

More NewsU Webinars to be offered

In November 2009, NINA members received a special discounted rate for the NewsU Webinar, "Facebook for Journalists."

Response from our members was enthusiastic -- so much so that, in the coming months, NINA plans to partner with NewsU to offer more discounted online training. Watch our Web site and Digital Ink blog for details.

NewsU is the Poynter Institute's online series of journalism training programs. It includes self-directed courses, group seminars and Webinars.

Visit NewsU's newly relaunched Web site at www.newsu.org.



**Follow NINA
on Twitter:
@NINAnewspapers**

Dispatches from behind the lines

By Jim Killam

Over the past year, several of our new NIU graduates have found reporting jobs at small-town daily newspapers across the country.

Based on what they'd heard and read, I think they half-expected to find these places in ruins: dark, empty newsrooms ... tumbleweeds blowing through the pressroom ... the assorted journalism refugee hiding behind a stack of yellowed newspapers, swilling whiskey, snarling into a disconnected, rotary-dial phone, "Get me Rewrite!"

They've encountered something very different: vibrant newsrooms that still produce a printed product their communities can't imagine living without. To be sure, there's an empty desk here or there. The economy and the newspaper decline have taken a toll. But you hear a lot less talk in a small town about newspapers going away. You hear a whole lot more talk sparked by what's in the paper.

Newspapers remain the lifeblood of these communities whose entire populations would fit comfortably inside Wrigley Field, or even snugly into Huskie Stadium. A few months into their jobs, I offered my former students the chance to reflect on their career decisions and life far away from a big-city metro.

"Working for a small-town newspaper has really shown me what it means to be a community journalist," said 2008 grad John Puterbaugh, a reporter and copy editor for the Daily Chronicle in DeKalb. "I also live in the community in which I work, and it's not difficult to find that my own world is not too far detached from anyone else's."

He especially likes the fact that sources, readers and journalists are all neighbors -- much more so than in a large city or suburbia.

"I get the feeling that connections made and relationships formed in small communities are the kinds of connections you can count on for the long run," he said. "I guess, with a less fluid populace, it's just easy to grow comfortable working and living in smaller communities."

2009 grad Caitlin Mullen got a reporting job at the Sanford Herald in Sanford, N.C., a city of 29,000. Staff there has shrunk; one of the paper's three reporting positions isn't being refilled for now. So no one's exactly holding pep rallies in the newsroom.

"But, I do love my job," she said. "I enjoy talking to new people every day and building

relationships in a new place. Everyone has a story. And I like small towns. Most people here are very friendly.

"I love interacting with people, and getting to tell their stories is a privilege. As long as I can do that, I'm happy."

Giles Bruce ('09) works at the Charles City Press in the northern Iowa town of 8,000.

"My paper doesn't have another newspaper in town to compete with, nor are their bloggers aiming for our scraps," he said. "There's a radio station in town, and other papers and TV stations nearby, but a lot of their Charles City news comes from us.

People here actually get their news ... from the newspaper. Not the online version or a blog or a TV station, but the actual print, hold-in-your-hands paper. That's something I -- who still read print editions -- can appreciate.

"I also never thought a town of 8,000 people could support a five-day-a-week daily. I've lived in towns with six times the population that only had a weekly. And the folks here don't think anything of it -- a paper arriving at their house every weekday morning is just how it's always been."

John Ranallo ('09) works for the Beloit Daily News in the Wisconsin town of 35,000. This after spending last summer interning at a weekly newspaper in Wolf Point, Mont., where the pronghorn population may outnumber the people.

"I really think small town journalism is where it's at," he said. "It is great to live in a town where you see the effects of your work rather than have it get buried in a larger mass of news. It is humbling to receive calls and letters from real people who care about the area they live in. I have learned that being a reporter is a very noble job -- one that requires me to become actively engaged in everything I am doing, and I love it.

"I use to think I wanted to be a big metro reporter, and while I haven't ruled it out someday, it is great to make a difference. Sometimes I think reporters don't understand how much of a difference they can make. I never envisioned myself here, but I am glad I made it."



Jim Killam is adviser for the Northern Star, the daily student media at Northern Illinois University. He serves as NINA's communications coordinator. Contact him at jkillam@niu.edu, or 815-753-4239.