

INFLUENCE OF CIVIC JOURNALISM ON  
NEWSPAPER REPUTATION

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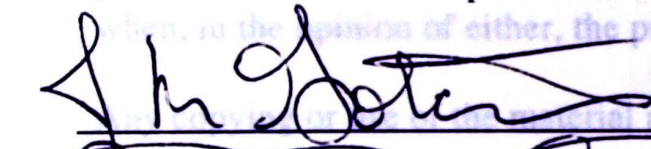

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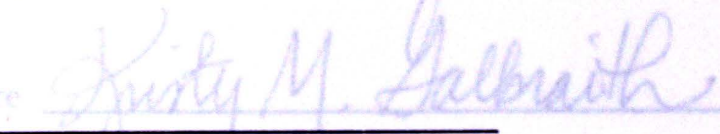
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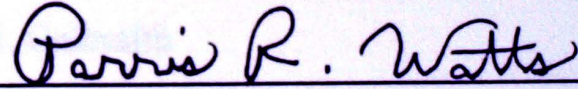
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December 2001



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NEWSPAPER REPUTATION**

**A Thesis Presented for the  
Master of Arts Degree  
Austin Peay State University**

**Kristy M. Galbraith**

**December 2001**



## DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated first and foremost to Dr. Ellen Kanervo, who has been a great source of guidance, patience and knowledge – let alone a beacon of light through this process. To Dr. Mike Gotcher, whose humor, guidance and enlightenment have made my experience at Austin Peay most memorable. And to Dr. David von Palko – my shoe-in from an ever-changing faculty, as well as a great source of support and encouragement.

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### ABSTRACT

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis attempted to determine whether a civic journalism project could have an effect on a newspaper's public image. The hypotheses sought to show a significant increase in the public's perception of the newspaper's accuracy, relevance, trust and community activity. While no significant increases in these variables were found after the civic journalism project was held, the possibilities for future research are noted. The research included in this study includes an in-depth look at civic journalism, as well as the media's credibility and role in civic engagement.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to recent studies conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE) (1997, 1999), people no longer care to read the newspaper — because, today, many do not believe what they read is news at all. A growing cynicism among American citizens toward the media and its newspapers is making it harder for newspapers to hold onto a diminishing readership. But a fresh, invigorating idea is being injected into many news stories, bringing many newspapers back from the ever-pervasive declines in readership. The injection is called civic journalism.

In this study I sought to identify whether a newspaper could increase its perception among its readership by conducting a civic journalism project. To do this, I measured changes in perceived accuracy, community involvement, trust and relevancy using a pre and post-test survey.

Over the past two decades, researchers have identified declines not only in newspaper readership, but also in media credibility. Add to that, others have noted with these declines, there have been fewer people engaged in civic life.

Credibility is among the newspaper industry's biggest concerns (Anderson, 1999; Noack, 1999; Jaben, 1999; Strupp, 1999). As N. Christian Anderson III, publisher and CEO of *The Orange County Register*, Santa Ana, Calif. states, "...our readers don't hold us in the same high regard they once did. They question our motives and the ways we go about our work. If we continue to ignore that, we're stubborn at best and stupid at worst" (Anderson, 1999, ¶ 18-19).



Among the biggest causes for this loss of credibility are bias in reporting, errors in reporting, loss of objectivity, disregard of ethics, and misunderstanding of the public and reader needs (Doyle, 1999; Pew Research Center, 1999; "Redefining Reporting," 2001; Good, 2001; Whitt, 1999).

Many researchers believe there may be a correlation between community outreach by newspapers and increased credibility, as well as civic involvement – although no specific identifications have been made to support this supposition.

Civic involvement has declined over the past decades (Schudson, 1999; Scheufele & Shah, 2000) leaving many researchers to be concerned about the future of civic involvement. That involvement is measured and defined in the various forms in which it manifests itself through people including "involvement and activity in extra-institutional groups, associations, ad hoc initiatives and efforts of all kinds to effect change about matters that concern them" (Swanson, 2000, p. 411). In his book, *Bowling Alone*, Harvard political science Professor Robert D. Putnam places the blame of this decline in civic activities on the increased isolation of people, urban growth, the media – specifically TV, and much more. (Flacks, 2000).

To combat this decline in civic involvement, many researchers are pointing to civic journalism as a valid solution. Specifically, civic journalism is defined as an effort to fortify and engage public life by energizing the people in its community (Merritt, 1995; Corrigan, 1997). It breaks the boundaries of detached reporting and offers a newspaper the opportunity to help, together with its community, solve significant issues and problems facing residents.



Ed Fouhy, executive director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, believes it sustains our communities by focusing on civic life and on those values that make up that civic life. "It is an attempt to foster more citizen participation in decision making by defining – through conventional polling as well as focus group techniques – the public agenda" (Fouhy, 1994, p. 261).

Civic journalism is also an effort to combat two negative trends that have been noted in today's society: "1) public life, the way in which democracy is expressed and experienced, is not going well; and 2) journalism in all its forms, by almost any measure of credibility, authority and economics, is in deep trouble with the public it seeks to serve" (Merritt, 1995, p. 262).

It is "a movement that has spawned millions of participants; a national dialogue among social scientists, policy makers and legislators; lively discussion on the pages of alternative publications" (Kruh, 1996, p. 1).

Interest generated by the movement has resulted in more than 200 known civic journalism projects between 1992 and 1998 (Coleman, 1997). Its start has been pinpointed to a project conducted by a newspaper in Columbus, Ga., (Coleman, 1997) that decided to abandon its role of detached observer and jump into an activist mode to help improve the quality of life in the community (Corrigan, 1997). The project, run by the late editor of the *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, Jack Swift, was titled, "Columbus Beyond 2000: Agenda For Progress," and included a survey of 400 households on issues ranging from race relations to the local economy. The *Enquirer* had embarked on a



mission, which, unbeknownst to them, would become part of a burgeoning trend (Coleman, 1997).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the effectiveness of that trend by looking at readers' attitudes about the local newspaper's accuracy, relevance, trust and community activity before and after a civic journalism project.

public and the press. From declining accuracy in news stories to bias in news reporting, the public has become disenchanted with a medium that believes it to be "the watchdog of the people." (Smith, 1997).

Hank Gilman writes, "The value of what we do exists only in the minds of our readers. If they don't regard our work as worthy of attention, they won't give it to us" (1999, p. 27).

And it is that reader perception which worries many in the profession.

"Journalists increasingly agree with public criticism of their profession and the quality of their work. Overwhelmingly, news media professionals say the lines have blurred between commentary and reporting and between entertainment and news. A growing number of reporters, editors and news executives also say that news reports are riddled with factual errors and sloppy reporting" (Pew Research Center, 1999, ¶ 1).

From the largest national newspaper to the smallest local paper, editors are feeling the heat and the decline from readership trust. "Editors at small newspapers, while battling all the same credibility issues as their larger brethren, find that many of the perceptions about 'the media' begin at the national level [and] work their way down" (Doyle, 1999, ¶ 5). Doyle includes a comment from Stephen A. Trosley, editor and publisher of the 8,900-circulation *Norwalk (Ohio) Reflector*: "The problem with our



## CHAPTER II

## LITERATURE REVIEW, ¶ 26).

Research conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in March 2000. A decline in the trust and credibility of newspapers across the country continues to widen the gap between the public and the press. From declining accuracy in news stories to bias in news reporting, the public has become disenchanted with a medium that believes it to be "the watchdog of the people." (Pew Research Center, 1999).

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credibility,” Trosley said, “is that we’ve been giving our communities the newspapers they can afford – not the newspapers they deserve.” (1999, ¶ 26).

Research conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press in March 1999 found that the news media’s credibility declined by 11% from 1985 (1999). Possibly more significant are findings which show the number of news media executives and journalists who agree to a lack of credibility, jumping from one-third in 1989 to almost half of those surveyed in 1999 (Pew Research Center, 1999).

G. Evans Witt (1999) writes that while it is surprising that “journalists’ views of their own work has soured,” they also admit they are “out of touch with the public, too focused on ‘inside baseball’ and not enough on information that people care about” (¶ 2). This based on the results of a June 1998 Pew Research Center for the People & the Press poll. Whitt further writes that journalists’ perceptions of their image is right: “The portion of the public saying they believe most of what their local daily newspaper prints is down 17 percentage points since 1985” (1999, ¶ 5). “The impact of these shortcomings is not lost on the press,” the Pew Center corroborates. “Lack of credibility is the single issue most often cited by the news media as the most important problem facing journalism today” (Pew Research Center, 1999, ¶ 2).

Why the drop in credibility? Whitt believes it’s because journalists are simply out of touch with their readers, they are biased in their reporting and they cannot distinguish between fact and opinion (1999). A 1998 study by the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), reports that “the public perceives that newspapers do not consistently demonstrate respect for, and knowledge of, their readers and their community,” (ASNE,



1998, Finding no. 2, para. 1), further emphasizing the distance placed between the public and the media.

But one commentator goes so far as to say that reporters today will actually ignore facts. "A lot of journalists...have absorbed such trendy post-modern notions as, 'There is no objective truth' "(Lowry, 1999, ¶ 15). Lowry further comments that journalists hold a greater hostility towards truth because it "frees them from the deadening and demeaning task of transmitting facts" (1999, ¶ 16).

A turning from the code of journalist ethics may also account for this loss of credibility. Howard Good, a coordinator of the journalism program at the State University of New York, writes: "Journalists always seem somewhat surprised when surveys reveal that the public doesn't like or trust them. But how could it be otherwise? The press has shown about as much regard for ethics as the wrongdoers it so eagerly exposes...Rather than help refurbish our shabby institutions, journalists have taken up residence in a decayed building on the same crumbling block" (Good, 2001, ¶ 4).

Further studies conducted by the ASNE found that accuracy, often a measurement for credibility, contributes to the public distrust and confidence of the media. Its results revealed "each misspelled word, bad apostrophe, garbled grammatical construction, weird cutline and mislabeled map erodes public confidence in a newspaper's ability to get anything right" (1998).

Over and over, readers are decrying the media with similar complaints. As part of the Free Press/ Fair Press project, Bob Haiman said he found, across the nation, "with

happened.



almost no variation from city to city, readers agreed that the following newspaper story practices struck them as unfair:

- “1. Newspapers are inaccurate and get basic facts wrong
2. Newspapers refuse to admit their errors and publish prompt, full and candid corrections.
3. Newspapers use anonymous or disguised sources, particularly to make charges or level attacks.
4. Newspapers have reporters who simply do not have the special knowledge or expertise to cover complex subjects or stories.
5. Newspapers prey on the weak and defenseless, particularly children, victims of tragedy, and unsophisticated citizens not accustomed to being questioned by reporters or surrounded by photographers.
6. Newspapers concentrate too much on the negative problems and failures of society and too little on positive accomplishments and successes. And they tend to frame everything as conflict.
7. Newspapers lack diversity of all kinds in the composition of staff and the content of the paper.
8. Newspapers allow editorial opinion—or the opinions of reporters—to infiltrate news stories. Reporters write news stories laced with reportorial speculation on the possible motives of the people involved, and this makes it difficult for readers to grasp what actually happened as opposed to why the reporter suspected it happened.



9. Newspapers are unwilling to admit that "sometimes there simply is no big story here," despite what might have been thought when the story was assigned or the reporting begun" (Haiman, 2001, ¶ 6-14).

This public perception of biased reporting has also revealed itself in a Pew Research Center study. The February 1999 study found that 56% of those surveyed see the press as politically biased – an 11% increase over a previous survey conducted by the Pew Center in 1985.

Even television news has been ranked more credible than newspapers. In Alabama, based on a survey conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1985, residents rated cable news as the most trustworthy news service (Ibelema & Powell, 2001, ¶ 1). Ibelema & Powell cite a survey conducted by the Roper organization in 1998 which found a 54% "net trust" in local TV compared to a 40% "net trust" for local newspapers – "net trust being the difference between the percentage of respondents who 'can trust' and those who 'cannot trust' the respective media" (2001, ¶ 8). Although, "the same survey found, however, that by this measure, there is little difference in credibility between local newspapers and the nightly network news" (Ibelema & Powell, 2001, ¶ 8).

With the obvious decline in public perception towards the media, newspapers are developing ways to abate the loss of credibility. Almost all are agreeing they need to reconnect with the reader.

Solutions editors are proposing in an effort to fight the slump of media credibility include increasing diversity in the newsroom, increasing interaction with readers,



explaining the news-gathering process, promoting journalistic ethics, reviewing controversial topics, setting down more concrete standards of journalism and ethics and expanding local news coverage (Strupp, 1999; Jaben, 1999; Smith, 2001).

Various newspapers are already working towards improving that same credibility by improving the accuracy of news reports. While many newspapers are simply focusing on running corrections, (Haiman, 2001), one newspaper is focusing on routing out and eliminating its errors. In Chicago, the *Tribune* “instituted an elaborate system to track every error in the paper, to find out who made it, how it happened, and how it could be avoided in the future. In five years, errors were reduced by 50 percent” (Haiman, 2001, ¶ 16). Ray Marcano, who is managing editor for production at the *Dayton Daily News*, believes that by carefully considering the effects stories may have on readers, (including problems of accuracy) journalists can, and will, do a better job (2001).

Many other newspapers are reaching out to readers, making greater efforts to connect with them. “Nine of ten editors say the future of their profession depends on more interactivity with readers” (“Redefining Reporting,” 2001, ¶ 3) – this according to a Pew Research Center study which sponsored the survey, along with the Associated Press Managing Editors association and the National Conference of Editorial Writers in July 2001. Jack Nelson, chairman of the Pew Center's Advisory Board and Chief Washington Correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times*, said, “It's a healthy development for the press and the public that there is an increasing emphasis on articles that better connect with readers and report on solutions as well as problems” (“Redefining Reporting,” 2001, ¶ 5).



One significant solution that some say may help bring about a greater increase in credibility among the public is civic journalism. This movement towards civic (or as it sometimes referred to public) journalism is in essence confronting the decay of newspapers. Jay Rosen, associate professor of journalism at New York University, who is often cited as one of the founders of the civic journalism movement, says, "The press is a participant in our national life. It suffers when the quality of public life erodes. And when the performance of the press deteriorates – as it has in recent years – then public life suffers as well" (Rosen, 1996, p. 833). Rosen emphasizes that by changing how journalists approach their work, they will rediscover "the power of the democratic ideal as an organizing principle for their work" (1996, p. 833). He believes this movement can and will "recharge the batteries of the press and show the way to much needed reforms" (1996, p.833).

So what exactly is this phenomenon called civic journalism? Numerous articles and research have been published in an effort to answer this question, although there remains some disagreement between practitioners and critics as to its true definition.

There are numerous viewpoints that describe this debate on the meaning of civic journalism. While many have varying definitions and describe the phenomenon from different angles, they all have one common thread: civic journalism is a product of the community in which it is implemented. Here is a sampling of those views.

Davis Merritt, editor and senior vice president of the *Wichita (KS) Eagle*, states that civic journalism "provides a new objective for the media: serving a purpose and that make up the public agenda of a community. It broadens a newspaper's focus from



beyond – but not in place of – telling the news: the purpose of reinvigorating public life by re-engaging people in it” (Merritt, 1995, p. 130).

Lewis A. Friedland, an assistant professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and research director of the Civic Practices Network, believes civic journalism revolves around the proposition that news institutions depend on a vibrant public and civic life for their own survival, requiring all voices of the community be heard when public debates are joined (1996). “It is also active, premised on the idea that civic engagement is required from everyone, that urban problems, for example, cannot be solved by news organizations or local elites acting on others’ behalf” (Friedland, 1996, p. 46).

Countering the newspaper’s widespread loss of public credibility, Edmund Lambeth, a journalism professor at the University of Missouri who founded the Civic Journalism Interest Group in 1995, believes civic journalism is a systematic attempt in assuming more responsibility for the vitality of civic life (1996). He believes that it is framed to stimulate public deliberation on pressing community issues (Lambeth, 1996). “Civic journalists are listeners. They say they sift what citizens themselves think about public affairs, not as a prelude to ‘pandering’ or marketeering, as critics contend, but to “frame their own stories in ways more likely to foster genuine public deliberation” (Lambeth, 1996, p. 19).

Ed Fouhy, executive director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, states that civic journalism is not just about electoral politics but about the “whole range of issues that make up the public agenda of a community. It broadens a newspaper’s focus from



one dominated by political and governmental news to include more issues of interest to citizens who are neither members of the policy-making elite nor part of the political cognoscenti” (Fouhy, 1994, p.261). Fouhy believes civic journalism sustains our communities by focusing on civic life and on those values, which make up that civic life. “It is an attempt to foster more citizen participation in decision making by defining – through conventional polling as well as focus group techniques – the public agenda” (Fouhy, 1994, p. 261).

Fostering that participation in civic life is what many political scientists are focusing on while looking towards ways to encourage the public to return to democratic activism. Michael Schudson, professor and author of “The Good Citizen, A History of American Civic Life” spoke at a 1999 Batten Symposium on this subject of civic involvement. Schudson said, “There will be no re-engaging citizens without rethinking citizenship and recapturing its multiple meanings that our American heritage has provided us” (1999, ¶ 79). Schudson believes it is, “the citizen who takes an interest in and participates in government, within the norms of equality and the rule of law, is, indeed, the heart and soul of democracy” (1999, ¶ 13).

Civic engagement is defined in the various forms in which it manifests itself through people including “involvement and activity in extra-institutional groups, associations, ad hoc initiatives and efforts of all kinds to effect change about matters that concern them” (Swanson, 2000, p. 411). It is also considered by many “to be an essential characteristic of a properly functioning society because cooperative actions enable citizens to efficiently pursue common goals” (Scheufele & Shah, 2000, ¶ 3).



A decline in this civic engagement over the years has created much concern for community involvement across the nation. Participation in formal civic organizations has declined by more than one quarter, according to a study conducted by Harvard political science Professor Robert D. Putnam in 1995 (Scheufele & Shah, 2000, ¶ 4). Decreasing voter turnout, shrinking labor unions, declining PTA membership and waning civic and fraternal organization participation are just a few of the indicators that are part of this decline (Conte, 1996). Putnam decries this 30 year-decline, placing blame, in part, on the increased isolation of people, urban growth, the media – specifically TV (Flacks, 2000).

While Putnam places blame on television for this decline, others believe newspapers share similar blame. “What’s wrong with newspapers is many-fold,” writes David Lawrence, Jr., former publisher of *The Miami Herald*. “The press and media share the responsibility for the pervasive cynicism, apathy, and antipathy toward public institutions and public servants” (Lawrence, 1999, p. 62).

There has also been increasing criticism of the press’ role in the protection of democracy. A report written by the Pew Center in 1985 stated the public’s confidence in the press’ protection of America’s democracy has evaporated (1999). This reasoning was based on a comparison of a survey completed in 1985 where two-to-one believed the press protected democracy, and more recently, figures which reduced it to a close division. The February 1999 study found 45% believed the media protected democracy and 38% said they hurt it (Pew Center, 1999).

“In 1985, the public saw the press as a democratic caretaker...Americans now split evenly (41% to 42%) over whether the press is too critical of the United States, a



significant change from the mid-1980s when the public described the news media as standing up for America by a 52% to 30% margin" (Pew Center, 1999, ¶ 25).

It's for this and other reasons that many journalists feel the need to reconnect with their obligation to democracy by possibly helping reengage people in civic life. One way, some believe, is through civic (or public) journalism. "Public journalism is part of a broader movement to revive civic life generally," writes Chris Conte (1996, p. 831).

Ever since its birth, educators and editors have had differing views on civic journalism. Don Corrigan, a professor at Webster University, discusses these differences in his research of editors and university professors of journalism and mass communication. In his survey, he found that while many editors and professors were very familiar with the term public journalism, they are divided on what constitutes a civic journalism project (Corrigan, 1997). Corrigan states that they are divided not only by what constitutes a civic journalism project, but also by whether the ideas are representative of what civic journalism means (1997). To emphasize his belief that in order for civic journalism to be successful, it must first be clearly defined by all involved, Corrigan quoted a statement by Renita Coleman of the University of Missouri, "Those who are engaging in public journalism projects are essentially working without a blueprint, inventing it as they go. There are many criticisms – both from within the movement and from those outside. Public journalism (or civic journalism) proponents must address the definition problem if the movement is to have a future" (1997, p. 3).

It is here where there must be a clear delineation between civic journalism and community journalism. These are words not to be used interchangeably, as they are two



separate ideas and practices. As a researcher once commented, "They are two leaves hanging from the same tree." (Lauterer, 1996).

While many would agree the two practices intersect many of the same lines, there is still an underlying difference between them (Lauterer, 1996). "Community newspapers, which throw much of their news and editorial weight behind providing local coverage and bringing the news home by finding the significant local angle to national and international stories, embrace their civic role by recognizing their public mandate to promote the general welfare of the community" (Lauterer, 1996, p. 5). On the other hand, civic journalism takes an active role in seeking to bring about community change for the better.

But there are areas where the two practices seem to blend. It is in this area of seeking how to help the community that a community newspaper's journalists have a similar role to those who practice civic journalism (Lauterer, 1996). "Helping one's community is one of the main support pillars of community journalism. Helping public life go well, becomes a moral imperative for the newspaper, be it a community, civic or public newspaper" (Lauterer, 1996, p. 5). Both practices hold this same goal – helping public life.

Another area where research has been conducted in civic journalism is the actual process of how newspapers can and should determine what constitutes their project. Marking the history of journalism from the "One Journalism" perspective of detachment, Merritt argues that this age-old vice has led journalists away from promoting the practice



of democratic deliberation and denying any journalistic concern or responsibility for what happens, if anything, to a community (1995).

Civic journalism has provided a new objective to take journalists away from this old perspective and reinvigorate public life. Merritt states that there are obvious means for making civic journalism work – including challenging the old assumptions that conflict is the most useful and interesting narrative device, avoiding traps of episodic storytelling and having an interest in whether problems are solved through democratic deliberation (Merritt, 1995).

“Public journalism is dependent on public deliberation,” states David Mathews (1996, p. 39) who believes the press needs to “align its practices to prompt a more deliberative form of dialogue” in order to truly report. And according to Fouhy (1994), in order to move toward that deliberative state, civic journalism has to make use of the old assumptions, “Far from compromising the enshrined objectivity and independence of the press, civic journalism dramatizes the unique capacity of the news media to infuse community governance with both information and judgment (p. 266).”

Edmund Lambeth and David Craig provided powerful insight into the goals of public or civic journalism. To do this, they created a framework of activity, rated low to high (modes 1-3), to describe the different roles some news organizations have chosen to play (Lambeth & Craig, 1995). They identified these roles as: Emphasis on listening to the public and experts/leaders about public problems, reactions, issues and concerns; emphasis on initiating dialogue with and between the public and experts/leaders about

newspapers through to the future. Higgins argues that current practices place it above all



public problems, reactions, issues, concerns, and solutions; and participating with the public and experts/leaders to solve public problems (Lambeth & Craig, 1995). Both authors agree that the time is right for scholars and practitioners to conduct extensive studies of not only the uses and limitations of civic journalism but to what purposes it can legitimately be deployed.

With these new trends and new goals of civic journalism, researchers are now looking into the news values held and based on the cultural assumption that journalists do have a responsibility to the public (Higgins, 1996). Higgins states in her research that journalists should focus on emphasizing the how and why. They should break their wholehearted addiction to immediacy and change their focus to representing a constituency through specialization and analysis. These areas, Higgins says, are representative of the true value of news.

Examining the how and why of news stories, Higgins looks to a study conducted by Doris Graber in which she examined the content of 350 television news stories. Higgins writes that each of them answered the traditional who, what, where and when questions about newsworthy events (Higgins, 1996). But they slighted the how and why questions “which placed events in appropriate contexts and explained their significance” (Higgins, 1996, p. 83). Higgins argues that “unless journalists provide answers to how and why questions, members of lower socioeconomic classes will be unable to make informed decisions that could enhance their quality of life” (Higgins 1996, p. 85).

It is this devaluing the immediacy of news that Higgins argues will carry many newspapers through to the future. Higgins argues that current practices place it above all



other news values (Higgins, 1996). This priority, she believes, constrains the quality of argument and discussion (Higgins, 1996). "Journalists who focus on understanding the citizen instead of 'scooping the competition' may survive the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Higgins, 1996, p. 85). And by putting reporters to work on the specialization of a subject or area and learning to analyze what they report on, Higgins believes newspapers will succeed where others have not. "The journalism profession contains too many generalists and not enough specialists to accommodate the public's need to know in the 1990s" (Higgins, 1996, p. 86).

And last, but far from least, Higgins believes that the representation of a constituency continues to be disregarded by many newspapers. Those publishers that have managed to increase the readership in order to generate a profit, have ultimately done so at the cost of their constituency, Higgins argues (1996). "They have failed to meet an editorial responsibility to a specific readership thus nullifying this news value" (Higgins, 1996, p. 87).

Another evaluation of civic journalism looks at it from the perspective of research, suggesting that it is a valuable tool not only for those practicing civic journalism, but also for those in the academic world. "It is a focus of research that meets the tests of timeliness, relevance, manageability and significance. It also is a research activity whose insights are likely to feed directly into university classrooms, newsrooms and mid-career professional workshops" (Lambeth & Craig, 1995, p. 148). Both urge a joint effort or venture between scholars and practicing journalists not only to increase the



value of academic media research conducted by universities, but also to help connect the media more closely and effectively to the public (Lambeth & Craig, 1995).

Another interesting and significant study to emerge in the field of civic journalism lies in the work of Renita Coleman. Her studies have dissected the civic journalism movement by identifying its “intellectual antecedents” and “philosophical foundations” (Coleman, 1997).

Coleman (1997) argues that civic journalism cannot truly be understood without a deeper insight into the principles on which civic journalism was founded. She believes the lack of insight into these principles may well be the reason some misguided civic journalism projects have ultimately failed (Coleman, 1997). She also argues that today’s approach to civic journalism should be understood in relation to historical, social and philosophical context so practitioners and critics can constructively analyze its problems and potentials (Coleman, 1997).

As with many new practices, there are failures. Corrigan (1997) noted one such failure in the “Campaign Central” project of the *Record* in Hackensack, N.J. The goal of the project was to inform voters of issues relevant to them during the 1996 election. The paper provided at least one full page of daily “civic-style” coverage from Labor Day through the November 1996 election. Supporting activities were also included such as televised town meetings, chat rooms on a web site and an eight-page voters guide.

But a study on the effects of the civic journalism project, conducted by David Bloomquist, the *Record*’s public affairs editor, and Cliff Zukin, a consultant from the Eaglton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University, brought bad news. Zukin and



Bloomquist found readers of the *Record* were no better informed about the elections than were readers of the “traditional” coverage in other papers. They also found 42 % of the *Record*’s readers could not name either U.S. Senate candidate in the race. (Corrigan, 1997).

This obvious failure was a hard blow to proponents of the civic journalism movement, although Corrigan states it was not fatal. In fact, panelists at the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication made an effort to contextualize the discouraging results of this project, so as to avoid these same mistakes with future projects (Corrigan, 1997). Some of the points they made included a belief that the *Record*’s experiment may have been too short to produce significant results; its coverage wasn’t sufficiently public; it was drowned out by other competing messages from other media; and the essential information citizens wanted was too difficult to find, understand and act on (Corrigan, 1997).

Because of these failures, practitioners quickly recognized the great challenges to effectively and successfully implementing civic journalism projects. Lewis Friedland discusses these challenges in his work. The first challenge, Friedland (1996) states, is being able to tell a different story of public life: “to focus on stories of civic engagement, problem-solving, and renewal” (Friedland, 1996, p. 46). This is one challenge, Friedland states that many newspapers and television stations have taken on and overcome.

The second challenge, Friedland believes, is much more difficult: that of “incorporating the insights of civic engagement more deeply into daily reporting in order to change the fundamental image of community life, the ‘imagined community’ that is



offered every day, in every story and on every page” (1996, p. 46). In other words, this challenge is for civic journalists not to ignore deep problems, racial divides, and civic challenges; but rather to dig into them and shape them into a form that can be understood -- a form that allows citizens from cities and suburbs to cross the boundaries that separate them and address their common problems (Friedland, 1996).

Not every editor or reporter has become fond of this movement, though. In fact, several have openly criticized the practice of civic journalism, believing it to actually be a movement away from ‘true journalism.’ Michael Gartner chairman and editor of *The Daily Tribune* in Ames, Iowa, strongly opposes the practice of civic journalism believing that readers don’t need solutions, they need facts – facts about their towns, taxes, schools, etc. (1996): “News pages are supposed to explain the community, not convene it. News reporters are supposed to explain the community, not convene it. News reporters are supposed to explore the issues, not solve them. Newspapers are supposed to expose the wrongs, no campaign against them. Reporters and city editors are not supposed to write legislation or lead campaigns or pass moral judgments. They’re supposed to tell the truth. And God knows that’s hard enough to do all by itself...” (1996, p. 833).

Gartner further comments that he believes the new journalism to be bad journalism, believing that “it ultimately will cost a newspaper its most precious asset – its credibility” (1996, p. 833).

While reviewing a number of works by various authors on the subject of civic journalism, Hanno Hardt, of the University of Iowa, provides his own criticisms for the ‘90s movement. One of his many criticisms comes after an analysis of the book, *Getting*



*the Connections Right* by Jay Rosen. In this book, Rosen provides a detailed theoretical basis for the promotion of civic journalism 'to help revive civic life and improve public dialogue' (Hardt, 1997). Hardt states that Rosen suggests journalists, prone to spreading cynicism, 'drop the devastating illusion of themselves as bystanders' and rejoin 'the American experiment', a suggestion that Hardt believes frees the journalist from charges of bias and lack of professionalism (1997). "As impressive as this may be, there is little to suggest that the bias of journalists as community workers will help revive civic life or produce professionalism" (Hardt, 1997, p. 106).

For Howell Raines, editorial page editor of *The New York Times*, the idea of civic journalism is no more than a simple fad that ignores values that have been practiced by journalists for more than 50 years (1996). "Civic journalism equates to tossing over values, no matter how you dress it up" (Raines, 1996, p. 30). Raines believes that if journalists get the facts right to begin with, the people, "acting through the democratic process, will take care of the connections – and also choose those they want to do the connecting" (p. 30). Civic journalism, Raines states, asserts that the democratic process is in such bad shape that journalists have no other choice than to "throw away our old values, adopt a political agenda, and rescue society from its current epidemic of misunderstanding and bad feelings" (p. 30). Raines also believes it produces "weak-kneed reporting and watery editorials that pollute the political process and hobble civic progress" (Raines, 1996, p. 30).

Other critics contend that it is only a fad that will become a "historical footnote in 50 years" (Calamai, 1996, p. 19), commenting that it is simply a fad based on circulation



woes (Calamai, 1996). Charles Reinken, an editorial writer, suggests, "Editorial writing is public journalism. The question is whether public journalism has any business on the news pages" (Calamai, 1996, p. 20). Hardt also describes other criticisms of civic journalism, including the charge that it reduces journalism to a marketing tool, surrenders professional judgments to audience opinions, creates a partisan press and challenges the claims of a journalist's autonomy.

An interesting argument Hardt (1997) makes against civic journalism is that it is only a fragment of a larger and deeper problem within journalism itself – that of lackluster performance and sagging circulation figures. Hardt concludes, "As long as commercial considerations dictate the nature of journalism and direct the discourse in society, though, there will be many publics that will remain silent and without representation and many journalists who will surrender to the demands of a patronage press" (p. 109).

What is the reception to this civic journalism trend by practicing journalists? In a study conducted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors to look at newspaper journalists' demographics, political outlooks and views on coverage, it was found that a significant number of journalists accept some of the concepts of civic journalism. In this survey, which more than 1,000 randomly selected journalists at U.S. daily newspapers responded to in the fall of 1996, journalists overwhelmingly supported (by 88%) developing enterprise stories supported by editorials to help communities move toward solutions. The research practices of civic journalism, that of polling the public to determine the most pressing community issues and then trying to get political candidates



to focus on these issues was supported by 71% of respondents. Conducting town meetings to discover key issues and then following up on those issues and offering solutions was supported by 68%. Many reporters advocate the use of civic journalism in the newsroom. In fact, many find it a satisfying addition to what at times amounts to a monotonous job of observation only (Kruh, 1996).

For other reporters it has also become a way fulfilling civic responsibility. "We journalists well know our democratic role in terms of our constitutional right to free speech; defending and exercising that right is as natural to us as asking the follow-up question. But we have been so focused on that right that we have neglected meaningful consideration of our responsibility" (Kruh, 1996, p. 33).

"Journalists know in their hearts that the media have a stake in this society, too," states Kruh (1996, p. 32). "They understand that providing the mortar for building community is not only their privilege but their civic duty. They know that, if there is a bias here, it is no more than the bias of a medical reporter who wants a cure for cancer or of an education reporter who champions a literacy campaign" (Kruh, 1996, p. 33).

An underlying theme of much research has been that of a nationwide discontent with newspapers and the media. In simplistic terms, public trust in the media has evaporated. Readers have turned cynicism-laced eyes and often deaf ears to the media preferring only to get the 'real news – not pseudo news' (Prato, 1997; Hernandez, 1996) they must have in order to function on a daily basis. The standoffish, detached journalists and their employers have created a newspaper entity unable to identify with its readers or, for that matter, have concern for its readers.



Hernandez (1996) states that people believe the media “have lost their sense of what the truth is – that coverage too often lacks accuracy; and that news organizations twist and turn things and in the process lose the essence of their stories” (p. 11).

Declining readership that has been marked by many researchers has become another problem for newspapers today. But civic journalism, in its simplistic form at best, may provide a basis for increasing public trust and ultimately newspaper readership.

By pinpointing the greatest potential for a newspaper’s growth, many editors may begin to agree to what an unidentified Eastern metro staff member once said, “Unless newspapers make people in their communities feel a part of them, as if they have a stake in them, they will disappear. People no longer want to be merely observed. People want to be cared about” (ASNE, 1997, p. 36).

### **Research Hypotheses**

Crime and safety have continued to make the top five list of concerns for Clarksville residents, according to a 1998 poll conducted by *The Leaf-Chronicle* and Gannett Corp. This civic journalism project would seek to tap into that concern and bring it into focus through *The Leaf-Chronicle* and subsequently prove or disprove an overarching meta-hypothesis: *The Leaf-Chronicle* will improve its public image as a result of conducting a civic journalism project that would ultimately help reduce crime and increase safety within the city of Clarksville.



This study will seek to prove these hypotheses:

1. This project will increase the public's perception of *The Leaf-Chronicle's* community activity.
2. This project will increase the public's perception of *The Leaf-Chronicle's* accuracy.
3. This project will increase the perception of the public toward *The Leaf-Chronicle's* ability to create relevant news to readers.
4. This project will increase the public's perceived trust in *The Leaf-Chronicle*.

and implemented.

#### The Survey Instrument

Using suggestions from the local newspaper, *The Leaf-Chronicle* editors, who had agreed early on to participate in the study, and using ideas from different surveys (Pew Research Center, 1997; PollingReport.com, 1999; Pew Research Center, 2000) that had been used on measuring perceptions of crime – the survey instrument was formed. It contained 28 questions. (See Appendix C)

The survey first sought to measure how safe residents felt themselves to be in the city of Clarksville, whether they had personally been victims of crime or whether someone close to them or living in their neighborhood had been victimized. The results of this part of the survey were released to *The Leaf-Chronicle* to begin the civic journalism project. The survey also sought to measure the perception of community members in Clarksville towards *The Leaf Chronicle*, in regards to its role in the community, its effect on issues and its value in the community.



## CHAPTER III

## METHOD

The idea to design a study around civic journalism came from a desire to find legitimate ways to improve the reputation of a newspaper. From there, the study evolved to focus on public perception and whether a civic journalism project would be effective in changing it. But to measure that public perception and determine if there had been a change as a result of the civic journalism project, a survey instrument had to be designed and implemented.

### The Survey Instrument

Using suggestions from the local newspaper, *The Leaf-Chronicle* editors, who had agreed early on to participate in the study, and using ideas from different surveys (Pew Research Center, 1997; PollingReport.com, 1999; Pew Research Center, 2000) that had been used on measuring perceptions of crime – the survey instrument was formed. It contained 28 questions. (See Appendix C)

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Clarksville residents were randomly selected through city prefix codes, which were provided by the local telephone company, BellSouth. The survey was completed in February 2001 with 116 full and partial responses.

The four specific variables the survey sought to measure were accuracy, trust, relevance, and community involvement. Two questions were created to measure each variable. For accuracy: "In general, do you think *The Leaf-Chronicle* gets the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate?" And, "In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in *The Leaf-Chronicle* when it comes to reporting the news accurately?" For trust: "In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in *The Leaf-Chronicle* when it comes to reporting the news fairly?" And "In presenting the news dealing with local political and social issues, do you think that *The Leaf-Chronicle* deals fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?" For relevance: "Do you think *The Leaf-Chronicle* is out of touch with the average Clarksvillian, or are they generally in touch?" And "How much, if any at all, do you look forward to reading the paper each day?" For community involvement: "Which of the following two statements about *The Leaf-Chronicle* do you agree with more? *The Leaf-Chronicle* does not understand the community or *The Leaf-Chronicle* understands the community." And "Which of the following two statements about *The Leaf-Chronicle* do you agree with more? *The Leaf-Chronicle* is not concerned about the community or *The Leaf-Chronicle* is concerned about the community."

These variables are often used as the basis for measuring media use and media credibility in communication studies (Rimmer & Weaver, 1987).



A post-survey was conducted two weeks after the completion of the civic journalism project to measure the effects of the project and the residents' views toward the newspaper. The survey was also contingent on the civic journalism project that began in April and was conducted through *The Leaf-Chronicle*. But, the ending of the civic journalism project collided with the end of the semester. The lab was still in use by a project that had to be extended. With only two graduate students and only three days to use the Research Center, the method of conducting the survey was modified. Responses were still randomly selected by prefix over the phone for the first night of calls, but into the second day, the survey was printed out and given to random people on the street, at offices, at a ball game and on the campus of APSU. Special care was given to ensuring diversity among the respondents. The results were compiled with the phone survey results. The survey was completed at the end of May 2001 with 93 full and partial responses.

### **The Civic Journalism Project**

The civic journalism project dubbed, "Building a Safer Clarksville," lasted approximately three weeks and focused on the issue of crime in the city. It involved numerous stories written by *Leaf-Chronicle* staff members and a public forum hosted by the newspaper's editor, Richard Stevens. (See Appendix D)

A special feature story reporting the results of the February survey and a special introductory story announcing the project were published on April 8, 2001. Both stories officially kicked off the project. The introduction to the project explained to the readers the ultimate goal of the project – creating strategies to make Clarksville a safer city. The



feature story detailed the major fears of residents regarding crime in the city, how safe they felt, and whether they had experienced crime in their own neighborhood.

From there, the invitation to attend a public forum was sent out through news briefs in the paper. Reporters began working on the project by identifying what police were doing to prevent neighborhood crime and included a special story on the police's new crime-fighting projects.

On April 17, the forum attracted about 35 people from college-aged to senior-aged to the community room of *The Leaf-Chronicle*. Editor Richard Stevens directed the forum and invited the interaction and comments of residents not only during the forum, but afterwards. "We want to try to interact more with our readers, try to work through problems and make use of the good thinking in our community," Stevens said.

On the agenda that evening was a discussion of preventative measures to crime. Some of the major preventions determined by this group included the creation a teen court to deal with an increasingly large amount of juvenile cases and criminal activity; increased lighting on the city's streets; more neighborhood watch programs; early intervention programs and the establishment of more drug treatment centers.

Juvenile crime topped the list of concerns with this group, though. As one participant Heidi Doyle commented, "I see the problem of crime [as being] connected with not enough for our kids to do." Another participant agreed, adding that the city should invest more in helping kids. "I see an army of kids walking down the mall and I get nervous," said Jerry Martin. "We need to get to the point of where we are preventative."



## CHAPTER IV

*Leaf-Chronicle* reporters researched and reported further on the ideas presented during the forum. Their results were published on April 29, officially wrapping up the project.

In the initial design of the survey instrument, the questions were assigned certain responses pre-determined as effective measuring devices. The variables are accuracy, confidence, and community activity/involvement. These variables, often used in measuring the credibility of communication sources, are common measurements for studies of newspapers (Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Major & Gorman, 1997). The sample size for the pre-test was 116 and for the post-test, 93.

#### Responses of *The Leaf-Chronicle*

Table 4.1 shows a close division of confidence amongst those surveyed when it comes to the accuracy of *The Leaf-Chronicle*. In response to the question "In general, do you think *The Leaf-Chronicle* gets the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and facts are often inaccurate," respondents were nearly evenly divided in both the pre- and post-survey. The difference (11.54%) is found in the post-test, (after the civic journalism project was conducted) where the majority is less likely to believe the newspaper gets the facts straight (29.03%) than those who were tested in the pre-survey (40.57%). Another significant change is in those who answered, "don't know" - an increase of more than 20% in the post-test.

Table 4.1

Difference Between the Responses to Question 6 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project

	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Facts Straight	40.57%	29.03%	-11.54%



## CHAPTER IV DATA RESULTS

In the initial design of the survey instrument, the questions were assigned certain variables pre-determined as effective measuring devices. The variables are accuracy, relevance, trust/confidence and community activity/involvement. These variables, often used in defining the credibility of communication sources, are common measurements for studies of newspapers (Rimmer & Weaver, 1987; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Major & Atwood, 1997). The sample size for the pre-test was 116 and for the post-test, 93.

### Perceptions of *The Leaf-Chronicle*

Table 4.1 shows a close division of confidence amongst those surveyed when it comes to the accuracy of *The Leaf-Chronicle*. In response to the question "In general, do you think *The Leaf-Chronicle* gets the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate," respondents were nearly evenly divided in both the pre-survey and post-survey. The difference (11.54%) is found in the post-test, (after the civic journalism project was conducted) where the majority is less likely to believe the newspaper gets the facts straight (29.03%) than those who were tested in the pre-survey (40.57%). Another significant change is in those who answered, "don't know" – an increase of more than 20% in the post-test.

Table 4.1

Difference Between the Responses to Question 6 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Facts Straight	40.57%	29.03%	- 11.54%



Inaccurate	39.62%	30.11%	- 9.51%
Don't Know	19.81%	40.86%	+ 21.05%

Table 4.2 suggests the majority of those surveyed have either a fair amount or more trust and confidence in *The Leaf-Chronicle*. In the post-testing, there was a slight increase from the pre-test – this in response to the question, “In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in The Leaf-Chronicle when it comes to reporting the news accurately.” The increases were found in respondents who held a fair amount or greater trust and confidence in the paper (6.05% and 3.34% increases respectively). There was a fairly large decrease (16.05%) in respondents who said they didn’t have much trust and confidence in the newspaper reporting the news accurately from the pre-test.

Table 4.2

Difference Between the Responses to Question 8 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Great Deal	8.49%	11.83%	+ 3.34%
Fair Amount	50.94%	56.99%	+ 6.05%
Not Much	23.58%	7.53%	- 16.05%
None	2.83%	3.23%	- 0.4%
No Opinion	14.15%	20.43%	+ 6.28%

Interestingly, according to Table 4.5, respondents overwhelmingly held some amount of trust and confidence in the newspaper, in both pre and post-tests, in answer to the question, “In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in The Leaf-Chronicle when it comes to reporting the news fairly?” In comparing the responses from the two surveys, increases were found in response to “a great deal” (13.02%) and “a fair amount” (13.56%). Additionally, the percentage of respondents to “no opinion” decreased from the pre-survey by 14%.



Table 4.3

Difference Between the Responses to Question 7 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
In Touch	55.66%	13.98%	- 41.68%
Out of Touch	22.64%	43.01%	+ 20.37%
No Opinion	21.7%	43.01%	+ 21.31%
None at All	1.89	4.3	+ 2.41
No Opinion	15.09	1.08	- 14.01

Most people surveyed do look forward to reading the newspaper each day – according to Table 4.4, which reports responses to the question, “How much, if any at all, do you look forward to reading the paper each day?” In both the pre and post-tests, the majority said they looked forward to reading the paper each day a fair amount or greater.

Table 4.4

Difference Between the Responses to Question 10 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Very Much	23.81%	21.51%	- 2.3%
Fair Amount	28.57%	36.56%	+ 8%
Not Much	17.14%	23.66%	+ 6.52%
None	4.76%	4.3%	- .46%
Don't Read	20%	12.9%	- 7.1%
Refused	5.71%	1.08%	- 4.63%
Don't Know	21.9%	37.63%	+ 15.73%

Interestingly, according to Table 4.5, respondents overwhelmingly held some amount of trust and confidence in the newspaper, in both pre and post-tests, in answer to the question, “In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in The Leaf-Chronicle when it comes to reporting the news fairly?” In comparing the responses from the two surveys, increases were found in response to “a great deal” (13.02%) and “a fair amount” (13.56%). Additionally, the percentage of respondents to “no opinion” decreased from the pre-survey by 14%.



Table 4.5

Difference Between the Responses to Question 9 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Great Deal	8.49	21.51	+ 13.02
Fair Amount	35.50	63.56	+ 13.56
Not Very Much	24.53	23.66	- .87
None at All	1.89	4.3	+ 2.41
No Opinion	15.09	1.08	- 14.01

The majority of those surveyed believe *The Leaf-Chronicle* tends to favor one side when reporting, according to both pre and post-test responses to the question presented in Table 4.6, "In presenting the news dealing with local political and social issues, do you think that *The Leaf-Chronicle* deals fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?"

Table 4.6

Difference Between the Responses to Question 11 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Deals Fairly	35.24%	27.96%	- 7.28%
Favors One Side	42.86%	34.41%	- 8.45%
Don't Know	21.9%	37.63%	+ 15.73%

In response to the question, "Which of the following two statements about *The Leaf-Chronicle* do you agree with more? *The Leaf-Chronicle* does not understand the community or *The Leaf-Chronicle* understands the community," respondents seemed to believe in the newspaper's ability to understand the community, according to results shown in Table 4.7. In both tests, (64.76%, pre-test and 70.97%, post-test), the majority believed the newspaper to understand its community.



Table 4.7

Difference Between the Responses to Question 12 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Does	64.76%	70.97%	+ 6.21%
Does Not	35.24%	29.03%	- 6.21%

Respondents also believed the newspaper was concerned about its community, based on the question, “Which of the following two statements about The Leaf-Chronicle do you agree with more? The Leaf-Chronicle is not concerned about the community or The Leaf-Chronicle is concerned about the community.” The majority in both the pre-test (73.33%) and post-test (83.87%) believed *The Leaf-Chronicle* was concerned about the community, based on results presented in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Difference Between the Responses to Question 13 Before and After the Civic Journalism Project			
	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Difference
Is	73.33%	83.87%	+ 10.54%
Is Not	26.67%	16.13%	- 10.54%

### The *t*-Test

To test the four hypotheses presented in Chapter 2, a *t*-test was performed, using directives from Wimmer & Dominick (1997). A *t*-Test allows measurement of two groups of subjects that have been tested: “One group receives some type of treatment, and the other serves as the control. After the treatment has been administered, both groups are tested, and the results are compared to determine whether a statistically



significant difference exists between the groups" (p.245). A test for independent groups or means was used in this analysis.

The first step in conducting the *t*-test was to form an index to measure each of the four variables of accuracy (questions 6 and 8), relevance (questions 7 and 10), trust (questions 9 and 11) and community involvement (questions 12 and 13), to create a new data set. Each set was calculated by first eliminating don't know/refused scores and then adding the values remaining. The mean for each variable was then calculated for both the pre and post-tests. The next step was to run a *t*-test comparing these means to determine whether a statistically significant change occurred from the pre-test to the post-test.

In testing Hypothesis 1: *This project will increase the public's perception of The Leaf-Chronicle's community activity*: The mean for the pre-group was  $\bar{X}_1 = 3.28$  and the post-group was  $\bar{X}_2 = 3.55$ . When a *t*-test for the independent group was run, the *t* value was .50, which was not significant at *p* equal to or greater than .05.

In testing Hypothesis 2: *This project will increase the public's perception of The Leaf-Chronicle's accuracy*: The mean for the pre-group was  $\bar{X}_1 = 3.73$  and the post-group was  $\bar{X}_2 = 3.53$ . When a *t*-test for the independent group was run, the *t* value was .29, which was not significant at *p* equal to or greater than .05.

In testing Hypothesis 3: *This project will increase the perception of the public toward The Leaf-Chronicle's ability to create relevant news to readers*: The mean for the pre-group was  $\bar{X}_1 = 3.75$  and the post-group was  $\bar{X}_2 = 3.84$ . When a *t*-test for the independent group was run, the *t* value was .12, which was not significant at *p* equal to or greater than .05.



In testing Hypothesis 4: *This project will increase the public's perceived trust in The Leaf-Chronicle*: The mean for the pre-group was  $\bar{X}_1 = 3.74$  and the post-group was  $\bar{X}_2 = 3.51$ . When a *t*-test for the independent group was run, the *t* value was .344, which was not significant at *p* equal to or greater than .05.

None of the hypotheses could be supported; none were found to change significantly from pre-test to post-test. A degree of freedom of 1.645 was needed for a confidence level of greater than or equal to .05. None of the variables could meet that level of confidence necessary to support the hypotheses.

If this study were to be conducted again, a number of things could be changed that likely would create stronger results. First, the survey could include more than questions to measure each variable – by increasing the number of questions, it would be a more valid measure of each of the variables being measured. Second, the sample should come from a list of subscribers to a newspaper, rather than from a generated list. If someone does not read or subscribe to a newspaper, they are less likely to have been influenced or affected by the study. Therefore, a newspaper is more likely to provide an opinion on its effectiveness. A paid survey company, like SurveyMonkey, could also be used. The project would have given a better indication of the effect of the study on the newspaper project. However, such an undertaking would have required more resources than were available for this project.



## CHAPTER V

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

While this study did not find a significant effect of the civic journalism project on readers' opinions of the newspaper, a number of methodological problems may have influenced these negligible results. The major deficiency of this study was the sample size for both the pre and post-tests. Had there been a larger sample, at least one of the hypotheses might have been supported. But a time constraint limited the possibility of gathering a larger sample and may have influenced the collection of scores when paper surveys were used to gather more responses. Also, the second survey was not given to a randomly selected sample, which further eroded the validity of its results.

If this study were to be conducted again, a number of things would be changed that likely would create stronger results. First, the survey would include at least four questions to measure each variable – by increasing the number of questions, it's likely a more valid measure of each of the variables could be achieved. Second, the sample should come from a list of subscribers to a newspaper rather than from a randomly generated list. If someone does not read the newspaper, they are obviously less likely to have been influenced or affected by the civic journalism project and unable to base their opinion on its effectiveness. A panel study interviewing the same people before and after the project would have given a better indication of the effect of the civic journalism project. However, such an undertaking would have required more resources than were available for this project.



Another option for further increasing the validity of the study would be the selection of a random sample that would be used for both the pre and post-testing. In the post-test, a second randomly selected sample would be tested and measured against the pre-test sample for correlation.

Third, the actual civic journalism project should have been conducted over a longer period of time. A sustained project may have created a better recall for reference when respondents were asked questions measuring each variable.

For future possible studies, the research could be modified to include the selection of a large group of randomly chosen readers who were tasked with reading the newspaper first during randomly selected weeks and then during the weeks of the project. By keeping a journal of their thoughts and opinions on the content of the newspaper, their opinions could well have been evaluated and potentially measured for changes based on the project's effectiveness.

All in all, whether it was measurable or not, the effectiveness of *The Leaf-Chronicle's* civic journalism project may well have affected the perception of its readers if for a short time. Its effectiveness most likely helped the relationship between editors and police officers – a concern admitted by the Editor Stevens. While it may not be possible to ever truly measure people's opinions regarding their local newspaper, it behooves any newspaper to be an active participant in the life that occurs outside its doors. And, though no respectful editor or journalist may believe it necessary, it may help in improving their own local relations with their publics and interested parties.



On the issue of contention for the legitimacy and principles of civic journalism: I truly believe that basis of civic journalism has true significance and decency in an age of political scandals, terror and degradation of values. The overarching themes of today's civic journalism projects focus on the problems of communities such as crime, race relations and economy. Projects that are promoting the public good and solutions for positive growth, rather than reporting on the nation's woes.

Civic journalism holds many lessons for many reporters. Lessons in the art of interviewing, lessons in inter-personal communications and lessons in civic life. Today, many reporters are looking for something to report on beyond the mundane of hard news stories and fluffy features that are requested by editors in inches. Even Hardt (1997) makes the argument that one of the deeper problems within journalism is that of lackluster performance from its journalists.

Projects such as these endeavors of civic journalism enable reporters to see the effectiveness of their pens – to see the end result of many, many lines of type. They may also help eliminate the lackluster work many find from today's journalists.

There are still boundaries that must be respected by reporters when involving themselves in civic journalism. Editorializing, bias, objectivity, fair balance of ideas – are just a few of the major concerns many have with this idea. But, I'd like to believe that through the research, the interviews and the writing, reporters will discover how to measure their objectivity. That the free discussion of ideas at forums will help them learn to identify their own bias and will greatly reduce the editorializing that occurs in day-to-



day reporting and go beyond the person-on-the-street interviews they've become so famous for.

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Examples for citation: Please refer to the following:

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Anderson, N.C. (1998).

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## APPENDIX A

## Survey Questions

Q1: How safe do you feel in Clarksville, Tennessee? *(your family are walking in your*

1 - Very safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

2 - Somewhat safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

3 - Not too safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

4 - Not at all *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

5 - Don't know *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

## APPENDICES

Q2: How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?

1 - Very safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

2 - Somewhat safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

3 - Not too safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

4 - Not at all *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

5 - Don't know *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

Q3: In general, how safe would you say you and your family are from crime when

you're home at night? *... safe would you say if you and your family are at a shopping mall at*

1 - Very safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

2 - Somewhat safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*

3 - Not too safe *... safe would you say if you and your family are at school?*



APPENDIX A  
Survey Questions

Q1: How safe do you feel in Clarksville, Tennessee?

1 – Very safe

2 – Somewhat safe

3 – Not too safe

4 – Not at all

5 – Don't know

Q2: How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?

1 – Very safe

2 – Somewhat safe

3 – Not too safe

4 – Not at all

5 – Don't know

Q3a: In general, how safe would you say you and your family are from crime when you're home at night?

1 – Very safe

2 – Somewhat safe

3 – Not too safe



4 – Not at all

5 – Don't know

Q3b: In general, how safe would you say you and your family are walking in your neighborhood after dark?

1 – Very safe

2 – Somewhat safe

3 – Not too safe

4 – Not at all

5 – Don't know

Q3c: In general, how safe would you say you and your family are at school?

1 – Very safe

2 – Somewhat safe

3 – Not too safe

4 – Not at all

5 – Don't know

Q3s: In general, how safe would you say you and your family are at a shopping mall at night?

1 – Very safe

2 – Somewhat safe



3 – Not too safe

4 – Not at all

5 – Don't know

**Q4: In the past 12 months, have you or your family, or has someone else in your neighborhood had money or property stolen?**

1 – Yes – self or family

2 – Yes – someone else in the neighborhood

3 – No

4 – Don't know

**Q5: In the past 12 months, have you or your family, or has someone else in your neighborhood, been physically assaulted or mugged?**

1 – Yes – self or family

2 – Yes – someone else in the neighborhood

3 – No

4 – Don't know

**Q6: In general, do you think The Leaf-Chronicle gets the facts straight, or do you think that their stories and reports are often inaccurate?**

1 – gets the facts straight

2 – often inaccurate



3 – don't know

Q7: Do you think The Leaf-Chronicle is out of touch with the average Clarksvillian, or are they generally in touch?

1 – out of touch

2 – in touch

3 – no opinion

5 – don't read the paper

Q8: In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in The Leaf-Chronicle when it comes to reporting the news accurately?

1 – great deal

2 – fair amount

3 – not very much

4 – none at all

5 – no opinion / refused

Q9: In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in The Leaf-Chronicle when it comes to reporting the news fairly?

1 – great deal

2 – fair amount

3 – not very much

4 – none at all



5 – no opinion

Q10: How much, if any at all, do you look forward to reading the paper each day?

1 – very much

2 – a fair amount

3 – not too much

4 – not at all

5 – don't read the paper

6 – don't know/refused

Q11: In presenting the news dealing with local political and social issues, do you think that The Leaf-Chronicle deals fairly with all sides or do they tend to favor one side?

1 - deal fairly with all sides

2 – tend to favor one side

3 – don't know/refused

Q12: Which of the following two statements about The Leaf-Chronicle do you agree with more?

1 – The Leaf-Chronicle does not understand the community

2 - The Leaf-Chronicle understand the community

Q15: Where do you primarily find information on things to do for fun and relaxation?

1 – TV



[Q12A is an open-ended question: "Can you tell me the most important reason you feel this way?"]

Q13: Which of the following two statements about The Leaf-Chronicle do you agree with more?

- 1 - The Leaf-Chronicle is not concerned about the community
- 2 - The Leaf-Chronicle is concerned about the community

[Q13A is an open-ended question: "Can you tell me the most important reason you feel this way?"]

Q14: Overall, where would you say you get most of your local news from:

- 1 - Television
- 2 - Radio
- 3 - Magazines
- 4 - Newspapers
- 5 - Internet
- 6 - Some other source
- 7 - Don't know

Q15: Where do you primarily find information on things to do for fun and relaxation?

- 1 - TV



- 2 – Nashville TV
- 3 – Nashville Radio
- 4 – Clarksville Radio
- 5 – Our City
- 6 – The Leaf-Chronicle
- 7 – Friends and co-workers
- 8 – Don't know

Q16: How satisfied are you with that source?

- 1 – Very satisfied
- 2 – Satisfied
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Unsatisfied
- 5 – Very unsatisfied

Q17: What primary source of information do you use to find school news?

- 1 – TV43
- 2 – Nashville TV
- 3 – Nashville Radio
- 4 – Clarksville Radio
- 5 – Our City
- 6 – The Leaf-Chronicle



7 – Friends and co-workers

8 – Don't know

4 – Unsatisfied

Q18: How satisfied are you with that source?

1 – Very satisfied

2 – Satisfied

3 – Neutral

4 – Unsatisfied

5 – Very unsatisfied

3 – Nashville Radio

Q19: What primary source of information do you use to find sports scores?

1 – TV43

2 – Nashville TV

3 – Nashville Radio

4 – Clarksville Radio

5 – Our City

6 – The Leaf-Chronicle

7 – Friends and co-workers

8 – Don't know

3 – Neutral

Q20: How satisfied are you with that source?

1 – Very satisfied



2 – Satisfied *How often do you read The Leaf-Chronicle?*

3 – Neutral *one week*

4 – Unsatisfied *times a week*

5 – Very unsatisfied *es a week*

*Almost everyday*

Q21: What primary source of information do you use to find the latest news on local government? *Choose which range your age falls into.*

1 – TV43 *25*

2 – Nashville TV

3 – Nashville Radio *How often do you read The Leaf-Chronicle?*

4 – Clarksville Radio

5 – Our City

6 – The Leaf-Chronicle

7 – Friends and co-workers

8 – Don't know *What is your ethnic background?*

*White*

Q22: How satisfied are you with that source?

1 – Very satisfied

2 – Satisfied

3 – Neutral

4 – Unsatisfied

5 – Very unsatisfied



Q23: About how often do you read The Leaf-Chronicle?

- 1 – Less than one week
- 2 – One or two times a week
- 3 – Three or four times a week
- 4 – Almost everyday

5 – Bachelor's degree

Q24: Please choose which range your age falls into.

1 – 18 to 25

2 – 26 to 35

3 – 36 to 45

4 – 46 to 55

5 – 56 to 65

6 – 66 or older

7 – 32,000 to 38,000

Q25: What is your ethnic background?

1 – White

2 – African American

3 – Hispanic

4 – Asian

5 – Other



Q26: What is your highest year of education?

- 1 – Some high school
- 2 – High school degree
- 3 – Some college
- 4 – Associates degree
- 5 – Bachelor's degree
- 6 – Graduate school
- 7 – Graduate degree

Q27: What is your combined household income in the year 2000 before taxes?

- 1 – Less than 20,000
- 2 – 20,001 to 26,000
- 3 – 26,001 to 32,000
- 4 – 32,001 to 38,000
- 5 – 38,001 to 44,000
- 6 – 44,001 to 50,000
- 7 – 50,001 or more
- 8 – No answer



Q28: Male or Female?

1 - Male

2 - Female

0 - Don't Know

Sunday, Apr. 8, 2001

## Readers invited to stop city

The Leaf-Chronicle

Editor: The publisher of the Leaf-Chronicle, a daily newspaper, has decided to discontinue the publication of the newspaper's Sunday edition.

When asked why the paper was being discontinued, the publisher said, "We have decided to discontinue the publication of the newspaper's Sunday edition because of the high cost of printing and the low circulation of the Sunday edition."

There's also the fact that the publisher of the newspaper has decided to discontinue the publication of the newspaper's Sunday edition because of the high cost of printing and the low circulation of the Sunday edition.

STATE UNIVERSITY  
OF MISSISSIPPI



Building a Safer Clarksville:  
The Civic Journalism Project Articles

# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

Sunday, Apr. 8, 2001

## Building a safer Clarksville

### Readers invited to stop city crime

The Leaf-Chronicle

Crime. It's a problem every community faces. And, according to our readers, crime continues to be among the top five concerns in Clarksville.

While a single solution does not exist, we think strategies can be developed to create a safer community.

That's why the editorial leadership of this newspaper has decided to take a step beyond just reporting the news by conducting a civic journalism project. Over the next few weeks, we'll present a factual analysis of criminal activity, identify how safe residents

#### TO GET INVOLVED

■ The forum will be 7 p.m. Tuesday, April 17, at The Leaf-Chronicle, 200 Commerce St. Let us know you're coming by calling 245-0228 starting Monday.

feel and find crime solutions.

But we need your help. We're hosting a community forum here at The Leaf-Chronicle — Building a Safer Community. We'll determine at least 10 ways this newspaper, citizens and police can work together to build a safer community, a safer Clarksville.



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

Sunday, April 8, 2001

## Night skies bring fear over city

By BRIAN DUNN  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Pellets of glass shimmered on the floorboard of Troy Denney's 1988 Mazda RX7. Mud clung to the passenger's seat. Wires dangled out of a hole in the car's dash.

A burglar had visited Tuesday, stealing more than \$3,000 worth of compact discs and stereo equipment from the car parked at Dog-House Computers on College Street.

"How do I feel?" Denney said. "I feel violated. I don't steal from anybody, and I don't expect to be stolen from."

A recent Austin Peay State University survey indicates people feel safe in Clarksville, but they do have fears. Locals fear nighttime crime, and they think their neighborhood doesn't necessarily provide a security blanket.

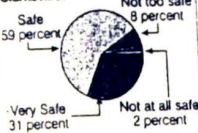
The survey results leaned to the negative when "night" was included in the question, and more than 23 percent of the people said they didn't feel safe walking in their neighborhood under a dark sky.

Statistics provided by Clarksville police support their fears. More than 67 percent of last year's robberies happened between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m., police statistics show.

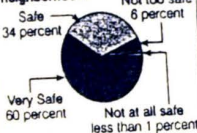
### Crime survey

Results of a survey conducted by Austin Peay State University's communications department regarding fear of crime in Clarksville.

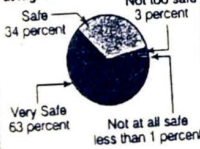
1. How safe do you feel in Clarksville?



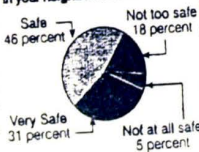
2. How safe do you feel in your neighborhood?



3. In general, how safe would you say you and your family are from crime when you're at home at night?



4. In general, how safe would you say you and your family are from crime when you're walking in your neighborhood after dark?



The statistics also show:  
• Most of last year's rapes happened between 1 and 8 a.m.

• Almost all business burglaries happened after hours or during the weekend. Most happened between midnight and 7 a.m.

The APSU survey also indicated people feared shopping in Clarksville at the night.

A burglar smashed through the window of Larry Stewart's 1995 Chevrolet pickup truck and grabbed his wife Barbara's purse in January at a restaurant near Exit 4. The couple was eating inside.

"I was mad at first," Barbara Stewart said. "Then I felt different. I felt like somebody knew me. I felt like I was being watched."

She said thinking about the crime has lessened and she feels safe, but the burglary and more notable Clarksville crimes sometime creep into her head.

"When I drive down Riverside and past the Taco Bell, I think about the people who got shot down there," Stewart said, referring to the slayings of four employees during a robbery in 1994. "But you can't really dwell on the bad things that have happened to you. You can't dwell on the bad things that might happen to you."

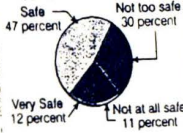
"We still go out to eat."

Brian Dunn covers crime and safety and can be reached at 245-0236 or at [brandunn@theleafchronicle.com](mailto:brandunn@theleafchronicle.com).

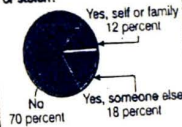
5. How safe would you say you and your family are at school?



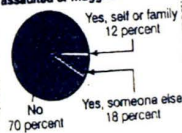
6. How safe would you say you and your family are at a shopping mall after dark?



7. In the past 12 months, have you or your family, or has someone else in your neighborhood had money lost or stolen?



8. In the past 12 months, have you or your family, or has someone else in your neighborhood been physically assaulted or mugged?



Survey notes: Randomly generated phone numbers using city prefixes provided by BellSouth. 116 total respondents.



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

## THE LEAF-CHRONICLE



Wednesday, April 11, 2001

### REGIONAL ROUNDUP

#### Forum on crime is Tuesday

Crime continues to be among the top five concerns to our readers.

Over the next few weeks, The Leaf-Chronicle will present a factual analysis of criminal activity, identify how safe Clarksville residents feel and determine how we can all work together to make ours a safer community.

But we need your help. As part of this project, we're hosting a community forum at 7 p.m. Tuesday at The Leaf-Chronicle, 200 Commerce St. in downtown Clarksville.

Please join us to let us know your views and concerns about crime and safety. Please let us know your intent to participate by calling 245-0228.



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1898

Sunday, Apr. 15, 01

Building  
a safer  
Clarksville

## Police: watch, prevent

Strategy zeroes in on education  
of residents to lower crime rate

By BRIAN DUNN  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Joe Norris has lived on Power Street in New Providence for 64 years, and he lauds Clarksville police as the best he's seen.

"They're always in the neighborhood, and the response time is always good," said the 74-year-old. "They're nice. They're courteous. I'm real tickled with the Police Department."

Crime statistics back Norris' praise, indicating police have reduced crime about 40 percent during the past few years.

The numbers, however, have tapered. And Police Chief Lavoyed Hudgins is planning an aggressive crime prevention campaign to keep them down despite a booming population.

The key, Hudgins said, is awareness.

"The primary thing we started out to do (upon his 1998 arrival) was to get the community involved in our

### TO GET INVOLVED

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### INSIDE

■ Commentary: An open invitation to readers, A12

cussed the problem Friday morning.

crime-fighting efforts," he said. "We have been very successful in some areas, and we have had abject failures."

"We're re-evaluating and trying to figure out what we need to do to interest citizens."

In a sense, the police strategy has changed from one of "crime fighting" to "crime prevention."

An example: The city has been plagued this year by a rash of vehicle burglaries, especially in shopping areas.

"You can take a stroll through any parking lot in the city and see CDs, radar detectors, purses — temptation for people to steal," Hudgins said.

The department's three crime prevention officers have carried the burden of educating the public to stow away pricey items and lock car doors. They've gone door to door. They've aired tips via the media — all to little avail.

Police administrators dis-

"We decided one way to raise public awareness was billboards with a crime-fighting message," Hudgins said.

If the department finds corporate sponsors (\$300 a month per billboard), police will decorate billboards on three major thoroughfares with crime-fighting phrases.

Hudgins also has considered doubling the number of crime prevention officers.

"We want to become extremely aggressive," he said.

The chief offered other glimpses of the future, including an aggressive bicycle patrol this summer. The bikes should reduce drug crimes because of their stealthiness, he said.

Police, however, will concentrate on further creating a relationship with the public, getting people more aware and engaged in crime prevention.

Neighborhood Watches have popped up throughout

► See Crime, A2

## Crime

Continued from A1

the city, including in New Providence, St. Bethlehem and near Bel Air Park.

"If we could have every Neighborhood Watch as active as Operation Take Back (New Providence), then I think we would see more double-digit drops in crime," Hudgins said.

Joe Norris is a charter member of Operation Take Back. He said the operation has been indispensable in curbing drug activity, prostitution and related crime in New Providence.

"We need to have more Neighborhood Watches, and people need to be more involved," Norris said.

"We seldom have many children at our meetings. We need to get more involved with the children."

What drives Norris are memories of his childhood.

"You didn't have to lock your door," he said. "You didn't get robbed when you went out to your mailbox."

Will those days return?

"I hope so," Norris said. "It's a shame when you go to the grocery store, and you have to lock your automobile up. A long time ago, you didn't even have locks."

Brian Dunn covers crime and safety and can be reached at 245-0228 or by e-mail at brian.dunn@theleafchronicle.com.



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

Monday, Apr. 16, 01

## Forum on crime is Tuesday

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**Building  
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# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

## THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

**B**

Tuesday, April 17, 2001

### REGIONAL ROUNDUP

#### Forum on crime taking place today

Crime continues to be among the top five concerns to our readers.

Over the next few weeks, The Leaf-Chronicle

**Building a safer Clarksville** will present a factual analysis of criminal activity, identify

how safe Clarksville residents feel and determine how we can make ours a safer community. But we need your help. As part of this project, we're hosting a community forum at 7 p.m. today at The Leaf-Chronicle, 200 Commerce St. in downtown Clarksville. Please join us to let us know your views and concerns about crime and safety. Please let us know your intent to participate by calling 245-0228.



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

Saturday, April 21, 2001

## Police fight crime with new projects

By BRIAN DUNN  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Police are launching several crime-fighting projects in northern Clarksville to enhance community policing there. They hope the projects will bring citizens and officers together.

The effort has been dubbed "Operation Strike Back" and comprises eight community policing projects.

"We call it community policing at its best," said Lt. Larry Vaden, who combed police departments throughout the country to get ideas. "They have been done in other cities. It's not something we've invented."

A list of the projects follows:

- **Citizen Observer Program (COP)** — Volunteers are trained to observe and report suspected criminal activity. The COPs perform the primary task of a patrol officer but they don't confront criminals. They report the activity.

"We'll ask them to report street lights out, abandoned vehicles and potholes," Vaden said.

The COPs will have a badge and maybe vehicle decals.

- **Citizens Offering Police Support (COPS)** — People volunteer to help police with simple everyday duties such as answering phones and taking common reports.

- **Police cadets** — High schoolers can gain experience with law enforcement, working with officers. The cadets will help with parades, crime prevention and other programs listed here, such as backing a COP's volunteer.

- **Project School House** — This project requires officers taking time during the day to visit middle and high schools. The effort has started successfully, Vaden said.

"It's good community relations with the kids, but it's al-

### TO GET INVOLVED

■ To get involved with any of the "Operation Strike Back" programs, call Officer Coz Minetos at 648-0658.

so good to learn the layout of the schools," he said.

- **Project Safe Streets** — This includes using crashed cars at schools to deter reckless driving and putting "dummy" cruisers (those without actual officers in them) at dangerous intersections.

"Then you see the brake lights," Vaden said.

- **Neighborhood Watch** — The watch already established — neighbors working together with police and other officials to deter and report crime.

- **Business Watch** — Businesses work with police to deter crimes associated with shopping areas such as shoplifting and vehicle burglary. Vaden launched this with Wal-Mart SuperCenter on Fort Campbell Boulevard.

- **Crime Free Multi-Housing Project** — This project seeks to train property managers and residents of apartment complexes crime prevention techniques. It also attempts to establish a sense of community.

To establish the projects, Vaden recommended city council members appoint a ward contact person to work with COPs and crime prevention officers.

Christine Davenport, who founded a Neighborhood Watch at Campbell Heights Mobile Home Park, said she liked the ideas, which will take up to a year to implement.

"I think it's a good idea, but I think they're going to have trouble getting people interested," she said. "I think the key thing is getting teenagers involved."



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

Sunday, April 22, 2001

Building  
a safer  
Clarksville

## It takes two to cut down on crime



Robert Smith/The Leaf-Chronicle

Richard Stevens, executive editor of The Leaf-Chronicle, leads a forum Tuesday for citizens to express their concerns about crime and safety.

Forum finds  
citizens, police  
both have role

By BRIAN DUNN  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Crime-fighting should be a multifaceted effort involving both police and citizens. This was the conclusion reached by residents and officials during a forum Tuesday hosted by The Leaf-Chronicle.

About 35 people — including police and government officials — attended the forum, which was part of a month-long civic journalism project called "Building a Safer Clarksville."

Vigorous dialogue dominated the evening, especially on topics concerning teen violence, drugs and community policing. And those topics centered on problem-solving rather than griping.

"I think it was a positive gathering," said Heidi Doyle, who teaches a law enforcement class at Dougherty Junior College. "There were a lot of specialized concerns. You can see (crime and safety) is a multifaceted problem. 'Police are not an island,' she added. "It takes a community."

### Teens

Teen-age crime, men-tioned rarely and often, sprung the most time. No teens attended the forum.

Police Chief Larry Hud-gins introduced the topic, which he mentioned has at-



Robert Smith/The Leaf-Chronicle

Jerry Martin talks about some of his concerns about teen crime in the Clarksville area during a recent public forum. Martin had praise for the School Resource Officer program.

## Fender benders take a bite of police time

By BRIAN DUNN  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Bob Hasselbring's first thought about building a safer Clarksville centered on traf-fic, rather than crime. Indeed, traffic affects more people more directly.

But Hasselbring shed light Tuesday on a link between the two.

"If we can reduce significantly the time consumed by our police patrolmen and women, they will have more time to devote to crime pre-

vention efforts," he said.

Hasselbring rode along with a city officer recently and was taken by the amount of time the patrolman spent working on fender benders — including directing traffic, investigating wrecks and finishing paperwork.

So he created a list of ideas for reducing wrecks, which he presented at Tuesday's forum. Primary in Hasselbring's thoughts is obeying the traffic laws drivers routinely ignore, such as not fol-

lowing another car too close-

ly and signaling for turns. But he also wondered why Montgomery County doesn't have mandatory driver's education classes.

"You can be sitting at a green light behind a young person, and the person doesn't turn because there isn't a green arrow — and nobody's coming," Hasselbring said.

More than half of his ideas concerned what the city can do to reduce crashes, in-cluding the following:

### IDEAS ON CRIME

Here are some of the ideas that came out in Tuesday night's "Building a Safer Clarksville" forum.

- Establish a teen court, in which youths sentence one another in misdemeanor cases.
- Expand programs that connect law enforcement officers with citizens.
- Find ways to bring communities together and unite neighbors in watching out for one another.
- Improve lighting across the city.
- Hire more police officers.
- Offer better drug treatment.
- Open schools to children after regular classes.
- Reduce traffic-related strains on police.
- Have helicopter surveillance of shopping areas.

• Encourage citizens to provide timely information on dangerous situations.

• Encourage businesses to have their address legibly listed near their entrance, so drivers looking for a place won't create traffic hazards.

"You're looking around wondering where the heck you are," Hasselbring said.

• Standardize the location of street signs.

• Review lane markings and signs that are sometimes confusing.

▶ See Crime, A2



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

The Leaf-Chronicle ☆ FROM THE FRONT ☆ Sunday, April 22, 2001

## Crime

Continued from A1

tempts to start a teen court in Clarksville.

The courts would be comprised of teen-agers who levy sentences on fellow teens who have pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor. Teens can opt to appear before their peers rather than an adult judge, and once their sentences are complete, the crime is expunged.

"It is the most successful thing in turning around aberrant teen behavior," Hudgins said.

Added Jerry Martin, also a proponent of teen court: "It works because of peer pressure."

Martin concentrated his efforts during the forum talking about teens — also mentioning the effectiveness of the sheriff's School Resource Officer program, which puts deputies in each of the county's middle and high schools.

"We've got to come to the point where we are preventive," Martin said. "They see the deputies every day, and it helps build relationships."

### Community policing

Relationships — those between police and citizens, among neighbors and between teens and parents — also embodied a recurring theme during the forum.

The topic first emerged when Denise Skidmore, her young child by her side, mentioned the Clarksville Police Department's Citizen's Police Academy for teens.

She lauded the program but wondered if police could have more frequent classes, especially during summer.

The Citizen's Police Academy — a class also exists for adults — is an extension of community policing, a concept brought to Clarksville by Hudgins that seeks to enhance ties between police and the public. Good relations between the two help reduce crime, proponents believe.

Deputy Police Chief Mark Smith said the means of community policing, however, are changing as evidenced by the Neighborhood Watch in New Providence, Operation Take Back.

"New Providence has really been our showcase," Hudgins said. FBI reportable crimes — mostly felonies — have dropped from about 20 per week when Operation Take Back started to about two each week now, Smith said.

But the results aren't necessari-

*"Hearing gunshots while you're inside your house scares you. It scares you to death."*

**Phil Drew**

City Council member

chief said.

Gabriel Segovia, councilman for Ward 3, wondered how many people knew the names of those in their neighborhoods and suggested that communities would take a step forward if people knew each other and looked out for each other.

### Drugs and bullets

Councilman Phil Drew ran for office because he saw a shooting of a teen-age boy near his Helton Drive home about 1 1/2 years ago. Witnessing the violence, which included the shooting of two other teens, conquered any apathy he might have had.

"Hearing gunshots while you're inside your house scares you," Drew said. "It scares you to death."

The councilman advocates increasing the CPD's roster to bring the number of officers to the national level, and Hudgins wishes he had 80 more officers to match the Southeast's average.

Although Tuesday's forum centered on more creative ways to prevent crime, Drew's plea to increase the number of officers seemed convincing as the ultimate cure.

"If you don't have more officers, you can't take crime prevention to the next level," he said.

Drew feared the recent drop in crime will reverse because the population will become too cumbersome for police.

But Ray Cline said increasing the number of police will increase the number of arrests, which will strain already overcrowded jails and clog an already stopped up court system.

Cline said the "revolving door" of the justice system embodies the real problem of crime and safety in Clarksville.

Cline called for a more abstract way to prevent crime and to build a safer city — the decriminaliza-

ly because of police and citizens solving problems. The relationships among neighbors and between residents and city officials (council members, Street Department) have made a large impact too, Smith said.

"It's no longer community policing, it's community government," he added. "What they've produced in New Providence is a whole new animal."

Residents, for example, can call their City Council representative and demand a street light. Well-lighted areas attract fewer crimes. "I have never seen such a poorly lighted city in my career," Hudgins said.

Several Neighborhood Watches have sprouted, but few are strong. And other community initiatives have proven hard to keep viable, Hudgins said.

"We run into a lot of apathy," the

a safer city — the decriminalization of drugs.

Brenda Radford, District 2 county commissioner, responded by saying that babies born to drug-using women would eventually put a strain on the school system.

The topic of decriminalization drew more dialogue, especially about enhancing the treatment of drug addicts. Treatment is better than jail time, the forum's participants indicated.

Deputy Chief Smith explained the "crime triangle" — victim, offender and place — crime prevention being most effective with the "place."

Cline indicated the place for a drug-addicted criminal lies in his head. "These people commit crimes to get money to buy drugs," he said.

### Other topics

Other topics brought up during the night included:

- Opening schools to youngsters for recreation after school.

"The kids have no place to go, so you have dead time, and dead time is dangerous time," Martin said.

- Citizens and the city working to reduce the number of crashes by obeying traffic laws and simplifying traffic patterns and signs in Clarksville.

"If we can reduce significantly the time consumed by our police patrolmen and women (at crash scenes), they will have more time to devote to crime prevention efforts," said Bob Hasselbring.

- Helicopter surveillance of shopping areas.

Brian Dunn covers crime and safety and can be reached by phone at 245-0236 or by e-mail at [briandunn@theleafchronicle.com](mailto:briandunn@theleafchronicle.com).

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# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

Sunday, Apr. 29, 2001

Building  
a safer  
Clarksville

## More police not sole solution

By MICHELLE E. SHAW  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Some say the answer to cutting down crime is beefing up the police force.

But what kind of impact would that have on the court system? The answer depends on whom you talk to.

In this scenario, timing is critical, said General Session Court Judge John Hestle.

"If they added 100 officers right now we (in General Sessions) would be swamped because there are two courtrooms and three judges," he said. "Now if you fast-forward to 14 months from now when the courts complex is scheduled to be complete, they could add 250 officers and we could handle it because there would be three courtrooms and three judges."

That scheme, Hestle said, is based on the thought that more police mean more arrests.

On the other hand, "More police on the street means fewer crimes are being committed," said General Sessions Court Judge Ray Grimes. "That's the best form of prevention, more police out there."

Grimes said the number of arrests would not automatically rise



Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle

Public Defender Roger Neil and Clarksville patrolman Patrick Seay discuss a court case.

just because the number of police are increased.

Public Defender Roger Neil adds the "but." "But, if the number of arrests did increase, then naturally that would add clients to the system."

Neil and the District Attorney's Office are in "critical staffing situ-

ations," said District Attorney John Carney.

"Our system is about to collapse under its own weight," he said. "We couldn't take any more cases if the number of arrests did increase. Our staff can't continue like this."

Neil and Carney are hoping the state Legislature will give them

money to hire additional staff.

Both men say in order to move cases along in the court system, additional prosecutors and defenders must be hired.

Andy Hardin, executive director of the Public Defenders' Conference, said the holdup in hiring attorneys lies with the state.

"We, like the DAs, are 100 percent state-funded," he said. "All of our money comes from the state."

Neil and Carney said that is why they are hoping the Legislature gives them additional funds.

"Without those funds I can't do a thing," Carney said.

But adding staff comes with a warning, Neil said.

"It won't do any good to hire more defenders and prosecutors if you don't have any more judges," he said.

In Circuit Court, there are two criminal judges, one civil judge and two courtrooms.

"Even if there were another judge we don't have the people to staff the courtroom," Neil said.

"I agree with him 100 percent on that," Carney said.

Michelle E. Shaw covers courts and can be reached at 245-0750 or by e-mail at michelle.shaw@theleafchronicle.com.



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

Sunday, Apr. 29, 2001

## Police urge know-how in calling

By JILL NOELLE CECIL  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Chris Cayce found herself being stalked about a week ago in a grocery store parking lot.

While she took some steps to protect herself, she realized about an hour later that she hadn't done the most important thing immediately.

She had not called the police. "I had my phone with me," she said. "I should have called the police right then. I don't know why I didn't."

When someone is afraid of becoming the victim of a crime, the last thing he or she needs to be afraid of is calling police, said Clarksville Police Sgt. Geno Grubbs.

"If you are in doubt, call the police," he said. "That's the best advice I can give. Let the police come out and determine what the situation is. That's our job. That's what we're here for."

As a rule of thumb, people should call 911 if they expect a police officer to respond to their call, said Sgt. Gene Pulley.

The more quickly police can get information, the better, said Detective Jimmy Heatron.

"That makes it all the more likely police can find suspects in situations of all kinds, including home burglaries, assaults and suspicious activity," he said.

"The least we would do is fill out a field interview card," he said. "We'd try to find them and ask them questions like why they are there."

In some cases, the field interview cards enable police to link people with other crimes committed.

Capt. Al Ansley said a call puts police into action.

He encourages callers to be as clear and as specific as they can be in describing their situation to police or E-911 dispatchers.

Police often will step up patrolling in that area for the next several days, he said.

The department has just added a "duty phone" for people to call in cases when they don't have an immediate emergency.

A duty officer is available at the duty phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week to give general information or help with le-

*"If you are in doubt, call the police. That's the best advice I can give. Let the police come out and determine what the situation is. That's our job. That's what we're here for."*

**Geno Grubbs**

Clarksville Police Sergeant

### FOR HELP

■ If you feel you are the victim of a crime or are going to become the victim of a crime, call 911.

■ If you have general or non-emergency questions for police, call 848-0856, press "5" and ask to speak to the "duty officer."

The duty officer is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

■ Police can also be reached by district:

District 1 - 553-2464

District 2 - 848-0856

District 3 - 553-8119

gal questions.

"A lot of the time people just feel better being able to talk to an officer," Pulley said. "I think that helps."

Police are also trying to improve their customer satisfaction through a monthly survey of some of the people who make reports.

The survey began in February, and the department got back 120 surveys through March.

Broken down, responses to the 11-question survey were 94 percent excellent or good in districts 1 and 2.

District 3 had 97 percent excellent or good responses.

Jill Noelle Cecil covers city government and can be reached by telephone at 245-3252 or at [jnoelle@theleafchronicle.com](mailto:jnoelle@theleafchronicle.com)



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

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Sunday, Apr. 29, 2001

## Crime officials say Teen Court works

By BRIAN DUNN  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Police Chief Lavoyed Hudgins lauds the success of Teen Court, where teens sentence their peers for misdemeanor crimes.

Hudgins supported one in Enterprise, Ala., where he headed the police department before coming to Clarksville.

"It was the most successful thing in turning around aberrant teen behavior," he said.

Hudgins wants to bring the idea here, and a forum last week hosted by The Leaf-Chronicle, "Building a Safer Clarksville," showed the chief has support.

Attendees indicated they thought Teen Court could help build a safer Clarksville by manipulating peer pressure to deter repeat teen criminals.

General Sessions Court Judge John J. Hestle strongly supports the chief, and he said he hopes a Teen Court is established in Clarksville by the beginning of the next school year.

"The (Teen Courts) that I have seen, I think they've made a big difference," he said. "I think in other places, Teen Courts have caused teens to think twice before committing a crime."

The courts are relatively simple.

They use teens as prosecutors, defenders and jurors. The teens don't judge a peer's guilt, but they levy the punishment, which usually is restitution, community service or counseling, among other creative sentencings.

Once the teen completes his sentence, his crime is removed from his record.

The teen — who is a one-time offender of non-violent misde-



meanors — can choose to undergo routine juvenile court or to plead guilty and appear for sentencing before his peers.

Jerry Martin, a teacher at Northwest High School, has been behind the idea all along.

"Usually, people look at peer pressure in the negative arena," he said. "This manipulates peer pressure in a positive way."

Martin said Teen Courts strive to alter a youngster's course in life, thus preventing future crime.

"If we can stop negative behavior on the high school level, then we don't get it on the adult level," he said. "Teen court gives you the option of earlier intervention."

Martin, who is working with Hudgins, Hestle and General Sessions Judge Ray Grimes, to establish a Teen Court here, has based his model on courts in Kentucky.

Hestle also lauds Teen Court because it gives students an inside look at the criminal justice system.

"It will be good for the students from both standpoints," he said. "It brings it home for all the people who participate."

Martin said the teens who act as jurors, prosecutors and defenders also will be deterred from crime as an adult.

"Working within the system and seeing how it works, perhaps it will prevent them from coming in the system as a defendant," he said.

Brian Dunn covers crime and safety and can be reached at 245-0236 or by e-mail at brian-dunn@theleafchronicle.com.



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

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Sunday,  
April 29, 2001

Building  
a safer  
Clarksville

## Neighbors rebuild community pride



Robert Smith/The Leaf-Chronicle

Chris Watson, left, Joe Norris listen as Hunter Burney asks a question during the New Providence Operation Take Back monthly meeting last week. Also listening are Mattie Quarles and Norma Martin.

### New Providence has proven what citizens can accomplish

By BRIAN DUNN  
The Leaf-Chronicle

Deputy Police Chief Mark Smith hails the Neighborhood Watch in New Providence — "Operation Take Back" — as a prime example of community policing.

He even thinks the New Providence residents have taken the concept to the next level.

"What they've produced in New Providence is a whole new animal," Smith said. "It's no longer community policing, it's 'community government.'"

A forum last week hosted by The Leaf-Chronicle and titled "Building a Safer Clarksville" showed residents and police think community policing and pro-

grams like Neighborhood Watch can effectively deter crime.

But, as Smith inferred, Neighborhood Watch doesn't need to center on police intervention.

For example, a well-lit street can be as valuable as a police officer in preventing criminal activity.

Residents in New Providence initially worked with police and targeted prostitutes and drug dealers, but the operation changed. Residents soon worked with the Street Department to erect street lights and with the Sheriff's Office to eliminate trash.

They're now nagging the

➤ See Building, A2

#### TO GET INVOLVED

The National Crime Prevention Council — the people who brought the world McGuffin and "Take a bite out of crime" — offers these tips for a successful Neighborhood Watch.

- Spell out roles and responsibilities of the association and its members. Adopt bylaws and elect officers.
- Keep in touch with members. Use personal contacts, in and outside of meetings. Distribute a newsletter to communicate regularly with members.
- Prepare and train new leaders. Don't burn out old ones.
- Mobilize collective resources and use them. Know members' skills and personal and business contacts.
- Conduct business meetings on time and efficiently, but have a time for socializing before or after the meeting.
- Involve all elements in the community — single parents, renters as well as homeowners, teen-agers, senior citizens, business owners and managers.

#### ON THE NET

- Community policing is explored in-depth on the National Crime Prevention Council's Web site, [www.nnpc.org](http://www.nnpc.org).

#### INSIDE

- Crime officials say Teen Court works well, A2
- Police urge citizens to know when and how to call, A3
- Hiring more police can't be the only solution, A3



# THE LEAF-CHRONICLE

Tennessee's Oldest Newspaper — Established in 1808

The Leaf-Chronicle ☆ FROM THE FRONT ☆ Sunday, April 29, 2001

**Building  
a safer  
Clarksville**

## Building

Continued from A1

Tennessee Department of Transportation to work on the Providence Boulevard rush hour nightmares, said Jennifer Douthitt, Take Back president.

"It's about taking respect of our community," she said. "Instead of hiding in our houses, it's doing something."

"Drug dealers don't want to move in where they see people taking care of their neighborhood," she added.

Operation Take Back started in 1999. The neighborhood experienced some 22 FBI reportable crimes each week. That number has dropped to three.

"Our neighborhood is safer," Douthitt said. "People can feel like their kids can go out and play. You can go out in your neighborhood and feel safer."

The next step for New Providence is being addressed by Deputy Chief Smith.

One problem nagging the residents is unsupervised children playing in the streets. Smith has donated five officers — who work in the schools during the academic year — to New Providence to tackle the problem. The officers will work with Operation Take Back every day to find creative activities for the youngsters.

"What we're trying to do is divert the youths' attention to positive activity," Douthitt said. "Right now, we're just brainstorming."

*"Instead of hiding in our houses, it's doing something."*

**Jennifer Douthitt**

The ideas include the city providing transportation to and from parks and events.

"Our officers will be out there to assist the community to develop activities for these kids," said Sgt. John Wolitski, who will supervise the officers although the officers will answer primarily to the residents.

"We hope to improve self-esteem and bring to them positive activities. There's no doubt in my mind we will be successful, and, in the future, we will have this in other neighborhoods.

"This is community policing at its grassroots."

Community policing through Neighborhood Watch isn't easy. Many fail. Few succeed as well as Operation Take Back, and it has overcome a few bumps in the road.

"I think we've learned from our mistakes on what works best to reach people," Douthitt said.

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