

Widener University Delaware Law School

From the Selected Works of Alan E Garfield

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The Future of Local News Reporting

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/alan_garfield/34/

Perspective

CONSTITUTION DAY 2009

The future of local news reporting

For the fourth year in a row, Widener University School of Law and The News Journal have solicited essays on a theme related to the U.S. Constitution. These essays are housed at the Law School's Web site and reproduced in whole or in part in the News Journal around Sept. 17 – Constitution Day, the date in 1787 when the Framers signed the Constitution in Philadelphia.

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The topic for this year's program is the future

of local news reporting. The premise is that our system of self-governance ("We the People") works only if citizens are adequately informed. As James Madison put it, "A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both."

But who will pay for gathering and disseminating the information necessary to keep the public informed? The Constitution does not require the government to subsidize news reporting. (And

could we trust a government-subsidized press if it did?) Instead, news reporting is likely to occur only if businesses can make money doing it.

But can they? Are citizens willing to foot the bill for investigative journalism that can turn a crime story into Watergate? Or does quality journalism depend upon advertising to fund it? And if the latter is true, what happens if the business model of using advertising to subsidize news starts to collapse?

These and other issues discussed in our essay

collection are highly relevant as newspapers across the country struggle to survive, public broadcasters cut back on services and commercial radio and television transfer resources from news to entertainment.

We hope you enjoy the essays. And we hope they make this year's Constitution Day just a little more meaningful.

Alan E. Garfield is a professor at Widener University School of Law and is the founder and coordinator of the Constitution Day essay project. For all of the essays, go to <http://law.widener.edu/constitution/2009>.