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FEATURE | Prepared to go down with the ship (Part 2)

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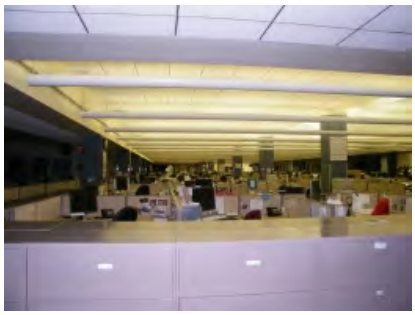
(Editor's Note: This is part two of a three-part series published in print and on DailyCollegian.com on subsequent days beginning Monday, April 27. Readers can view parts one and three on DailyCollegian.com.)



Matt Rocheleau/Collegian

At 6:30 a.m., The Globe's newsroom is quiet and empty, something that could be permanent if The New York Times Co. closes the Boston newspaper.

The New York Times Co. threatens to close The Boston Globe if demands aren't met by May 1st.

One hundred and twenty newspapers across the nation have closed their doors this year, and a total of 16,000 reporters lost employment in 2008 – a trend with no end in sight.

In February, The Rocky Mountain News in Denver, Colo., shut down after 150 years of operation. Hopeful to move the publication's readers to the Web, 30 of the Rocky Mountain News' former editorial staff members planned to launch INDenverTimes.com on May 4 with a goal of 50,000 subscriptions to fund the operation. A week ago, site developers revealed around 3,000 people pledged to subscribe, which caused some of the staff to abandon the idea, jeopardizing the project's future.

The Christian Science Monitor has switched from a daily print paper to a weekly, online news source. The Seattle Post-Intelligencer ceased print as well to focus on the Web. Meanwhile, The Hartford Courant, The Chicago Tribune, The Chicago Sun-Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Minneapolis Star-Tribune are among a list of well-known regional newspapers who have filed for bankruptcy recently.

So, why are many newspapers' profits plummeting?

The main reason is advertising. Readership has declined, but companies are investing less in advertising due to the weak economy. And, when companies are investing, most look to the Internet, TV or radio – not print – and the majority of news websites do not generate enough revenue to make a profit. Classified ads and job postings have moved online as well, to sites like Craigslist, which allow users free or cheaper listings than newspaper classifieds.

As the country's 14th largest paper, The Boston Globe – which is owned by The New York Times Co. – lost a reported $50 million in 2008 and is on track to lose $85 million more this year. If it closes shop, which the Times Co. has threatened to do, it will be the largest paper to do so.

"Times pimps, pillages Globe"

How serious The New York Times Co.'s threats are, no one really knows; or, at least, the people who do know aren't talking.

The Times Co. has refused to talk about the threat other than confirming the deadline date, while Globe management have said little on the looming deadline and negotiation process.

"We are in the midst of negotiations with our unions. Because of that, we are going to decline to comment," said an e-mail from senior vice president of corporate communications at The Times Co., Catherine Mathis.

The Boston Newspaper Guild has tried to urge The Times Co. and Globe management to allow the negotiations to be done in public, but both sides have refused so far.

Former Globe columnist Eileen McNamara called The Times Co.'s silence, "a curious position for a newspaper that's in the information business."

McNamara worked at the Boston publication for 30 years, including 10 as a columnist, and earned a Pulitzer Prize in Commentary in 1997. Feeling that she had "sort of run [her] course" at The Globe, in 2007 the North Cambridge native took a buyout to teach journalism full time at Brandeis University, where she had been working part-time since 1994.

Three days after The Times Co. announced its threat to shutter The Globe, The Boston Herald published McNamara's column, "Times pimps, pillages Globe," which resonated with many Globe employees – both journalists and those on the production end.

McNamara received calls or e-mails thanking her for the piece because "they felt that, in part, the column in The Herald was speaking for them, too," she said.

Summarizing her column, she said, "I don't think The New York Times cares about The Boston Globe. I don't think it ever did, except as an economic engine that was going to pump money into New York. And since they've bought the paper, they've done nothing but strip it of the things that made it a distinctive newspaper."

The scenario of ownership trying to cut back or close its publications altogether is common across the country, but what she said distinguishes The Globe's situation is that its owners are direct competitors in the newspaper business.

Since the Charles H. Taylor family sold their local ownership of The Globe to Times Co. CEO Arthur O. Sulzberger for $1.1 billion in 1993, The Globe has faced several rounds of layoffs, pay cuts and buyouts. The Globe's three remaining foreign bureaus were closed in 2007 and the Boston paper has just its Washington, D.C., bureau left outside of the offices in Massachusetts. The daily editions of 80 to 90 pages from 10 years ago are now 50 to 60 pages, Globe photographer George Rizer pointed out.

"The Paper of Record," as The New York Times is sometimes referred to, has had financial troubles of its own. Shares have dropped from a high of more than $50 in 2002 to about $5 now. In March, 100 Times Co. employees were laid off and salaries were cut by 5 percent. Earlier this month, The Times Co. reported a loss of $74.5 million and revenue dropped 19 percent in the first quarter of 2009.

This story will also be published online at GazetteNET.com by The Daily Hampshire Gazette, where Matt Rocheleau is a contributing writer.

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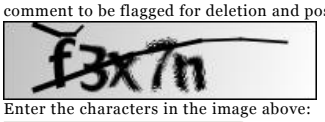

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