“I’ve lost count of the number of fires I’ve covered this year.”
A fire goes 17 times faster than you can run, depending on what way the wind is blowing.

"Usually we’ll get the little fires, one or two acres. But right off the bat, we had big fires, hundreds of thousands of acres threatening homes, livestock, drivers. It just kind of went off the charts. The nighttime fires are more intense now. Helmets protect you from embers burning your hair. If you burn your feet or hands, it’s an automatic helicopter flight out of there. Burns to soft tissue can get really bad really quickly. I carry a fire shelter. It is a last resort. If you have to deploy it, it’s a last gasp alternative to not dying."

Kent Porter
Photojournalist
The Press-Democrat
Santa Rosa, California
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2021 by the Numbers

- **850** CNPA MEMBER PUBLICATIONS
- **246 Thousand** PUBLIC NOTICES POSTED STATEWIDE*
- **$4.1 Million** NETWORK AD REVENUE
- **41 Hundred** JOURNALISTS IN CALIFORNIA
- **82 Percent** DIGITAL MEMBER GROWTH
- **131** LEGISLATION ADDRESSED

*Since Summer 2021 Launch

CNPA Mission

To protect and serve the common interests of news media so that they can deliver democracy using the highest ideals, ethics and traditions of journalism to inform their communities.
To most, CNPA carries a torch for the California newspaper industry. And it’s true. We work to advance the businesses of news publishers who gather news and distribute it in at least seven different languages to readers in thousands of cities, towns and neighborhoods.

But the fire in our advocacy goes well beyond the business of publishing. What truly ignites our flame is the preservation of a free press and the right of journalists to tell the stories citizens need to know in a society where governance is of, by and for the people.

It is this fire that sparked the idea for this Annual Report. Yes, journalism costs money and publishers need to make it so their businesses can keep the “presses” running. But more profoundly, it is the absence of journalism — and what its loss would surely cost society — that our members work hardest to prevent.

On the pages that follow, we display the products of our profession. The words and pictures aptly defend local journalism by shining light on the professionals who not only embrace news reporting as a sacred trust, but also accept the risks inherent in its practice when health, safety and way of life may be threatened.

The year 2021 was framed by the events of 2020. The pandemic, record wildfires, and economic and civil unrest put the state at tipping points. Yet Californians prevailed and began to rebound largely on the strength of access to trusted, locally-sourced information.

Through it all, newspaper professionals powered on to serve publics by relentlessly searching for truth and sourcing their stories. Without them, the news ecosystem in California may have drowned in a tidal wave of social media disinformation. Without them, there is no telling what other adversities we might have endured.

The year 2022 may portend more perils for our state and country. The award-winning stories and photos highlighted in our report reveal the commitment of thousands of local journalists to stay the course by keeping communities informed and government accountable.

It’s what news professionals do in a democracy. It’s what drives our businesses and fuels our passion for journalism and freedom of the press.

Charles Ford Champion II
Homeless at Age 7

Theo lives with his homeless mom in the streets and parks of San Francisco. Sarah Ravani’s story opened a window of hope with its revelations. Photo by Gabrielle Lurie, San Francisco Chronicle.

If not us ...

In an era of disinformation and social polarity, local journalism holds strong for democracy’s sake

Scenes rife with uncertainty played out daily in pandemic-ridden California. Masks were up. A third of the state’s businesses were shuttered. ICUs were crowded with gravely ill COVID-19 victims. There were flames of civil unrest, and tragedies beneath the eerie, orange-colored skies from record-setting wildfires. The homeless population spilled into upscale shopping corridors and parks where playground gazebos became roofs over their heads. Crime — too often violent — spiked.

Over the chaos was the din of national and social media. Talking heads blared conflicting data points, alternately exalted and contested health authorities, advanced conspiracy theories, and normalized the metaverse. Social platforms with names not in dictionaries a decade ago overflowed with fake news. Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Tik Tok turned every digital device into a news channel.

Subjected to this ubiquitous and confusing techno-information universe, news consumers faced a dilemma. Nicholas Carr of Williams College, writing for Politico in the aftermath, boiled the problem down to this:
The days of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate and Walter Cronkite are mist in the memories of baby boomers. Only 12% of people have "a lot of trust" in national media like the New York Times and the Washington Post, once the gold standards for news in America and perhaps the entire free world.

With the pandemic, readers decisively returned to their foregone defaults. Local daily and weekly news — print and digital — once again became go-to sources. Along with this came the rediscovery of community assets: the journalists from their neighborhood who questioned decision-makers, checked and rechecked facts, reported the news when it broke and followed with coverage to put developments in a rightful community context.

Placing a value on this community resource is difficult. How many lives were saved by local media alerts to use face coverings to prevent contagion? Or evacuate homes to escape incineration? Or tread carefully in areas of civil unrest? Or trust COVID-19 vaccines? The worth is incalculable, but in 2020-21 it was fully realized.

"When shunted through digital media, information behaves like water: it flows together, it melds and it finds its lowest common level. The trivial blurs with the profound, the false with the true. The news bulletin and the dance meme travel in the same stream, with the same weight. Content collapses."

In other words, two key questions — where to go for credible information and whom to rely on for authentic stories — became not just matters of academic discussion. These were urgent questions around the breakfast table. Californians needed to know what was happening ... and what to do about it.

To get the answers, they went back to the sources that knit them into communities and acted as their eyes on truth: local newsrooms and local journalists.

The move was not unexpected. Pew Research Center surveyed adult social media users in 2021 and found that more than half think social media is largely inaccurate. What is more, American adults have been losing faith in national mass media for two decades.
If not us ....

Why did Californians need an object lesson? The Knight Commission on Trust, Media and Democracy supplies some useful insights.

It found that nearly 60% of readers believe that the proliferation of information sources makes it harder to be well informed. Of more concern, perhaps, just 40% are “confident in their ability to navigate the news environment to remain knowledgeable on current events and determine what is factually true.”

Another factor? The role of press in a democracy is to keep the public informed about the actions and policies of its government. That place in the hierarchy of freedom has eroded in recent decades because the lines between news and opinion have blurred. Talk radio, cable TV and the evolution of so-called “citizen journalists” have helped instigate the confusion. None of these forms are necessarily bound by the tenets of professional journalism.

Finally, and somewhat related, the newer forms of media tend to lack gatekeepers to verify and authenticate. Local newspapers adhere to the principles extant in the pre-

internet news ecosystem. They put a premium on accuracy and fairness and don’t relax the standards to accommodate speed, promotion or subscriber gratification.

The argument is necessarily tied to financial considerations. As one editor remarked during a webinar on how news businesses might survive the pandemic, “Journalism costs money.” It is a truism that holds no matter where the capital comes from or how the nation pays for the journalism.

A great worry for the next generation is that media will bifurcate along the lines of the “haves” and “have nots.” It is a concern largely premised on the demise of viable

Trust in Media by Source

75% Local Media
58% National Media
27% Social Media

% of US adults who have a lot or some trust in information from these media sources.
Source: Pew Research Center
If not us ...

local journalism. Eli Pariser, the author of “The Filter Bubble” and co-director of New_Public, an incubator for public digital spaces, poses the threat this way:

“We are well into an age of media fracture, and in the coming years that trend will only accelerate. The information-rich will get information-richer, but those without the appetite or funds to access gated digital communities will inhabit a vast wasteland of viral lies, propaganda and conflict. Our attention will be pulled magnetically toward nationalized conflict and viral upheavals that most people can’t influence, furthering a sense of powerlessness and alienation.”

This outcome is the very antithesis of journalism in a free society. Gratefully, society is beginning to recognize the greater loss occasioned by the closure of local news outlets. Thanks to the upheaval of 2020-21, principled businesses, government, academia, institutions, and entrepreneurs are stepping up not to make money from new business models or subscription programs, but to make certain that free press does what it is supposed to do: protect democracy and, in so doing, keep citizens free.

The local news ecosystem of the future, the one the profession must strive for, will be made up of locally-owned newsrooms intent on a certain information equity. Communities will be served by media that devote their journalism to watch-dogging their government and covering the stories that bond free people to one another without surrendering to algorithms or chasing likes, clicks or page views.

David Rodriguez’ Salinas Californian story won first place in the California Journalism Awards for investigative reporting by weeklies with over 25,000 circulation.
Covering California: 2021

Unrecognized first responders, journalists witness fatalities, fantasies, injustices

CNPA has long sought first-responder status for its journalists. We need only look to the evidence vividly portrayed on the pages of newspapers since March 2020: COVID-19, wildfires and protests. What we saw in words and pictures was made possible by journalists who entered fevered ICUs, tread along flame-engulfed ridges, and stepped onto city streets ablaze with anger and violence. As 2022 dawned, journalists again put themselves in harm's way to give readers and viewers firsthand accounts of the war in Ukraine.

Readers naturally empathize with the subjects of the stories. Publishers' empathy – and amazement – focuses on the journalists. They marvel at the willingness of their journalists to risk their own safety to ensure an informed public. They are humbled by their dogged pursuit of truths and in awe at their irrepressibility.

Pandemic reporting was a study in contrasts: from tragic missteps in a nursing home to Keith Birmingham’s photo for the Pasadena Star-News of faux normalcy in Dodger Stadium.
Steve Appleford
Capital & Main reporting with COVID-19

“So there was a lot of worry about being exposed to the virus. I was basically going to be wading into this crowd of people who didn’t believe in masks. Police cars were on fire, so I was in the middle of that as well. I’ve been in those situations before and you always have enough to worry about as it is, but then you have the virus on top of it. That made it more interesting in a way.”

Tyler Shaun Evains
The Beach Reporter on racial injustice

“This was honestly the first time for a lot of Manhattan residents who would pass by the park all the time and had no idea. People were paying more attention to those types of issues in the middle of last year. That’s what journalism does: People read about it (and pay) more attention to issues of race and discrimination. I think that’s why people became, you know, to join the movement to actual stuff getting done.”

Jason Pohl
Sacramento Bee on corrections reform

"We filed Public Records Act requests for all of the 56 counties that have jails. What those claims brought back was a series of amazingly terrible story ideas, quite frankly. It was way too large to comprehend. I think we knew that if we were going to spend this much time and energy doing data analysis ... we damn sure better make people care about this by showing the true face of who’s impacted most by some of these changes."
CNPA has been built to serve member publishers and the journalists they employ. Our staff provides lobbying, legal affairs, advertising, networking and job services. We also conduct the California Journalism Awards program. Members access this portfolio of products to advance journalism and sustain and grow the businesses that distribute the news.

Several years ago, our board endorsed a strategic plan aimed at modernizing operations. The goal was to make CNPA more responsive to member needs in a well-documented, challenging environment for news publishers. Indeed, digital technology, pandemic accelerated business downturns and legislation have been existential threats to our members.

We are fortunate to have a management team and staff that has eagerly transitioned to an outcome-driven enterprise. The decision lens is “customers first,” meaning that the association relies on understanding member needs to guide the development of solutions. The approach is yielding very satisfactory results.

We revamped our legislative affairs program so that CNPA could amplify the impact of its voice on the business of California state government. The effort paid off in several decisive legislative victories in 2021.

It also served to elevate CNPA’s recognition among lawmakers, policymakers, staffs and various political allies of the association.

We were able to adjust to a precipitous downturn in advertising revenues and position the association for needed health and wellness notifications, the resumption of some business ads and the onset of post-pandemic tourism promotions.

We engineered programs to support programs that we had to cancel because of the pandemic. Most notably we created an ad-supported magazine to celebrate our annual California Journalism Award winners. In 2023, we expect to see the return of both the CNPA Capitol Conference and the CJA Awards Gala.

As to the future, CNPA is poised to lead the profession toward meaningful participation in a media universe where both print and digital platforms thrive and where professional journalists have credible outlets for their work.

Simon Grieve
Advertising Services

CNPA’s Advertising Services unit is a media network that provides a critical revenue-building service for the association and its members. The unit advocates for ad revenue in member daily and weekly print and digital newspapers.

In 2021, rebounding from massive pandemic-driven advertising reductions, the team won major pieces of business for its network, including a $2.4 million, 500+ ad buy from the state’s “Visit California” tourism initiative and a prime position in the local ad plan for Tobacco Free Kids.

In addition, with the urgent need to communicate pandemic government services, the unit was active in placing ads statewide on rent relief, federal and state rescue plans, class actions, unclaimed property and election redistricting. It also secured more than 300 legal notices on environmental protections and toxic waste. Gross placements revenue totaled $4.1 million compared to $1.5 million in 2020.

Legislative Affairs

Each year, CNPA’s legislative affairs team fights attempts to limit access to public information and infringe on the rights of the free press to gather and report the news. 2021 was no different with 131 bills that might have had an impact on the ability of journalists to do their jobs.

Nonetheless, the association prevailed in virtually every instance. It notably worked with the Senate to stall a bill that would have limited press access to public autopsy files in criminal cases.
For smaller publications that do not have paid legal staff or a law firm on retainer, CNPA offers guidance – not legal counsel – on what various laws require. In 2021, the Association’s legal team answered more than 200 inquiries from the publishing and editorial staffs of members. They worked with First Amendment Coalition to publish a second edition of "The Right to Know," a comprehensive guide to media law and public access. Newsrooms statewide have made the new edition a key part of their editorial libraries.

**Statewide digital public notice posts with search**

Years ago, public notice advertising rules were created to ensure the public had an open window on the work of government. The rules meant an independent third party would publish notices so there was the widest possible access and avoidance of any suggestion of backroom deals or sweetheart bidding.

Ironically, advocates for public access have to contest dozens of bills each year that propose to dilute this fundamental right. Many of the proposals erroneously assume that publishing notices on low viewer, infrequently visited government websites constitute a substitute for the widespread access provided by newspapers and their associated digital and online news editions. That’s why CNPA has moved to modernize the systems that support distribution of critical public notices. The first step was an in-depth review of legal notice rules across the U.S.

*Article continues on page 14.*
States deploying best practices had two things in common. State press associations provided a facility for posting notices on a website that made notices accessible and searchable statewide; and the associations made it mandatory to post notices on the statewide site and online at the websites of the publications.

www.CaPublicNotice.com

CNPA launched a website where adjudicated newspapers are posting legal notices that are distributed statewide and are searchable.

In line with the findings, CNPA built a statewide public notice site and changed its bylaws to require member posting at the site. The public can now search for and access public notices distributed by more than half of the state’s adjudicated publications. More than 246,000 notices have been posted since the summer of 2021 when the site became operational.

Along with posting at the online sites of the publications themselves, where daily access and page views far outstrip any government website, Californians can be assured that they are being appropriately informed. CNPA makes the statewide site available to members free of charge.

Journalism Awards

Each year CNPA celebrates professional excellence by giving California Journalism Awards for work that makes a difference and lives up to the highest standards of journalism. More than 3,000 entries were submitted in 2021 to be judged in print, digital and campus categories. A complete list of winners is located at CNPA.com. In addition to the work below, stories highlighted on pages 5 and 9 were also 2020 award winners.

Redding Record Searchlight won first place for coverage of local government.

Diversity and inclusion

CNPA and its members are conscientious about matters of diversity and equity in hiring and professional advancement. In the association’s fiscal year 2021, more than 14 ethnic and minority publications have become members. In addition, CNPA has working relationships with California Black Media, Ethnic Media Services and several Hispanic media groups. An initiative to grow freelance membership is also underway.
2021 Financial Highlights

The CNPA entities maintain positive net equity and remain in a strong financial position. The association maintains cash and accounts receivable reserves for ongoing operations.

CNPA net revenue is generated by a diverse set of business units that support government advocacy and public affairs. Member dues and Ad Services are the biggest contributors.

Staff compensation and professional service fees are allocated to government advocacy and public affairs programs and to CNPA business units that generate revenues to support CNPA’s portfolio of member services and programs.

On average, for the last 12 months, members participating in CNPA Advertising Services programs have received rebates equivalent to five times their annual membership dues.
CNPA Leadership

Charles F. Champion II
President
Chief Executive Officer

Brittney Barsotti
General Counsel

Cecelia Drake
Chief Revenue Officer

Joe Wirt
Director
Affiliate Relations

Ashley Bryant
Director
Finance

CNPA Board of Directors

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Grunion Gazette, Beach Reporter in Hermosa Beach, Palos Verdes Peninsula News

Chairperson-Elect Emily Charrier, Publisher
Petaluma Argus-Courier, Sonoma Index-Tribune

Paulette Brown-Hinds, Publisher
Black Voice News, Riverside

Martha Diaz Aszkenazy, Publisher
San Fernando Sun, El Sol

Arturo Carmona, Senior Advisor
La Opinión, Los Angeles

Eric Cushman, Publisher
Monterey County Weekly

Richard Esposito, Publisher,
The Mountain Democrat, Placerville

Steve Falk, CEO
Sonoma Media Investments, Santa Rosa

Will Fleet, Publisher
Tracy Press

Norb Garrett, Publisher
San Clemente Times, Dana Point Times,
The Capistrano Dispatch

Jeff Glasser, VP Senior Counsel
Los Angeles Times

Craig Harrington, Publisher
The Intermountain News, Burney

Ron Hasse, President
Southern California News Group

Bill Johnson, Publisher
Palo Alto Weekly

Terri Leifeste, Group Publisher
Santa Maria News Media

Julie Makinen, Executive Editor
The Desert Sun, Palm Springs

Silas Lyons, Executive Editor
Record Searchlight, Redding

Bill Nagel, Publisher
San Francisco Chronicle

Colleen Nelson, Executive Editor
Sacramento Bee

Hank Vander Veen, Publisher
Manteca Bulletin

Michael Yamashita, Publisher
Bay Area Reporter
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