



# The Courier — 1981 to 2010



## Meet the Daily Courier's publisher, owner and editor

### Dennis Mack: 'There was no shortage of challenges'

By Patricia Snyder  
of the Daily Courier

Much has changed since the Daily Courier's first non-family-member publisher became involved in the newspaper industry.

Dennis Mack took over as Daily Courier publisher on Oct.



MACK

10, 1991, running the newspaper for third-generation owner John Voorhies. "My dad had said to always try to hire managers that are smarter than yourself," Voorhies said. "With Dennis, we sure got one. He was doing his boss' job for him before long and then sure improved things in the publisher's office."

Voorhies promoted Mack from business manager to publisher after deciding to ease off after a lifetime at the Courier, Mack explained.

"I imagine it to be rare that a non-family-member in a management position of a third-generation family business could have the trust and support that I have enjoyed over the years," Mack said.

In 1968, after being discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps, Mack took a job as a dispatcher for the advertising department at the Santa Cruz Sentinel in California, where he worked for 13 years. He moved up through the Sentinel ranks, then he accepted an advertising manager position at the Daily Courier.

"Coming to Grants Pass in 1981, there was no shortage of challenges for any business," he recalled.

The real estate industry had collapsed in the early 1980s, and the timber industry, a mainstay of income for the community, was embroiled in an environmental battle, especially over the spotted owl.

"It seemed as though half the storefronts downtown were empty and the timber industry employment just dried up," Mack said. "As Grants Pass reinvented itself and recovered, so did the Courier."

The Courier continues to navigate shifting waters. When Mack first got into the newspaper business, changes came slowly, every 10 to 15 years, he said.

"Now, you go about 10 or 15 minutes and something has changed," he said.

The Courier has the advantage of being a small, family-owned independent that is not saddled with debt, unlike some corporate newspapers whose problems have been publicized, Mack said.

"Somebody once said that the health of a newspaper was dependent on the health of the community it serves," he said. "Fortunately, we both seem to be doing OK."

### Owner John Voorhies started selling papers in street in 1937

By Patricia Snyder  
of the Daily Courier

Third-generation Daily Courier owner John Voorhies worked his way up through the newspaper from his childhood.

He got his first job at the Daily Courier in 1937, at age 11, selling papers on the street downtown.

He became co-publisher after grandfather Amos Voorhies died in 1960 and publisher after father Amos Earle Voorhies died in 1971.

"Having been 'in-house trained,' so to speak, and my grandfather having picked the best place in the world to live, it's been good," he said.

Amos Voorhies was, to young John, "Dado." He grew up living next door to Amos, seeing him nearly daily until he went into the military service in the 1940s, due to World War II.

"The first job I had for him was age about 5," Voorhies recalled of his grandfather. "He hired me to find a diamond lost out of a ring, probably somewhere in his living room. I found it down in the rug under his desk. He paid me 50 cents. Nine years later, he was paying me 20 cents an hour to sweep the office."

His earliest memory of the Courier was when the office was still located on Sixth Street, at the present location of the Music Shop. He went to a storage room at night to watch his father build a speedboat that Earle would later race on the Rogue River.

John did some boat building himself, in his grandfather's basement. However, the raft of scrap material was too big to get out, he said.

"I disassembled it and straightened out all nails, returning them to the proper cigar boxes and Mason jars," he said. "Lumber was returned to the racks and signs of activity removed."

He noted that he learned a bit about thinking ahead and tidying up from his grandfather.

When he started working at the Courier,



FILE/Daily Courier

John Voorhies follows his grandfather and his father as owner of the Daily Courier.

"Dado" became "Boss," which is what employees called Amos Voorhies.

After some time as a newspaper route substitute, Voorhies got his own bicycle delivery route at age 12. His 130-paper route was bounded by Evelyn Avenue on the south, Conklin Avenue to the east, Hawthorne Avenue to the west and the airport to the north. In those days, the airport was located not far from the present-day Beacon restaurant.

By 14, he was working in the mail room.

As World War II called away adult men, John's duties expanded. From making rubber stamps, pouring lead chunks used for type, running the mailer and stuffing newspapers, he went to working afternoons and evenings making photo engravings. He got out of

school early, on work release.

"No one else knew anything about engraving and all you had to do was meet deadlines," he recalled. "Of course, you had to get done in time to meet your girlfriend after her night shift at the Rivoli Theater."

After his time in the Army Air Corps, he pursued a degree in journalism at the University of Oregon, where he didn't always agree with the dean on how a daily newspaper should run. During the summers, Voorhies worked in the circulation and advertising departments at the Daily Courier.

He returned to the paper full-time in 1950, at its new and present location, to manage the business side.

In addition to the Courier, Voorhies has been involved in a variety of community institutions, including most prominently Evergreen Federal Bank, Rogue Community College and Grants Pass Golf Club. Other involvements have included the Chamber of Commerce, United Way, the city water board, the Boy Scouts, the Active Club and Rotary.

In 1991, Voorhies named Dennis Mack as publisher, although he still maintains an office at the Courier.

### Tussing Park bears name of ex-Courier news editor

By Patricia Snyder  
of the Daily Courier

The Daily Courier's news editor from 1933 through 1942 remains a part of the Josephine County landscape.

Rex Tussing (pronounced Too-sing) fought for preservation of public land and also served as the first chairman of the Josephine County Parks Commission.

On Sept. 22, 2001, local dignitaries gathered to dedicate Tussing Park in his honor. The five acres located along the Rogue River are owned by the city of Grants Pass and connect to Reinhardt Volunteer Park via a pedestrian bridge over the river.

An avid trout fisherman, he was especially concerned about river access.

Writing in 1941, he said, "Twenty years ago holdings



TUSSING

along the Rogue River were extensive, and no man begrudged passage to the people who wanted to reach the stream ... The river has always been public — but in the future as well as now, there will be miles of river which John Public will never see because there is a sign, No Trespassing, which says he can't get to his own property."

That same year, the county designated its first park land, near Greens Creek, which meets the Rogue River in the area of modern-day Chinook Park.

In 1942, Tussing left the Courier to serve in World War II. After the war, he went on to work at newspapers in Hayward, Castro Valley and San Leandro, Calif., before becoming administrative assistant to a California congressman.

He died in 1958.

### Dennis Roler: Democracy depends on newspapers

By Patricia Snyder  
of the Daily Courier

Newspapers serve a vital role in society and need to be supported, the Daily Courier's editor believes.

From a high school honor roll to a story that explains why police were in one's neighborhood, local newspapers provide information that isn't available with equal depth from other sources, Dennis Roler said. People would have to settle for sound bites or slanted versions from Web sites if newspapers went away, he added.

"People who have axes to grind with papers for one reason or another — they don't tell their version of the truth or whatever — may dance in the streets over this," he said. "But Americans' sense of community and democracy would suffer greatly."

Only Harry Elliott, who served for 23 years until his death in 1986, ran the newsroom longer than Roler.

Born in Albany, Roler earned a bachelor's degree in liberal studies and journalism from Oregon State University and a master's degree in communications and newspapers from Syracuse University.

He began as a reporter in Pottsville, Pa., then worked in Lake Tahoe, Roseburg and the San Francisco area before moving to Grants Pass 23 years ago. He served as city editor, in charge of news reporters, for three years before taking over as editor in 1990.

He's seen technological and cultural changes since he started in journalism.

"At the time I started, newspapers were still floundering about, looking for the next system to replace hot type," he said. "On my first job out of college, we used a tortuous system that employed at various stages typewriters, floppy discs, punched paper and negatives."



ROLER

Thank goodness computers eventually ruled the day and swept away this jury-rigged system."

Technology now allows the Courier to get later-breaking news into the print edition and information onto the Web site 24-hours a day, as fast as 15 minutes after it

happens.

At the same time, technology has brought a number of competitors to newspapers in the past 36 years.

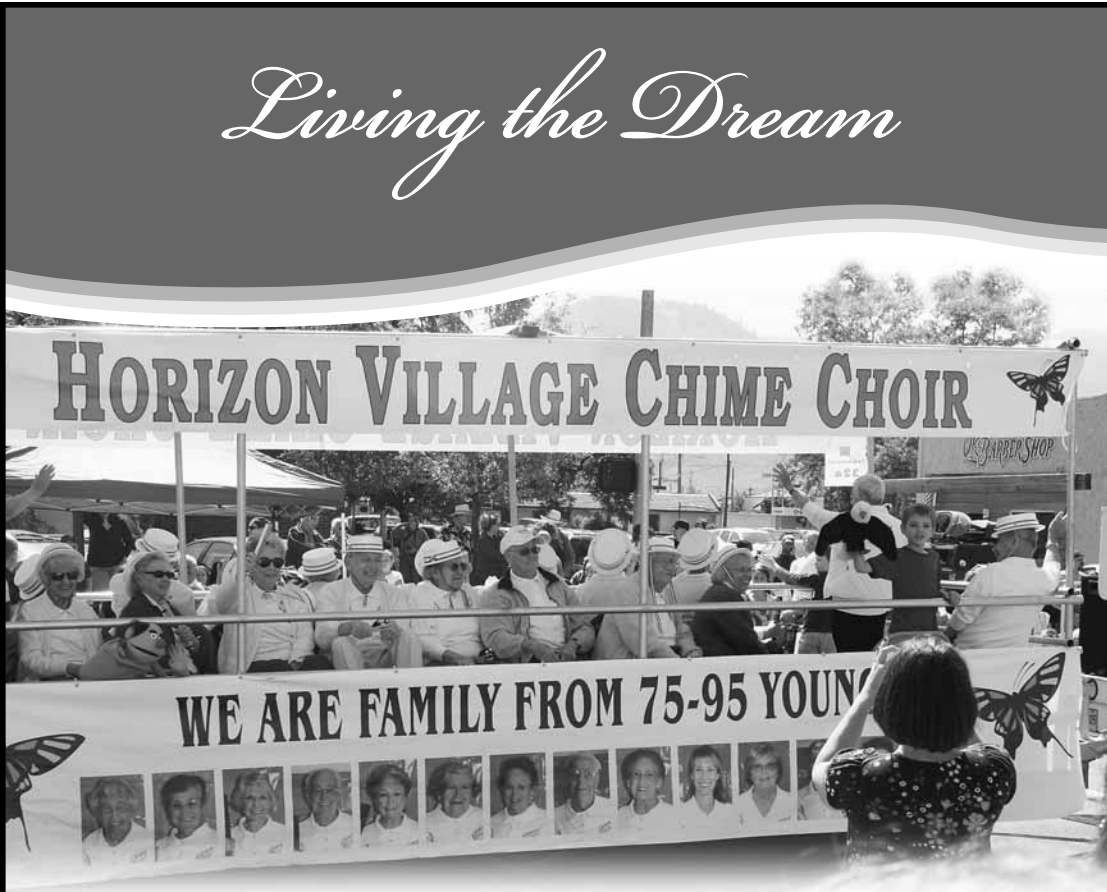
"The Internet is everywhere," he said. "There are hundreds, maybe thousands of TV channels, whereas the 'Big Three' used to have a near monopoly. People are pelted with many forms of communications daily. These other media not only compete for the news but for the advertising dollar. And this is why newspapers are suffering today."

Smaller newspapers, such as the Courier, have an advantage over larger papers that try to cover everything from local crime to international events, which people now find on the Internet for free. Local newspapers are still the best at covering local news, he said.

"People who really want to know what is happening in their community still turn to newspapers, in one form or another," he said, "and smart advertisers know that and advertise with them."

As newspapers search for their niche in a rapidly changing media landscape, they have had to start Web sites to compete with other sources using them.

"It also means some media that once saw themselves as competitors might have to be partners to survive," Roler said. "For example, the bigger staff of a newspaper could cover local news, but put it out through another medium, such as a TV station. It's important for those in the news business to keep their minds open and not be boxed in by old boundaries."



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