Commentary: An existential threat to Kentucky's community newspapers

By Scott White Woodford Sun

Community journalists across Kentucky are raising alarms about House Bill 368, which would end a requirement to publish legal notices in local newspapers. The measure cleared the Kentucky House 62-30 on Feb. 26.

Jane Ashley Pace, immediate past president of the Kentucky Press Association and publisher of The Oldham Era and the Henry County Local, recently wrote that HB 368 would decrease government transparency and could cost some smaller, rural counties their local newspaper.

The following is an edited version of a column pubwritten by Sun managing editor Scott White.

Just when you think things are turning around. . . .

The Kentucky General Assembly is considering House Bill 368, which, if passed into law, would pose a very real threat to the Woodford Sun's ability to stay open. Let me explain.

As many of you know from prior columns, we here at the Sun have been laser-focused on saving this county's 156-year-old voice from extinction. This is not crying wolf - community newspapers in Kentucky and around the country have been failing

at a steady rate.

newspaper locally owned, loare the sole source of Wood-Everything we print is reledoing business in or enjoying Woodford County.

pretty proud of the job we were even five years ago, do, and based on what many they are improving. You acof you call, text or email me or stop and tell me, most folks agree.

lished in the Woodford Sun folks have stopped me to say, "You guys can do it, we need the Sun. Don't sell or close. The Sun is indispensable."

> Many of you have renewed for two years. Many seniors ignore the discount price and pay the full amount. Some of ber of times you advertise times you run an ad.

Thank you.

Issues, there are a lot of you you will see some. out there supporting the Sun.

P **DECLARATION** Cont. from page 1

calling 800-621-FEMA (3362) or by using the FEMA App. Anyone using a relay service, such as video relay service (VRS), captioned telephone service or other similar service, can give FEMA the number for that service.

Beshear said the number of people who lost their lives in the statewide flooding had risen to 23.

"Sadly, our death toll today has now climbed to 23," he said. The newest fatality was identified as an adult male in Grant County.

of the biggest disasters one of those included in relieffund.ky.gov.

TORNADO Cont. from page 1 situational awareness by monitoring the weather on weather.gov, watching local TV, or listening to NOAA Weather Radio. • Flying debris is the greatest danger in tornadoes, so store protective coverings such as a mattress, sleeping bags, thick blankets, etc., at or near your shelter space, ready to use on a few seconds' notice.

flooding of 2022.

agement Team (IMT) in affected counties. spent last week at the Gov. Beshear said they Kentucky Operations Center in butions to The Team Ken-Frankfort to assist in the tucky Storm Relief fund efforts as part of a pilot to aid those impacted by project to provide work the severe weather sysrelief to state workers.

publisher Ben Chandler is lated by totaling the average committed to keeping this in-county mail and singlecopy sales numbers on our cally focused and open. We annual postal statement and dividing that total by the tures, community doings, datum that is updated annu-Census. This means a third vant to anyone living or of this county's population regularly reads the Sun.

And though our advertising Even being small, I am revenues are not what they cepted without complaint an increase in the cost from 75 cents to a dollar. Subscrip-I can't tell you how many tions, both new and renewals, Woodford Sun? are up.

Now, about HB 368.

HB 368, sponsored by Rep. Jennifer Decker, R-Waddy, and awaiting action in the Senate, would allow local governments and others to remove legal notices from you have increased the num- newspapers and place them on government websites. or increased the number of These are things like notices of meetings, proposed ordinances, master commis-And, according to data sioner sales, estate filings, from the Institute for Rural utility rate increases; just turn Journalism and Community to our classified page and

We don't make a ton of The institute reports out of money off of these, but this 120 community newspapers does account for a portion of in Kentucky, we are 30th in our revenue. The possible

community penetration at loss of this, now, is a real in a newspaper, it is placed in the Courier-Journal where ness.

> free and independent press? Let me be more specific. Should residents of Letcher ties including county and city County have to live without governments place public the award-winning Mountain notices on their own web-*Eagle?* Or, Georgetown sites, yet many have only one Or, Frankfort without the can't keep their current web-State Journal? Or, Versailles sites updated. and Midway without the

the federal and Kentucky ing legal notices in newspaholds public officials ac- it? countable, and decreases the risk of mischief by those of- know who Al Cross is; he hood of 20 percent." ficials and bureaucrats.

The Sun has not turned a 29% — which represents the threat, and we are nearly the local newspaper, it is he became a columnist and profit since 2015. We are a percentage of residents who there. Sadly, many of our dated, and cannot be changed then as the executive director bare bones staff. Even so, our read our paper. This is calcu- colleagues around the state after the fact. In addition, it is are in even worse shape, placed on a website managed where the loss of this revenue by the Kentucky Press Assowould put them out of busi- ciation where all legal notices in Kentucky can be Though I get and hear the found easily at kypublicno ford County hard news, fea- number of housing units, a criticisms of the media, the tices.com. When the Sun reality is do you really want publishes a legal notice, it is local sports and you name it. ally by the Bureau of the to live in a country without a in the paper, on our website and on the digital paper.

HB 368 seeks to have enti-

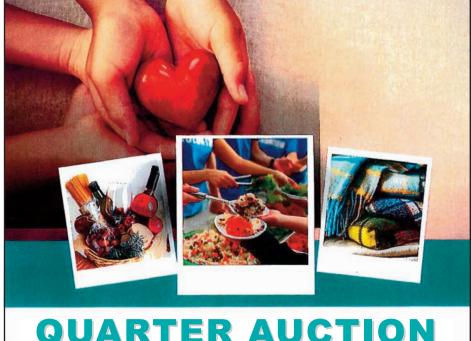
run by the City of Versailles That said, it's important to and Woodford County are, also remember there are pub- they are managed by just one paper that could be an lic policy reasons with roots or maybe two employees in the free press provisions of who have myriad other responsibilities. Is it reasonable constitutions for govern- to expect a local government, ments to be required to pub- even as good and responsible lish certain matters in the as we have, to make sure renewspaper and not just on quired legal notices are on their websites instead of government websites. Plac- posted and maintained in a local newspapers - which timely fashion? Given the pers increases transparency, risk of mischief, is it worth to 8 percent of their revenue

made his name as both a When a legal ad is placed state government reporter for it's north of 7%.

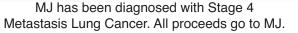
of the Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues at the University of Kentucky, from where he just recently retired. Al is also considered one of the most informed, keen and prescient observers of Kentucky politics and is a regular on KET's election night coverage. Al is also a good friend of mine and Ben's, a very good friend and subscriber of the *Sun*, and someone whom I regularly solicit for his without the News-Graphic? employee, if any, and often views and thoughts on how we operate.

> Here is what Al recently As good as the new sites emailed me about HB 368, "All in all, (last week's edition of the Sun) was a newsexcellent vest-pocket argument against HB 368, which would lead to the death of some Kentucky newspapers by allowing local governments to post public notices once got maybe 7 (percent) from public notices but are I suspect some of you now likely in the neighbor-

Well, we aren't 20%, but



QUARTER AUCTION for **MJ** Hawks



Saturday, March 22, 2025 Lewis County High School Cafeteria 79 Lions Lane, Vanceburg Enter Thru Front of School, Follow Signs

he's had to deal with dur- the deployment and ing his five years in of- served in the capacity of fice, saying it only ranks Situation Unit Leader, behind the tornado out- working with other IMT break of 2021 and the members as well as Ken-Several area Emer- agement and Federal

Tornado Siren Test

tucky Emergency Mangency Management offi- Emergency Management cials and other emergency Agency officials in proresponse officials com- viding support to local ofprising an Incident Man- ficials and relief workers

Emergency are still accepting contritems, including funeral Lewis County Emer- expenses. You can help by gency Management Di- making a donation online. Beshear termed it one rector Dennis Brown was Just go to Teamkystorm

Tollesboro

Garrison

Firebrick

Black Oak

Vanceburg

Wednesday

March 5

10:07 a.m.

• Put as many walls and floors between you and the tornado as possible.

• If you are in a mobile shelter, or a nearby permanent structure.

Test will be canceled in the event of bad weather. home, get out. Go to a basement and stay away down. Even in an interior have no basement, go to a yourself with

ing is issued, go to your lowest floor and crouch ceiling or roof.

neighbors, underground from windows. If you room you should cover thick small interior room like a padding to protect against • When a tornado warn- bathroom or closet on the falling debris, such as the



Doors Open 4:00 p.m. with Food Being Served Auction Starts at 5:00 p.m.

BRING YOUR QUARTERS & INVITE FRIENDS

If you would like to donate, please contact Susan Gilbert at 606-748-0640, Greta May 606-465-5156, or Crystal Flannigan at 606-541-2430. **All Donations Appreciated.**



TOGETHER WE

OPEN DONATION FOR FLOOD DISASTER RELIEF

Scan the QR-Code below to be taken to an Amazon wish list with items needed. Items that are not on the wish list can also be purchased and sent through the wish list directly to Flood Relief Centers in that area.



HTTPS://BIT.LY/3EIKYWD







Pike County HTTPS://BIT.LY/4GNWDGX

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