

Bulletin

~ Representing North Dakota's newspapers since 1885 ~

Foundation eyes programs to help deal with pandemic

Recognizing the extreme stress and anxiety being felt by citizens and businesses during the pandemic, the NDNA Education Foundation is launching two new programs.

The purpose of the programs is to provide information about dealing with COVID-19; the importance of relying on trusted, fact-based information over unvetted and often suspect social media posts; and protecting the health and safety of newspaper staffers while they report information that is critical to the health of communities.

The programs:

- Up to \$320,000 for Newspaper Advertising. The Foundation will place 3x10 color ads in every North Dakota newspaper for eight weeks. These ads will encourage responsible, healthy behaviors and point out the importance of trusted information such as that found in newspapers.

- Up to \$150,000 for News Support Grants to newspapers to ensure they have the resources to maintain sufficient staff to cover critical issues and that they have the materials and equipment for staff members to work remotely and/or in other ways that protect their safety and health.

Convention reinvented amid COVID-19 concerns

Association, foundation annual elections to be conducted electronically

It'll be in bits and pieces, and in a much different format than usual, but the annual ND convention show will go on.

If not for the global pandemic, registrations would now be coming in for the convention, which would have been scheduled for the first weekend in May.

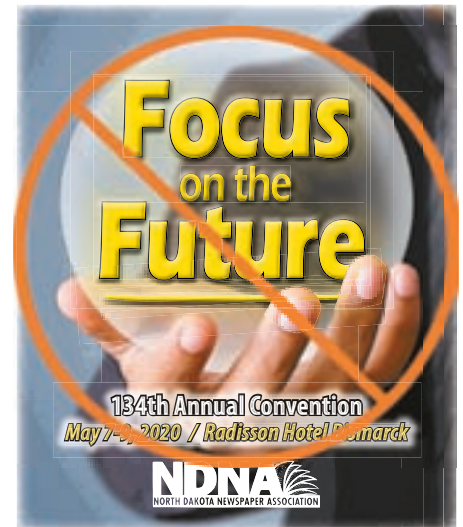
With uncertainty about when people will once again be able to gather, the NDNA board has a new plan for conducting the convention's business.

The first step will be to recognize the work of newspaper staffers from around the state.

Better Newspaper Contest award winners will be announced by May 7, and certificates and trophies will be mailed to winners. All members will be sent a link to a digital presentation showcasing the awards. A listing in Word format will also be posted so members can cut and paste into stories if they wish. As usual, we'll also have a news release on the top awards.

The annual meeting, primarily NDNA and NDNA Education Foundation elections, will be conducted electronically, starting with an email notice that will announce nominees and open a period for additional nominations.

Nominated by the board are Matt Von Pinnon for president, Cecile Wehrman for first vice president, Amy Dalrymple Molter for second vice president, Lesa Van Camp for



a new term on the board directors, and Allison Olimb for a new term on the board.

Once nominations cease, electronic voting will occur. Each newspaper gets one vote.

The final piece will be to meld some of what would have been done at the spring convention into the fall symposium, which will be held the first weekend in November at the Bismarck Radisson.

Notably, the symposium will include a banquet with a keynote speaker and presentation of such awards as Hall of Fame, Distinguished Service and 50-Year-Club.

The silent auction likely will become part of the symposium this year, along with some of the presentations that would have been done at the convention.

Among other things, plans are to put together some kind of panel or presentation to help members with ideas for recovering from the effects of the pandemic.



About 15 North Dakota newspapers joined with hundreds of others from a dozen different states to carry a message of solidarity during the coronavirus pandemic. The theme "When you're on your own, we're there with you." was accompanied by a message about the importance of relying on "facts over fear" by getting reliable information from trusted sources like newspapers.

Internship deadline extended

The application deadline for internships funded by the NDNA Education Foundation has been extended because so few have been received.

The foundation board approved funding for 12 college student internships of \$2,500 each and two high school student internships of \$200 each.

But when the April 3 deadline passed, only three college student intern applications and one high school student application had been received.

Applications will now be accepted until all internships are filled or it becomes too late for

a summer internship to be completed, which ever comes first.

The internships are the cornerstone of the Education Foundation's journalism education program.

Application forms are available at www.ndna.com. Completed forms can be emailed to stevea@ndna.com.

This fall NDNA will also begin searching for students to apply for legislative reporting internships during the 2021 legislative session.

For additional information, contact NDNA at 701-223-6397 or info@ndna.com.

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Pandemic era pummels newspapers

"Like just about every other business sector, North Dakota newspapers are reeling from the pandemic-related economic downturn."

Thus started a letter that NDNA staff and board members sent early this month to Gov. Doug Burgum.

The letter then asked for help.

"We do not want a handout. But we believe a significant stimulus would result if state government would use paid newspaper advertising to compliment the massive amount of reporting being provided by our newspaper members. We urge you to communicate with all state agencies and departments that have responsibilities and plans for marketing campaigns to include newspapers in their paid media advertising."

We didn't just say newspapers need help to make it through this crisis and to be in a position to continue serving their communities when it's over.

We documented it.

- In Crosby, more than 30 spring events that normally use newspaper have been cancelled. The local grocery store, the biggest advertiser, has stopped its weekly insert. Revenues for the first quarter were down \$15,000.

- In Northwood, several advertisers declined to pay for their ads after the events they were promoting were cancelled.

- In Ashley, reduced advertising has resulted in cutting 6.5 hours a day from a workforce of less than four people.

- In Wahpeton, the number of print publication days was trimmed from five to three after \$2,400 in advertising was cancelled in March and \$4,300 for April.

- In Hillsboro, year to date advertising is off 60 percent from normal.

- In Watford City, they're counting on the Paycheck Protection Program to avoid making cuts to an already small staff.



Steve Andrist, NDNA executive director

Just
in
Passing

- In Williston, April projections indicate a 35% drop in advertising, and without a significant change in conditions staff cuts are expected by the first of the month.

- In Bismarck, all newspaper employees are being required to take two-week unpaid furloughs.

- In Fargo, pandemic-related losses of advertising and circulation have precipitated a decision to eliminate Monday and Friday print editions.

- In New Rockford, the two largest advertisers, a grocery and a casino, have suspended all advertising and there are concerns that staff cuts may be necessary if things don't turn around soon.

The letter also noted that in recognition of the important role newspapers play and to protect their viability, the federal government in Canada and many state governments in the U.S. have allocated funds to purchase advertising services from newspapers.

It concluded with the ask:

"Governor, we sincerely appreciate your thoughtful and confident leadership in directing North Dakota's efforts to combat the coronavirus, and we respectfully request that government departments be mindful of newspapers when it comes to planning and executing their various paid media campaigns."

Newspapers in the news

In his daily COVID-19 news briefing, Burgum several times has held up newspapers as providers of trusted information.

He's particularly objected to false information and innuendo posted on social media, and stresses a "facts over fear" theme.

Meanwhile, earlier this month Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem was a guest on one of the daily briefings, talking about pandemic era scams.

Stenehjem was describing the case of an elderly woman who fell for a phone scam.

After sending money to the scammer, she read a newspaper story about the scam and immediately called authorities.

Because of that newspaper story, Stenehjem said, they were able to recover the woman's money.

Foundation building

Slowly but surely, members of the NDNA Education Foundation board have worked to build the group's endowment.

Now they have decided to do something with it.

In one fell swoop this month the foundation board voted to spend nearly a third of the endowment on two new programs.

That demonstrates the critical importance of surviving the pandemic era.

One of the programs is an advertising campaign stressing the importance of using only trusted, reliable information during the pandemic.

The other is a support grant program aimed at ensuring newspaper reporters are safe and healthy as they continue to gather and report vital information in an unprecedented time.

"This is not just about cutting checks to newspapers," said Foundation Board Member Rob Keller of the Jamestown Sun.

It's about getting trusted, fact-based information to North Dakota citizens and advocating for newspapers as an important provider of such information.

The ad campaign has begun, and the grant program will be rolled out soon.

It's time to understand others in need

Here in early April 2020, it's hard to grasp what the world is going through with the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are days that I drive around calling on clients and it's like Christmas day. Restaurants are closed, hotels are barely visible, and the state capital parking lot is empty. Getting home and turning on the news only magnifies the local experience as the situation plays out across the country and throughout the world.

In the newspaper industry, it is important to understand a couple things: 1) People in every community across the state are afraid, but what they read in the local newspaper gives them the truth about where we are at currently and what the outlook is for the future. This gives way to hope and the ability to push forward as a community, and 2) Business owners are trying to figure out this situation and how long they are going to operate under these conditions. Many are shut down, and those that are open are operating at a fraction of the customer base needed. We are

Ad Chat



Mike Casey, NDNA Advertising Director

dealing with unprecedented times.

What we need most right now is an understanding of what others are going through, both on the individual side and also the business side. We all know people who have been laid off and people are working from home.

Our children are home from school and dealing with distance learning the best they can. How they are truly dealing with not being around their friends and the busy life they were used to?

Many people are sick or have loved ones who are sick. The fact that many people fear what's around the corner tells us that compassion and understanding is

desperately needed.

How can we help our neighbors and our community? If we are all truly in this together, we can all come together for the greater good. Understand that a family may need something to eat, or that a business owner may need some help. A friend may need help paying a bill or even help with a tank of gas. A lot of people are going to need someone to talk to, and taking the time to listen and understand might change their outlook.

Take the time to visit with business owners and ask how they are doing. How is this affecting them and their employees? How can we help? Businesses will continue to need to tell customers about what they have going on, even if things have slowed down. When we get on the right side of this, we will help them build themselves back up again. I hope that everyone is safe and healthy, and I pray that we continue to show our strength as leaders in our communities.



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It's all about the product benefits

Rob is the marketing director for an outdoor apparel company. I remember a conversation with him about his philosophy of promoting their products. "It's all about benefits," he said. "Every time a new product is developed - or an existing product is improved - my task starts with learning the features and translating those features into marketable benefits.

"I meet with the research and development team and ask questions like, 'Where did this idea come from?' and 'Why did you decide on these specific changes?' I want them to walk me through their thought process, so I can understand how the product enhances our customers' outdoor activities.

"There's a chain of communication," he explained. "I share the relevant details with our sales team, so they can present the new product to stores that sell our products. That includes providing them with information the stores can communicate to their customers. Of course, all of that is coordinated with our international brand marketing.

"At every step along the way, the focus is on features and benefits. For example, we use wicking fabrics in many of our products. A shirt which is made of wicking material draws perspiration away from the body and to the exterior of the shirt, where it can easily evaporate. A

Ad Libs



John Foust, Raleigh, NC

shirt with wicking fabric is cool and comfortable - and that's important to active people. The word 'wick' doesn't mean anything to a lot of folks, so it needs a good benefits-oriented explanation."

There's a reason why advertising veterans have always preached the value of product benefits. People don't buy features, they buy benefits. If that strategy is good enough for a successful international company, it's good enough for the businesses we encounter every day.

Here are a couple of takeaways from Rob's approach:

1. Stick to the facts. "There's no need to embellish the truth," he said. "If a product is worth buying - if it is worth advertising - it should offer honest advantages to consumers. That's why we encourage all of our marketing folks to avoid superlatives in their descriptions. People are suspicious of words like 'best,' 'tremendous'

and 'fantastic.'

"Think about it. If you're in the market for a shirt to wear for hiking or boating, would you be more likely to buy one that is comfortable because it 'evaporates perspiration quickly' or one that is described as 'unbelievable?' Solid facts win that contest every time."

2. Keep it simple. Rob has access to a lot of technical product details, but he knows it's important to narrow it down to simple, easy-to-communicate information. "The most effective marketers make their messages easy to understand," he said. "If they make it complicated, they'll lose people." The most memorable benefits are communicated with just a few words."

When you're working with an advertiser who needs ideas for a new campaign, keep features and benefits in mind. That will answer the question, "Why should people buy what we're selling?" And it will take a lot of sweat out of the creative process.

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John Foust has conducted training programs for thousands of newspaper advertising professionals. Many ad departments are using his training videos to save time and get quick results from in-house training. E-mail for information: john@johnfoust.com

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What if our staff needs to work from home?

I received an email from Dennis Derossett, executive director of Nebraska Press Association, a little while ago. He posed an interesting question.

“The C-virus poses a question. What if the staff of a community newspapers must quarantine itself – how would they continue to produce the newspaper?”

I’ve got a pretty good idea Dennis knew the answer to that question, but was interested in my thoughts on the subject.

If anyone knows a lot about publishing with a home-based staff, I suppose it’s me. For the past three years, I’ve run a flourishing book publishing business with a staff that works from home. Don’t get me wrong, we have an office. I just haven’t been there in five weeks. Neither have any of my staff, as far as I know.

I’m a social person. I prefer to work at the office, but business took a huge turn upwards in January and I quickly learned I can get a lot more done if I jump out of bed, go straight to my computer (after a shower), and work till late night.

How do we do it? Pretty easily, actually. Because all of our folks worked out of their homes at the beginning, we’ve learned to do anything that needs to be done, whether at the office or at home. We’ve got bookkeeping, editing, designing, marketing – and even writing books – from home down to an art form.

It’s my guess that my words are going to travel quickly throughout the newspaper world. It’s Wednesday night, March 11. Five hours ago, my son sent word that classes at the University of Tennessee have been suspended until April 3. Three hours ago, the NCAA announced tournament games will be played without fans. Two hours ago, the NBA announced a suspension of the season for the foreseeable future. The president was on TV, asking folks to prepare. Governors are asking churches to cancel services, schools to close,

The Newspaper Technology Guru



Kevin Slimp, Knoxville, TN

and for the workforce to prepare for working from home. Things are happening very quickly.

Knowing many of my newspaper friends will read this on Thursday and Friday of this week, here are my initial thoughts on how to prepare for the possibility that your staff could be required to work from home at some point in the near future.

Hold a meeting with your staff right away. Begin making a game plan to prepare for the possibility the unexpected happens.

Be sure people have the tools at home to get the paper out, in case that has to be done. If you use Adobe CC (the current version), you are in a lot better shape, because the software can be installed on as many computers as necessary, though it can only be running on two computers concurrently. This means your staff could download InDesign, Photoshop and Acrobat at home using your company licenses and design pages since the software won’t be at use at the office.

If you have a large staff (more than a dozen or so), be prepared to purchase some Adobe CC licenses to get the paper out while folks are working from home. It would be disastrous to attempt to find and install older versions of the software on home computers. Adobe CC software is downloaded from the Internet, making it a relatively easy process.

Design a process for getting the paper done. If you already work from

“the cloud,” be sure everyone knows how to get to company files from their homes. If not, get a business dropbox account or find some other way to keep everything online so everyone that needs access to stories, photos and ads can get to them

Create a Zoom or GoToMeeting account so the staff can easily communicate as a group when necessary. This will also allow reporters to interview folks online, rather than in person.

Assuming your printer is still printing newspapers during this time (which is a big assumption), you will still be able to write, edit, design and sell ads for your newspaper while everyone is working at home. If you have no way to get your paper printed for a few weeks, plan to create an expanded online edition available to all of your readers to keep them informed. Remember, if you’re working from home, it’s likely most of your readers are as well. They’ll be scouring the web for information.

Purchase extra external hard drives now. They’re inexpensive (I just checked. 1 TB drives are going for \$45 on Amazon.com), and they will make your life much easier in the case of a quarantine. Plus, they’re good to have, even under normal conditions. Make sure important files from individual computers and servers are kept on these drives, just in case they are needed quickly.

Create up-to-date information for your readers about how to get medical assistance, food, and other vital commodities we generally take for granted. Keep a running list of updated information on your website at all times during a potential quarantine.

So what if no quarantine takes place and you make all these plans for nothing? So what. Good leadership depends, in part, on good planning.

I hope we wake up tomorrow and learn that coronavirus was all a bad dream. But for today, let’s not put off making plans. Just in case.

The Art of the Interview: how to get the goods

The basis for almost all great journalism is the interview, the act of obtaining information from a source.

It sounds simple enough, right? Find someone with knowledge, call or visit them, ask them questions and record their responses.

But like everything in journalism, conducting quality interviews is a craft that requires great commitment, effort and skill to pull off at the highest level. It demands a never-ending process of learning and improving.

Interviews serve several important purposes. They deepen a reporter's understanding of a topic; they provide opportunities to gather detail, color and specifics that enhance storytelling opportunities; they add context, nuance and perspective that documents and data cannot provide; and, ultimately, they generate credibility with readers by strengthening the writer's voice, authority and understanding of a topic.

Effective interviewing is an art form; there is no one way to do it well and the approach depends on the subject and the topic. Here are some tips to conducting memorable and effective interviews that will generate quality material to make your reporting and writing shine.

— Consider the Three Ps. Preparation, planning and persistence are critical. Great interviews only result from great preparation. Read up on sources and topics before the interview begins. Never go in cold.

— Be ready for anything; don't let sources take control of the interview. Ask a tough question three different ways if that's what it takes to get a real answer.

— Be patient to get more info. Asking good questions takes skill. Thought, anticipation and analysis are critical elements of asking the right question at the right time. Do not be in a hurry.

— Discomfort is encouraged on both sides of interviews that become intense and go deep; it's OK if you both squirm a bit.

— Think about questions in advance and write them down. On breaking news, think on your feet

Better Writing with Bart



Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, SD

and react to the situation to come up with high-impact questions. Maintain a tight focus on the work and don't drift off.

— Ask open-ended questions and those that push the source to go beyond the obvious and make them think deeply and reveal things they may not have intended to. Force them to reveal their feelings in addition to their knowledge.

— Develop a connection with the subject and use a conversational style to lower their guard and make them feel more comfortable revealing the truth. Be open with the source to gain trust and credibility and build a rapport but not a friendship.

— Create a flow for the interview that makes sense and feels right. Easy questions early, hard questions in the middle, follow-up queries at the end. Plan a strategy in advance.

— Listen more than you talk. Avoid questions with long wind-ups. Give the source your full attention at all times.

— Try to meet sources on their own turf. Better yet, be with them when they undertake an activity or go about their daily duties.

— Use the "devil's advocate" excuse to pose sensitive questions.

— Share a bit of yourself to warm up an uncomfortable, uneasy or inexperienced source.

— Feel free to acknowledge that you don't know something or didn't get it. Ask sources to explain complex topics in the simplest terms possible.

— Always seek opportunities for

photos and video. Do the full interview, then re-ask a good question while taking a photo or short video.

— On breaking news, interview both the blowhards and the quiet people who stand on the edge of a scene. Find the highest ranking officer on the scene and question them. Never stop asking questions of authorities until they walk away or tell you to stop. Have business cards handy to give to people and ask them to call you later. Act and think fast because opportunities are fleeting. Stay a little longer than you think necessary.

— In press conferences, never ask your best question amid the pack. Try to get private time with the source or call them later with the gangbuster inquiry. Always break away from the pack.

— Be kind and respectful at all times and don't be afraid to use tasteful humor to break down barriers with an uncomfortable or new source.

— Record interviews for accuracy, even if transcription takes more time and is painful. For phone interviews, put your phone on speaker and tape the call on a micro-recorder. When a key fact or great quote comes along, write down the time on the recorder in your notes to expedite finding it later.

— Always keep open the opportunity for a follow-up interview. Arrange to speak again to clarify facts or run new findings by them. Get the cell phone number of all people you interview.

— Put the phone down and turn the radio off while driving after an interview (windshield time is thinking time.) Right after an interview, go back and tidy up the notes and write up the information in story form.

— Practice makes one proficient; becoming a student of the interview process and reviewing past results leads to constant improvement.


Bart Pfankuch is the content director for South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit online journalism group. Contact him at bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org.

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Virus underscores need for business news

The coronavirus pandemic is dominating headlines, generating stories on issues touching nearly every aspect of lives.

Reports addressing the health and safety of citizens are obviously center stage. At the same time, the pandemic has spawned a range of stories focusing on our worksites – the places we earn a paycheck as employees and purchase products and services as consumers. Business lockdowns and restrictions have redefined commerce and reshaped daily routines.

Business news from all aspects deserves extra attention during these extraordinary times. This is also an opportunity to think about expanded business coverage during ordinary times. Stories about employers and employees have a big impact on communities. What happens at the workplace might even overshadow a decision of a local governing body. Yet, many newspapers struggle for consistent coverage of employers and employees.

It's impractical in many newsrooms to devote one person to report on business. Editors and reporters still can incorporate business coverage into their everyday regimen of assignments. The first step is to brainstorm stories on a regular basis similar to examining coverage of local government or sports.

Here is one list:

When is the last time you compared and contrasted local employment with statewide statistics? Take it a step further, and identify a feature story representing specific trends. Present the trends and data in graphically pleasing, easy-to-understand formats. If online, make the data interactive, searchable and alive.

How are businesses grappling with health care costs, and what is the impact on employees?

Is your community facing a

Guest Column



Jim Pumarlo, Red Wing, MN

workforce shortage? What steps are companies taking to attract and retain qualified workers?

Do companies provide on-site child care? Share the best practices.

What is the local landscape of in-home businesses?

How important are exports to the bottom line of businesses? Provide a local perspective into the global economy.

Who are the winners and losers in the international trade wars?

What sustainability measures are companies implementing to respond to consumer demand for a green economy?

Has the role of long-term care facilities changed as people live longer and programs are in place to help them stay in their own homes?

How important is e-commerce to local merchants? Are companies hindered by lack of broadband access? How are businesses best getting their messages to customers? Facebook? Web? Phone? Videoconferencing?

The stories are limited only by staff resources. As with any beat, newspapers will soon discover that the more attention devoted to the broad definition of business news, the more ideas that readers will forward.

Credible and ongoing coverage of employers and employees can lead to increased advertising revenue as well. Be clear, this does not mean saying “yes” to every

advertiser's request for news coverage. Newspapers are in the strongest position by maintaining a clear separation between news and advertising. That's in the best interests of both your advertising and news departments.

At the same time, news and advertising departments should explore shared opportunities. Newsrooms are regularly approached to publicize such events as Manufacturers Week or Small Business Week or Nursing Home Week. As you discuss news coverage, think about ways to generate revenue, too. Identify possibilities for a special section. Maybe even sponsor an event in conjunction with, say, the local chamber of commerce or manufacturers association. Investigate all platforms for news and advertising from print to digital.

Here's a worthwhile exercise for all newspapers.

Take a quiz in your newsrooms. You all can likely name the members of the city council or school board, local lawmakers, the county administrator. But how many can name the city's five largest employers, or the names of their CEOs, or the top corporate contributors to the local United Way?

Improving business coverage is a shared responsibility. Businesses must be comfortable that reporters can get the story right, and reporters deserve to have all the facts including those that may not be so flattering. Editorial and advertising staffs must have a common understanding of what is worthy of a story and what warrants an ad.

As a first step, begin a conversation within your newspaper and with your business community.

Jim Pumarlo writes, speaks and provides training on community newsroom success strategies. He welcomes comments and questions at jim@pumarlo.com.

Board presses 'pause' on search for new NDNA executive director

The NDNA board has temporarily suspended its search for a new executive director.

Believing the current pandemic environment makes this a poor time to transition to new leadership, board members asked Steve Andrist to delay

his planned retirement until sometime in the fall.

Several candidates who applied for the position when the search opened late this winter will remain under consideration when the search resumes in the fall.

Newspaper industry briefs . . .

Postal troubles

The U.S. Postal Service could be gone by June unless Congress immediately delivers billions of dollars to counteract the impact of the coronavirus crisis, a House committee chairwoman warned Monday night.

"Based on a number of briefings and warnings this week about a critical fall-off in mail across the country, it has become clear that the Postal Service will not survive the summer without immediate help from Congress and the White House," Oversight Chairwoman Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) said in a statement.

A Postal Service shutdown

would also affect the ability of voters to cast ballots by mail.

--Politico

S.D. papers close

These extraordinary times have resulted in the loss of two 140-year-old weekly newspapers in our state. The De Smet News and Lake Preston Times ended publication last week.

As Publisher Dale Blegen, a 43-year veteran of the business and South Dakota Newspaper Hall of Fame member, wrote in a front-page farewell last week:

"This newspaper never fully recovered from the Great Recession. And this COVID-19 pandemic has pushed us over the edge."

Dale added: "The sad part is this closing is a real loss for the community. Whatever your taste in news may be, what this newspaper provided will no longer be there."

-- SDNA

Facebook may help

The Facebook Journalism Project (FJP) is launching the FJP COVID-19 Local News Relief Fund Grant Program, offering grant opportunities to help U.S. local news organizations continue serving communities during the coronavirus outbreak. News organizations begin applying for relief grants on Monday, April 13. Go to <https://fjp-relief-fund-register.splashthat.com/> for more information.

NDNA Calendar

Witham Symposium
Nov. 5-7, 2020
Radisson Hotel Bismarck

NDNA-SDNA Joint Convention
May 6-9, 2021
The Lodge • Deadwood, S.D.

ONLINE MEDIA CAMPUS WEBINARS

See page 4 for webinar dates and times.
FREE registration for NDNA members!
Register at onlinemediacampus.com.
Call NDNA for password before registering.

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North Dakota Grocers Association
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ND Rural Water Systems Association
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Praxis Strategy Group
State Bar Association of ND
Veterans Honor Flight of ND/MN
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Thank you for supporting the newspapers of North Dakota!