

THE GUILD LEADER

Wednesday, Sept. 3, 2014

22 Lose Jobs In Takeover

By the end of the day Tuesday, 22 Guild members — 14 in advertising, 8 in editorial — were laid off as Local Media Group (a corporate sibling of GateHouse Media) prepares for its formal takeover of the Providence Journal. Journal/A.H. Belo officials wouldn't say how many non-union people were let go.

To make matters worse, LMG officials said they intend to outsource ad makeup work by the pre-pub department in January and the work of the copy desk in February, which could mean as many as 30 more layoffs over those two months. Some new jobs related to that old work might remain after that outsourcing, members were told, but LMG officials would say how many.

Though they said they will not cut the pay of the employees they hire in the takeover, any new employees brought on board later will be paid under a new scale. At briefings about the job offers, our members were told anyone who loses their job in the outsourcing and then applies for a new job, like in the pre pub/copy desk situation, would be paid under the new pay rate, which is about 30 percent less than what we are getting now.

So now we know how big a fight we are in.

The business plan laid out in LMG's words and actions shows its vision of for the Providence Journal: cramming its local identity into some one-size-fits-all cookie-cutter editorial operation and edited by people halfway across the country who have never set foot in Rhode Island.

This plan is not only bad for us, it is bad for business. One of the main selling points of this paper, to people who buy it in an honor box and for businesses who advertise in it, has been always been quality.

One of the big reasons for the Journal's quality has been that every story is gone over by someone who knows the city and state being written about. When there is no copy desk that knows Rhode Island and that can catch and fix mistakes, that advantage will be lost. Does LMG really think advertisers will buy into it? We don't.

At the last membership meeting one of the things we talked about was how, once the layoffs were over, the real fight would begin. The fight over what kind of paper LMG would publish. Now that we see it and understand what we are fighting for, that fight can begin.

We will be doing actions in the building to demonstrate the seriousness of our concerns and we will be taking our story out into the state at large, so readers and advertisers know what is at stake here. We will seek out allies amongst them, because they'll have a dog in this fight too.

It's okay to feel bad for a day or two, only natural in fact. But then it is time to start feeling angry and, after that, time to do something with that anger.

Their greatest weapon against us is getting us to believe fighting is futile. Don't give it to them.

We have a membership meeting Thursday at noon. We can start the fight there.