

# When you're no longer a 'new' editor, you milk it for all it's worth

In May I celebrated the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of becoming the 15<sup>th</sup> publisher of the Waterville Times in upstate New York.

In some ways my past lives at daily newspapers register on the memory meter only now and then, perhaps when breaking news falls between our weekly print cycles or, when for the 30<sup>th</sup> time in a day, people ask me about a hot topic in our community.

I have learned to hold off my laughter when someone starts to tell me about something they heard, and then stop in mid-sentence to say, Oh, wait, I read it in the Times.

For at least the first five years of owning the Times, people always called me the new editor. I wondered just how long someone had to do this job to no longer be new.

Slowly I learned names and titles, names of children and grandchildren, began to unravel the tangled family connections that come in a community where many families have their surnames on local roads and streets.

My mental Rolodex gained speed as I moved beyond names to people's history when I saw them. Works at the hardware store. Daughter on the basketball team. Wrote the letter to the editor. Son was in our Baby edition.

Still, I would occasionally hear myself introduced as being new. But about five years ago I did something I now trot out as having firmly established my Waterville cred.

Three days of steady spring rains caused creeks to overflow. A

bad storm knocked down trees and fences. I knew from listening to my scanner that morning the local fire department was out pumping flooded cellars. I soon left the house to take photos of the damage.

Driving along our local highway just north of the village, I spotted a flash of color that jumped out in the rain and gloom. It was the orange and white of a Guernsey cow, huddled knee deep in a flooded ditch on the shoulder of the highway. I looked at the cow and the tumblers fell into place. Guernsey. Baldwin farm. Denny. Fire chief. Pumping cellars. I knew the cow that had escaped the field and crossed the highway to stand in the flooding ditch belonged to our local fire chief.

I pulled over and called Village Hall, asking the clerk to radio the fire chief to say one of his cows was standing on the side of Route 12. After snapping the cow's photo, I drove off to take more photos.

Two days later a note came in the mail. 'Thanks,' it read. 'She is one of our best milkers.'

The next time someone started to call me new, I stopped him. "No," I said. "I don't just know people or their kids or their grandkids or even their dogs. I know their cows."

In my rural farming community, there can be no better way to show you belong.