by a thread. Despite the setbacks, the financial losses, and even quarantine, the Cullens continue to deliver the news. There's simply too much at stake not to.

Screening Objectives

Local journalism is in crisis. The rise of digital media has devastated local newspapers. Declining readership and advertising revenue have forced many to make drastic cuts or shut down all together. Without local newspapers, communities lose out on the reporting that empowers citizens to participate in—and keep their eyes on—local government. Gone are the shared set of facts that bring communities together.

The Storm Lake Times is one paper struggling to make it in a new media landscape despite an economic reality made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. There are thousands more papers like it—

and likely one near your community. Screening events for *Storm Lake* are an opportunity for communities to consider the value of credible, local journalism and what's at stake when newspapers disappear. We hope your Indie Lens Pop-Up events achieve these core objectives:

- Invite viewers to reflect on the critical role that credible local news plays in promoting civic engagement, inclusive communities, and democracy at large.
- Educate community members about the ways social media and digital advertising have changed the news industry, gutting local newspapers and expanding news deserts.
- Provide a platform for diverse local news sources—for example, Latinx- and Asian-community newspapers and Black- and Indigenous-led media—to discuss parallel struggles and opportunities in representing their communities.
- Encourage audience members to reflect on their own news consumption habits and to commit to supporting local journalism through paid subscriptions and placement of local advertising.
- Foster dialogue between local newspapers and their communities to imagine the future of local news, identify their parallel struggles, and explore opportunities for engagement and meaningful, mutual support.

Relevant Topics and Themes

- Civic engagement
- Community-based newspapers
- Democracy
- Local journalism
- Media consolidation
- News deserts
- Rise of social media and digital advertising
- Rural economy
- Solutions journalism
- COVID-19 impacts

Potential Audiences

- Newspaper readers and subscribers
- Social media users and digital advertisers
- Journalists, radio hosts, and bloggers
- Journalism students and educators
- Elected officials and government employees
- Local business owners and nonprofit leaders

BACKGROUND INFORMATION



Prior to your event discussions, familiarize yourself and your partners with key facts and studies related to topics in *Storm Lake*.

- In the 15 years leading up to 2020, more than 20 percent of U.S. newspapers folded—every state has been affected. Some 200 counties, many rural and in the South, currently do not have a newspaper. Journalism scholar Penelope Muse Abernathy describes these areas as “**news deserts**”—communities, either rural or urban, with limited access to the sort of credible and comprehensive news and information that feeds democracy at the grassroots level.

Source: “The expanding news desert,” by Penelope Muse Abernathy. Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at University of North Carolina, 2018.

- Researchers have found that local newspapers produce more local reporting in communities than television, radio, and online-only outlets combined. And studies show that without newspapers to serve as **local watchdogs**, local government spending and borrowing increase and, with less oversight, corporate and political corruption become a concern. Voter turnout in elections—especially in local elections—also falls when newspapers leave a community. The addition of radio and television news, which tend to cover more national news, does not have a significant impact on coverage of local politics and elections.

Sources: “Starving the watchdogs: Who foots the bill when newspapers disappear?” by Rhaina Cohen, Shankar Vedantam, and Tara Boyle. NPR, April 27, 2020; “Local newspapers are suffering, but they’re still (by far) the most

significant journalism producers in their communities,” by Philip Napoli and Jessica Mahone. Nieman Lab, September 9, 2019.

- Amidst accusations of “fake news” and partisan bias on the part of media, reports show an **eroding trust in news sources** in the United States. According to a 2021 survey by Poynter, the United States ranks last in media trust—at 29 percent—among 92,000 news consumers surveyed in 46 countries.

Source: “U.S. ranks last among 46 countries in trust in media, Reuters Institute report finds,” by Rick Edmonds. Poynter, July 28, 2021.

- **Paid advertising** is a critical source of revenue for local newspapers like *The Storm Lake Times*. In the last two decades, small business closures and the shift to digital advertising has siphoned off vital ad dollars from print publications. In some markets as much as 80 percent of advertising revenue goes to Google and Facebook, leaving television stations, newspapers, and radio stations fighting over a fraction of the advertising revenue they once had. In 2000, newspaper advertising revenues exceeded \$48 billion. In 2009, they fell to \$27.5 billion, a decrease of almost 50 percent, and by 2018, they had fallen to \$14.3 billion.

Sources: “Addressing the decline of local news, rise of platforms, and spread of mis- and disinformation online,” by David Ardia, Evan Ringel, Victoria Smith Ekstrand, and Ashley Fox. Center for Information Technology and Public Life, n.d.; “Eyes upon the street,” by Julie Sandorf. Stanford Innovation Review, Winter 2020.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- In addition to ad sales, **print newspaper subscriptions** are another important source of revenue to sustain local journalism. However, competition from free digital news sources has contributed to a dramatic decline in newspaper circulation. Since 2004, total weekday circulation for U.S. newspapers—including both dailies and weeklies—declined 40 percent, from 173 million to 73 million—a loss of 49 million subscribers nationwide.
Source: “The expanding news desert,” by Penelope Muse Abernathy. Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at University of North Carolina, 2018.
- Decreased revenue has contributed to dramatic cuts across the news industry, hastening a shift from local investigative reporting to cheaper digital clickbait content. The number of **employees working in U.S. newspaper newsrooms** dropped by 51 percent between 2008 and 2019, from about 71,000 to 31,000.
Source: Pew Research Center Fact Sheet, April 20, 2020.
- **Corporate media consolidation and newspaper buyouts by private equity firms** have severed ties between local newspapers and the communities they serve. More than half of all newspapers have changed ownership in the past decade, some multiple times. The largest 25 newspaper chains, such as News Media/GateHouse and Gannett, own a third of all newspapers, including two-thirds of the country’s 1,200 dailies.
Source: “The expanding news desert,” by Penelope Muse Abernathy. Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at University of North Carolina, 2018.
- Closures in small businesses during the **COVID-19 pandemic** hit newspapers extraordinarily hard at a time when residents needed public health information the most. Critical advertising revenues declined and cutbacks accelerated during the pandemic, and many newspapers took on government loans and ran crowd-funding campaigns to stay afloat. See if your local newspaper made cuts during COVID-19: [cjr.org/widescreen/covid-cutback-tracker.php](https://www.cjr.org/widescreen/covid-cutback-tracker.php).
Source: The Tow Center COVID-19 Newsroom Cutback Tracker. Columbia Journalism Review, September 9, 2020.
- **Ethnic and non-English newspapers**, such as *La Prensa*, the Spanish-language paper featured in the film, cover communities whose perspectives have been historically under-represented and misrepresented by mainstream news outlets. During the COVID-19 pandemic, their work to deliver public health information to communities hardest hit by the pandemic became even more important. But a study published by the *Columbia Journalism Review* found that the economic shutdown had a major effect on such publications, which were already operating with relatively few resources. Many were forced to lay off staff just as their communities needed reliable and relevant information the most.
Source: “For BIPOC communities, local news crisis extends beyond major cities,” by Latrell Deshan Crittenden and Andrea Wenzel. Columbia Journalism Review, September 1, 2020.
- Partisan **pay-for-play news outlets** have swooped in to fill the local news void with sponsored political content passed off as traditional objective local news. Dubbed “pink slime journalism,” these news outlets sell space in their publication to partisan groups to push their talking points. The Tow Center for Digital Journalism found that these sites tripled from 450 in 2019 to 1,200 in 2020. The increase in partisan pay-for-play local news gives rise to the concern of hyper-partisanship at the community level.
Source: “As election looms, a network of mysterious ‘pink slime’ local news outlets nearly triples in size,” by Priyanjana Bengani. Columbia Journalism Review, August 4, 2020.
- A 2019 study found that Americans have little **awareness of the financial challenges** facing local newsrooms. Of the adults that responded to the survey, 71 percent thought local news media outlets were doing well financially, yet only 14 percent responded that they had paid for their news in the past year.
Source: “Who pays for local news in the U.S.?” by Mason Walker. Pew Research Center, September 12, 2019.
- In 2021, a bipartisan group of legislators reintroduced the **Local Journalism Sustainability Act in Congress**, which was first brought to the House floor in 2020, where it stalled in committee. The proposal would offer tax credits to readers, publications, and small businesses to support the sustainability of local journalism.
Source: “Local Journalism Sustainability Act introduced to House of Representatives,” by Preston Fore. Center for Innovation and Sustainability in Local Media at University of North Carolina, June 2021.

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION



“The best journalism is that which builds communities. You build your community by publicizing good deeds done, by reporting on the cheats and scoundrels and other politicians, by urging yourself and those around you to do better, by allowing dissenting voices to be heard, and by making certain that your town’s issues are heard in Des Moines and Washington.”

—Art Cullen, Editor, *The Storm Lake Times*

Storm Lake is more than a film about a local newspaper in Iowa. It is a timely reflection on the importance of local journalism in producing the news that feeds our democracy at the grassroots, and ultimately national, level.

When planning for your event conversations, think about ways you can help your audience members see the bigger picture. Invite speakers that can talk about the trends in local newspapers in your area and across the country to help show how the issues in *Storm Lake* are widespread. Encourage people to think philosophically about how democracy has changed with the changing newspaper industry and about what’s at stake if local journalism continues to shrink. Make it personal by asking audience members to reflect on their own media habits and the news sources available to them.

This tool from *The New York Times* can help you find local newspapers in your area that produce original reporting.

If you live in a city that has a large corporate paper, consider looking for locally owned media that serve Asian communities, Spanish-speaking readers or that focus on Black or Indigenous issues. Your event can be an opportunity to build bridges throughout the community, just as the journalists do in *Storm Lake*.

If you live in a community that does not have any newspapers, it may be helpful to share information about papers that used to serve the area to help audience members see the changes over time. See if you live in a news desert here: usnewsdeserts.com.

We welcome and encourage public media stations to use the film events as an opportunity to showcase their work to cover local news. If you are a community organization, we encourage you to partner with a public media station in your state to organize your event.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Start a conversation with your guest speakers or your audience using these questions inspired by the film. You can also use questions to generate online conversation to build interest before or after your screening event.

1. How would you describe the main message of *Storm Lake*? What did you take away from watching the film?
2. In what ways does *The Storm Lake Times* benefit the community of Storm Lake? What do community members gain from having a local newspaper? What is lost when a newspaper leaves a community?
3. Does your community have or ever had a daily or weekly newspaper like *The Storm Lake Times*? If so, how has it changed over time?
4. How do you think social media and digital advertising have impacted local newspapers? What evidence do you see of this in your daily life?
5. How do you get your news? What sources do you read regularly?
6. Do you subscribe to a local newspaper? Why or why not?
7. How well does your public media station cover local news in your area? Is it one of your regular news sources? Why or why not?
8. What would you change about local news coverage in your area if you could?
9. Do you feel represented by your local news source? Is your community covered by local journalists?
10. What ethnic and non-English newspapers, like *La Prensa*, featured in the film, exist in your area? How does their coverage differ from other outlets?
11. "The best journalism is that which builds communities. You build your community by publicizing good deeds done," says Art Cullen in *Storm Lake*. In what ways does local news build a more inclusive community?
12. In what ways did *The Storm Lake Times* try to innovate and adapt to stay sustainable? What are some examples of innovation that you have seen from other newspapers?
13. What is media literacy? How do you think terms like *fake news* and *media bias* affect citizen trust in a free press?
14. Why is a free and robust press important to a democracy? Why does America need journalists?
15. What role, if any, do you think the government should play in supporting local journalism?
16. Did watching *Storm Lake* convince you to change the ways you consume news? Why or why not?

POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND/OR SPEAKERS



Organizations and businesses can help to connect you to speakers and audience members for your screening of *Storm Lake*. These potential partners have national networks that may have a presence in your area.

- Invite **local news journalists, public media hosts, and editors** to discuss their craft. Learning more about journalistic ethics and how stories are developed can help your audience build trust and appreciation for local news sources. And just as Art Cullen did in the film, journalists and editors can speak about how they've seen the industry change during their career. Find your local newspaper editor using this directory of local newspapers: [nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/support-local-journalism.html](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/support-local-journalism.html). Or try a public media station or journalism association to see if they have nearby representatives that could attend your event:
 - Find a local public broadcaster at the Corporation for Public Broadcasting site: [cpb.org/stations/pborganizations](https://www.cpb.org/stations/pborganizations).
 - See if you have a Report for America fellow in your community: reportforamerica.org/members.
 - Find your community in the Solutions Journalism hub: solutionsjournalism.org/hub/find-your-community.
 - Explore members of the Institute for Nonprofit News: inn.org/about/board-of-directors.
 - Connect with the National Association of Hispanic Journalists: nahj.org.
 - Reach out to the National Association of Black Journalists to find members in your community: nabjonline.org.
- See the Native American Journalists Association for Indigenous-led news sources: najanewsroom.com/about.
- Get in touch with America's Newspapers to see if there is an expert located near you: newspapers.org.
- Ask a **journalism professor or student newspaper editors** from a nearby school to talk with audience members about the state of local journalism. Student journalists in college or high school can help lead a conversation about what they see for the future of news media. Here are some places to look for local speakers:
 - Explore the website of the Council of Affiliates at the Association for Education of Journalism and Mass Communications (AEJMC): aejmc.org/home/about/council-of-affiliates.
 - Check out the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Lab to find high schools with journalism programs: studentreportinglabs.org/schools.
- **Librarians or historians** may be able to talk about past newspapers that served your area. Encourage them to bring visual aids to share in the nostalgia of local journalism history. Find a directory of state librarians to contact: imls.gov/grants/grants-state/state-profiles.

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES BEYOND A PANEL

“Nobody else is going to fight for the little person.”

—John Cullen, Publisher, *The Storm Lake Times*

Encourage your audiences to act on the film’s message in creative ways. These recommendations can be organized in addition to or in place of a panel of speakers.

- After watching the film, audience members may be interested in starting a **subscription to a local newspaper**. Make that opportunity available to them by inviting local newspapers to sell subscriptions at your event. Find your local paper offering subscriptions by visiting this database of local newspapers: nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/support-local-journalism.html.
- Make room in your event promotions budget to **purchase ads in local newspapers**. As mentioned in the film, newspapers depend on advertising revenue, which has diminished and continues to diminish substantially. Commit to being an advertiser in your local newspaper for your *Storm Lake* event and for future events that you host.
- Host a **town hall discussion** with local elected officials to help citizens get informed about local politics. You could invite a local journalist to moderate or cover the event and livestream the discussion to reach even more people.
- Arrange a **photojournalism exhibit** featuring local work like that of Dolores Cullen for *The Storm Lake Times*. Ask your local newspaper if they sell copies of its photography or would lend them for display at your event. Or you could work with a photographer directly to display their work.
- **Create content** to educate your audience about former newspapers that served your area. For example, you could organize an exhibit of historical newspaper clippings or make a short documentary about the history of journalism in your region. Try contacting your local librarian or historical society for support: imls.gov/grants/grants-state/state-profiles.
- Launch a **social media campaign** to promote newspaper patronage. You could ask people on social media to post creative photos of themselves with their local newspaper—receiving it on their doorstep, reading it, reusing it afterwards, and more.
- Invite your audience members to write **letters to the editor** of their newspapers about the importance of supporting local journalism. Each paper will have different instructions on how to submit letters, but in general, letters to the editor are 200- to 600-word essays expressing a viewpoint on one issue. Make it easy for your audience members to participate by providing specific instructions and examples at your event. More advice for writing letters can be found here: ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/direct-action/letters-to-editor/main.
- Give away **merchandise** that promotes journalism patronage. For example, you could enter everyone who RSVPs for the event or signs up for your newsletter to win a T-shirt. We recommend the ethically sourced collection created by RayGun: raygunsite.com/collections/journalists.
- **Teach youth** in your community how to read a newspaper. Some may have never read one before or even explored its pages. You can use the educator and student resources from the SolutionsU collection by Solutions Journalism to guide you through some discussion topics: solutionsu.solutionsjournalism.org/teaching-collections.

READ MORE



**“You’ve got to have a strong business model to do good journalism.
The problem is that the business model is falling apart.”**

—Art Cullen, Editor, *The Storm Lake Times*

Here are a few more articles about local journalism to supplement the information included in this guide.

- “The constitution doesn’t work without local news,” by Margaret Sullivan. *The Atlantic*, July 14, 2020.
theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/07/constitution-doesnt-work-without-local-news/614056
- “The last reporter in town had one big question for his rich boss,” by Dan Barry. *The New York Times*, July 10, 2020.
nytimes.com/2020/07/10/us/alden-global-capital-pottstown-mercury.html?referringSource=articleShare
- “Op-ed: How the death of local news has made political divisions far worse,” by Sarabeth Berman. *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 2020.
latimes.com/opinion/story/2020-12-04/local-newspapers-closing-pandemic-democracy
- “More than news: Indigenous media empowers Native voices and communities,” by Bryan Pollard. *American Indian Magazine*, Summer 2020.
americanindianmagazine.org/story/Indigenous-media
- “Losing the news,” by Pen America. November 20, 2019.
pen.org/local-news
- “In news industry, a stark divide between haves and have-nots,” by Keach Hagey, Lukas Alpert, and Yaryna Serkez. *The Wall Street Journal*, May 4, 2019.
medium.com/save-journalism/in-news-industry-a-stark-divide-between-haves-and-have-nots-3252b47e2cfc

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



More links and organizations to support your event planning for *Storm Lake*.

- pbs.org/independentlens/documentaries/storm-lake – This site was created by PBS *Independent Lens* for its broadcast premiere of *Storm Lake*.
- stormlakemovie.com – This is the filmmakers' site for *Storm Lake*, which offers more information about screenings, partners, and impact goals.
- reportforamerica.org – Report for America is a national service program that places journalists into local newsrooms to report on under-covered issues and communities.
- newspapers.org – America's Newspapers advocates with passion, energy, and drive on behalf of America's newspapers. It provides a network for education, support, collaboration, and connection; education on the latest trends, innovations, and changes in the industry; an alliance of local newspaper establishments where members can seek advice, share best practices, and tackle challenges; and advocacy and support for First Amendment rights and protection of the free press.
- nna.org – The National Newspaper Association's mission is to protect, promote and enhance America's community newspapers through active and effective government relation programs that addresses the issues affecting community newspapers; through educating readers, advertisers, and policy officials on the benefits and value of community newspapers; and through providing information, solutions, and strategies on current and emerging issues affecting the business interests of community newspapers.
- newsmediaalliance.org – The News Media Alliance is a nonprofit organization representing more than 2,000 news organizations and their multiplatform businesses in the United States and globally. Alliance members include print, digital, and mobile publishers of original news content. Headquartered in Arlington, Va., just outside Washington, D.C., the association focuses on ensuring the future of news media through communication, research, advocacy, and innovation.
- solutionsjournalism.org – Solutions Journalism works to spread the practice of solutions journalism: rigorous reporting on responses to social problems. They seek to rebalance the news so that every day people are exposed to stories that help them understand problems and challenges and that show potential ways to respond. [SolutionsU®](https://solutionsjournalism.org/solutionsu) connects you to solutions stories about responses to the world's challenges.
- usnewsdeserts.com – Do you live in a news desert? Use this [national map](#) to begin your own analysis. Click on any of the six tabs to see the different maps. To delve deeper, select a state in the drop-down menu below the map.

ADDENDUM

On the next page, you'll find a copy of **"Letter to a young reporter" by Art Cullen**. The editorial is a heartfelt look inside the mind of a journalist. Print and share copies with your event guests to read or take home.

Letter to a young reporter

By Art Cullen

Published June 3, 2014
The Storm Lake Times

Nepotism is fine so long as you leave it in the family. So it is that we welcome Tom Cullen to *The Storm Lake Times* as a reporting intern for the summer.

Tom, 21, will receive his bachelor's degree in economics (with minors in music and political science) presumably next spring from the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. He is the son of Dolores and me.

Tom is thinking about a career in journalism or maybe law school if he can find a friendly banker.

Hence a salutary address from the wise old man in favor of journalism, taking the form of a letter from father to son which, through the annals of history, is usually ignored by the son.

Dear Tom,

We are delighted that you have agreed to work for the summer at Buena Vista County's Hometown Newspaper. We are especially delighted that you will work about 80 hours a week for next to nothing but the satisfaction of seeing your name in 10 point boldface all caps Utopia on Page One of the best community newspaper in the world.

Since you did not read journalism textbooks, we will boil it down to a dozen paragraphs (called "grafs" in the trade) or so that should serve you amply.

When Thomas Jefferson wrote the First Amendment to the Constitution, he had you in mind. The reporter is the cornerstone of an informed electorate and a functioning democracy. Tyranny prevails wherever the press is not free. Stand guard.

Reporters hold about as much regard as the world's oldest profession, but we are not professionals. No body gives us license, we draw it from the Constitution. Nobody can require some academic degree of us to publish. All we have is our own credibility, which is called into question twice a week in our circumstance. Readers decide our future, not any branch of government.

We strive for accuracy. When you spot your mistake in the paper, it should make you want to wretch. Really. This is a healthy neuroticism. Correct your errors prominently and your credibility will build. When you lose that nausea over a mistake, go sell shoes or be a shaman in India.

Newspapering is the most fun you can have fully clothed. If you find writing is a chore after awhile, you are in the wrong business. When you are standing in the rain waiting for a murder suspect to come out of jail, think of what job you might have as an alternative. It is not an attractive thought; the rain falls soft.

As noted above, the pay is lousy and the hours can be terrible. The newspaper always comes first. If you are on your honeymoon,

as Jake Kurtz was, of course you tell your bride to wait a moment while you take photos of a fire. The marriage will be there in a half-hour, the fire will not be. It is all worth it when you see that newspaper roll up on the Mighty Harris Press every Tuesday and Thursday, and your byline leads the page. When that thrill is gone, try the monastery or actuarial sciences in Clive.

Get the news up front. Don't wander around. Get in and get out. Over-report and under-write. Write for readers and not other editors. Avoid contests for awards because they are fraught with peril. Write as if you were telling your mother about it in the kitchen. When appropriate, make them cry.

When you think you are pretty good, just remember that when Mark Twain was your age he had already been run out of Keokuk where his brother Orion owned the newspaper. By 27, he had the notes for the book *Roughing It* and he was writing letters from Hawaii for the *Sacramento Daily Union*. When you are writing letters from Hawaii, then you will know that you done good. Until then, get better.

Twain was not the only great writer to get his start at a dirty old newspaper. Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Kipling and Swift all honed their craft in the columns of newspapers. Not to mention Ben Franklin.

A pretty good rule is that an Iowa town will be about as strong as its newspaper and its banks. The best journalism is that which builds communities. You build your community by publicizing good deeds done, by reporting on the cheats and scoundrels and other politicians, by urging yourself and those around you to do better, by allowing dissenting voices to be heard, and by making certain that your town's issues are heard in Des Moines and Washington. Use your power to build, and the newspaper will grow naturally.

Always be honest. Again, credibility is your only stock in trade.

Anonymous sources almost always want to remain anonymous for interests that do not coincide with yours. Beware.

Above all, rejoice that you write for a living. Well, often it's more like slinging words together in a semblance of order to get your point across. You can change the world through journalism. Tom Paine did it with *Common Sense*. Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of the *Washington Post* did it with Watergate. Associated Press photographer Eddie Adams did it — with one brutal photo he started the end of the Vietnam War. That's the only good reason to get into this business. Because, when you're looking for a friend, remember that the dog can't read.

Love (you had better check it out),

Dad

PS: Is that story done yet?

Credits

GUIDE WRITER

Renee Gasch

COPY EDITOR

Joan D. Saunders

GUIDE DESIGNER

Mary Miguel

Jr. Designer

INDIE LENS POP-UP TEAM

Kristy Chin

Sr. Manager, Engagement & Impact

Zoe Stahl

Associate Manager, Engagement & Impact

Beatriz Castillo

Senior Director, Engagement Operations

GUIDE ADVISORS

Beth Levison

Director and Producer, *Storm Lake*

Eliza Licht

Impact Strategist, *Storm Lake*

Alice Quinlan

Impact Producer, *Storm Lake*

Penelope Muse Abernathy

Knight Chair in Journalism and Digital Media
Economics, Hussman School of Journalism
and Media

Javier Castaño

Director, *QueensLatino*

INDEPENDENT LENS

Independent Lens is an Emmy®

Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens.

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ITVS

ITVS is a San Francisco-based nonprofit organization that has, for over 25 years, funded and partnered with a diverse range of documentary filmmakers to produce and distribute untold stories. ITVS incubates and co-produces these award-winning films and then airs them for free on PBS via our weekly series, *Independent Lens*, as well as other series through our digital platform, OVEE. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For more information, visit itvs.org.

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