

The Twin-City News

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Twin-City News marks 100th year

FROM STAFF REPORTS

This month, The Twin-City News commemorates its 100th year serving the Batesburg-Leesville community and its neighbors.

The newspaper was purchased in 1925 by William W. Bruner, whose family was looking to escape the economic devastation the boll weevil was causing in Wilkes County, Ga.

A newspaperman who held one-half interest in The New Reporter in Washington, Ga., Bruner and his oldest son, Wilburn, took to the road in search of newspapers for sale and stopped in Batesburg. They encountered Mark Hazel, who owned the Summerland Creamery and sang the praises of the community.

When they learned The Summerland Headlight could be purchased, they made arrangements with Farmers Merchants Bank in Leesville. The pair commuted from Georgia — staying at the Commercial Hotel in Batesburg — to publish the newspaper until the family moved here in 1925.

After changing hands, the newspaper was published under its original name for two weeks, then was changed to The Twin-City News. Credit for the new name went to the late Bruner's wife, Esther, who suggested it after learning Batesburg and Leesville were only two miles apart. Located in "no man's land," the owners thought the newspaper could create a closer relationship between the towns. This was one of the first times the term "Twin-City" was used, but in later years it was often included in business names.

Over the years, several newspapers have served the area — The Batesburg Herald, The Leesville News and The Summerland Headlight — but few survived longer than two years.

A story about the 81st anniversary from 2006 shares that shortly after the newspaper opened its doors, a farmer came in to buy a six-month subscription. He pulled 75 cents out of his pocket and said "Well, maybe this paper will last six months and I won't lose any money."

Records gleaned from The Twin-City News archives show that the Bruners rented the building at 114 E. Columbia Ave. in 1928 from

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Editions of The Twin-City News published Aug. 26, 1960 (top), April 13, 1945 (center), and May 24, 1973, capture local and national news.

LEXINGTON COUNTY

No county tax hike means no extra road fixes

BY TIM FLACH

A push to increase repaving of roads in Lexington County has fallen by the wayside after a tax hike to pay for it was shelved.

County Council members ditched a proposal to allocate an extra \$6 million that would have tripled the annual repair of older roads — some marked by potholes — to 18 miles.

The idea would have laid the groundwork for a property tax increase of \$1.60 on a home valued at \$100,000, officials estimated.

But it was rejected after council chairman Todd Cullum of Cayce said there is no interest in even a "nominal" tax hike for anything in the \$325 million spending plan taking shape.

The decision last week came despite a complaint from Councilman Larry Brigham of Batesburg-Leesville that long-needed road upgrades are being put off repeatedly.

"We just keep knocking it back," he said.

But Brigham joined in approval of the spending package that features no county tax hike for the year starting July 1.

The outcome means the county again will be able to repave about four of the 700 miles of paved roads it maintains, projects all paid for by its share of state fuel taxes.

Without extra money, "our limited resources are really not preserving anything," county public works director Brent Hyatt told council.

Some of the nine council members agree road repairs

are vital but said it's not the right time to raise property taxes or impose new fees for that.

Resentment is strong over tax hikes stemming from the recent reassessment of homes and businesses, they said.

"People are mad," Councilwoman Beth Carrigg of Lexington said.

County leaders have no say over tax increases that may be coming from schools and communities.

Assessor Richard Dolan has not replied to two requests for a breakdown of changes brought by reassessment in residential, commercial and industrial categories countywide.

In a report to council members on March 25, he said rising values are widespread for the 163,000 tracts across the 758-square-mile county.

Rejection of the extra road aid signals that county leaders again are banking on winning voter approval of a penny sales tax increase for a lengthy list of road improvements.

A referendum on that proposal — rejected at the polls in 2014 and 2022 — could occur as soon as the November 2026 election.

Meanwhile, the cost of going to the altar will rise to add extra staff at probate court.

Council members agreed to raise the fee for a marriage license from \$10 to \$40 for county residents and from \$10 to \$75 for nonresidents. That is on top of a \$20 state-imposed fee for domestic violence prevention and treatment.



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ANNIVERSARY

W.K. Shealy, then purchased it a few years later. That same location is undergoing renovations expected to be completed within this year.

During the Depression, The Twin-City News became a family-operated business where “subscriptions were swapped for sweet potatoes, a chicken to go into the pot, a head of cabbage, or a slab of bacon. It fed the family, kept the newspaper alive, and its doors open as it struggled along with the rest of the nation to survive,” reads a story from Nov. 28, 1996.

Douglas N. Bruner Sr. took over as editor and publisher in 1940 after the death of his father. Bruner Sr. had worked part time at the newspaper while he was in high school and college, then joined the business full time in 1932.

The newspaper struggled through World War II when all help went into service and Bruner Sr. and his wife, Sara, were the only employees. After the war, and as the community grew, so did the newspaper. They added special columns, a photographer, linotype operators, pressmen, a society editor and correspondents. The printing process also was upgraded over the years from a flatbed press to a rotary press and then offset press.

Under Bruner Sr.'s leadership, the newspaper grew in size and page count, averaging 26 pages weekly.

In 1940, Sara became advertising manager and, in 1951, “Douglas N. Bruner and Sara F. Bruner, editors and publishers” were listed as in charge.

Bruner Sr. retired in March 1973, at which time Sara Bruner took over as publisher and became its driving force. She was at the helm in 1992 when the towns of Batesburg and Leesville consolidated.

“The newspaper was very important for people forming their decision and to learn what would happen with consolidation,” said Jay Hendrix, who covered Batesburg-Leesville sports for the newspaper for 26 years until stepping down last summer to become town manager.

A story from November 1996 announcing The Bruners as grand marshals of the Christmas parade noted “It is because of their dedication

THE TWIN-CITY NEWS CELEBRATES 100 YEARS

Coming May 30: To celebrate the 100th anniversary of The Twin-City News, watch this space weekly beginning May 30th for a look at some headlines from Batesburg-Leesville's past.

to the community and their willingness to report the news that The Twin-City News has continued to survive in an age when small, ‘hometown’ newspapers are being bought by ‘big business’ newspapers.”

During her more than seven decades with The Twin-City News, Sara was recognized as Outstanding Woman of the Year in 1953 by the S.C. Press Association and received the Order of the Palmetto in 1990 from Gov. Carroll Campbell, among many accolades from her service to the town.

“Sara was a familiar sight on the streets of this area, selling advertisements and gathering information for her weekly column, ‘About the Twins,’ which began in 1949,” according to her obituary from August 2013

Sara Bruner kept her finger on the pulse of both towns with the help of inquisitive writers.

Retired reporter Anna Long has many stories to tell.

“Over 30 years of writing for the paper, yes, I’ve got memories,” Long said.

She recalled that Sara mentioned she needed someone to write social news to replace Jo Rawl, who also was Long’s next-door neighbor.

“Sara Bruner hired me and pulled out a phone book and circled all these people I should call – about 50 people – every week to get the social news. I’d call them on a Monday to find out what happened over the weekend, who’d had a party, who got married, what they served – the whole shebang,” Long said.

Long would transition from writing social news to also covering crime, school news and many poultry festivals – “Every one of them, I would go to all three farms to interview the growers,” Long said.

She recalled fondly the Election Night when Batesburg-Leesville elected its first woman as mayor, Rita Crapps.

“I was at Town Hall when they were counting the votes. I got the results. They were all down at Jim Wizowaty’s waiting. I went up to Rita and said, ‘Madame Mayor,’ and ev-

eryone was screaming,” Long said.

Long was among the many newspaper staffers and contributors whom Sara Bruner considered family.

Teresa Shealy was part of The Twin-City News family for five decades, serving as office manager.

“Working at The Twin-City News and getting to know about the print world was a very interesting job, one I enjoyed for over 50 years,” said Teresa Shealy, who retired in December 2023.

“Mrs. Bruner was a loving and caring, special lady who felt like a second mother to me, often saying to me, ‘You’re No. 1.’ She was by my side for the happy times and sad times of my life.”

Bruner wasn’t just a newspaperwoman, she also was the mother of four children and a foster son as well as a grandmother of nine. She died at age 93 on Aug. 27, 2013.

In September 2014, her grandson Douglas Nease Bruner III, known as “Trey,” became publisher, with his wife, Leah Bruner, serving as editor for a number of years.

“I was so glad when the paper was continued by Trey and stayed within the Bruner family,” Shealy said. “Having a young man that I knew from

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his childhood years become my boss was amazing. Who would have ever thought that would happen?”

In his first year as publisher, the newspaper was converted to full color and traditional newsprint was swapped for higher quality paper. The improvements contributed to its being named 2014 Small Business of the Year by the Batesburg-Leesville Chamber of Commerce.

Bruner considers his role at The Twin-City News as a service to his family and the town.

“I wanted to keep the newspaper going as a community service for as long as the community wants it,” he said, noting that he also had a desire to get it to the century mark.

“There is no other family-owned business in this area that’s been in business for 100 years consecutively,” Bruner said.

His decade of ownership has had its own challenges.

“COVID almost broke us,” he said of the coronavirus pandemic that began in 2019. “We embraced our digital platform for several months and the people supported that to keep us going and then we went back to print.”

He’s also appreciative of the local businesses whose advertising has helped support the newspaper, some advertising for many decades.

In January 2024, The Twin-City News expanded its reach by acquiring The Standard-Sentinel of Saluda County

when Ralph Shealy retired as editor and publisher. Shealy continues to write about Saluda news weekly.

Subscribers now have access to the weekly print edition via mail or the emailed e-edition. Readers can buy single copies at area locations and find daily posts on Facebook.

Bruner’s next goal is to circle back to digital publishing.

“One thing that’s very im-

portant to me is our desire to digitize the entire history of The Twin-City News for preservation of the family business and for preserving the town’s history,” said Bruner, who is actively working with the local library and other entities to fulfill that goal. “This is a major goal because it’s too easy to lose it. I want the history of our town to be preserved in perpetuity and searchable.”



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