



The Research Bureau

Bureau Brief—The Role of the Media in Civic Life

“When men are no longer united among themselves by firm and lasting ties, it is impossible to obtain the co-operation of any great number of them unless you can persuade every man whose help you require that his private interest obliges him voluntarily to unite his exertions to the exertions of all the others. This can be habitually and conveniently effected only by means of a newspaper; nothing but a newspaper can drop the same thought into a thousand minds at the same moment.”

- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*

“Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. Ethical journalism strives to ensure the free exchange of information that is accurate, fair and thorough.”

- Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics

Since the arrival of Isaiah Thomas' *Massachusetts Spy* in 1775, Worcester has been a center for media. Worcester's American Antiquarian Society, founded in 1812, houses the largest collection of pre-1876 printed materials in the country. The *Telegram & Gazette* – originally two newspapers called the *Worcester Telegram* and *Evening Gazette* – traces its history back 149 years. Worcester Polytechnic Institute alumnus Henry P. Davis, Class of 1880, founded KDKA of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in November 1920, arguably the world's first commercial radio station, which preceded the establishment of WDBH (the original call letters of WTAG) in Worcester in 1924. The advent of the internet provided digital opportunities for traditional newspapers and news magazines as well as new online media such as news sites, blogs, and streaming video/radio.

The media plays a critical role in society, recording history, delivering information, analyzing issues, and highlighting the use and abuse of power. It is a vehicle for sharing and debating public opinions.

Yet newspapers, and many forms of media, are also a business. The growth of the internet and the proliferation of personal news and opinion sites, with little financial overhead, create significant competition for the public's attention. The traditional business model struggles as advertisers move dollars to popular, not necessarily professional or accurate, media sites. The loss of advertising has resulted in the closing of established news sources and the sale of local outfits to national conglomerates. Tom Fiedler, Dean of the Boston University College of Communication, offered one view of the impact with his virtual eulogy for the loss of the *Holyoke Transcript-Telegram*:

Nearly two decades have passed since that day. In Holyoke babies have been born, raised and sent off to college or war or other adult responsibilities without ever seeing their names in a T-T article taped to a refrigerator. Thousands of local deaths weren't recorded in obituary pages. Congressmen, mayors, and city councilors have been elected, served, and retired without knowing a hometown daily's beat reporter. In short, all the fundamentals of civic life have continued as before, but, like ghosts, they've left no trace of their passage.*

Over the years, the media has played an important role in the civic life of American cities and towns. In today's changing landscape, how does—and how should—Worcester's professional media balance the business of journalism and the ongoing need for public enlightenment?

*Tom Fiedler, “What Happens When a Community Loses Its Newspaper?”, *Commonwealth Magazine*, November 3, 2011.

SELECT WORCESTER MEDIA WITH NEWS/TALK COVERING LOCAL GOVERNMENT		
PRINT/ONLINE	OWNER	OWNER'S LOCATION
InCity Times	Rosalie Tirella	Worcester
Vocero Hispano	Vocero Hispano Newspaper Inc.	Worcester
Worcester Magazine	Holden Landmark Corporation	Holden
Worcester Telegram & Gazette	Halifax Media Group	Daytona, FL
Worcester Business Journal	New England Business Media	Worcester
RADIO	OWNER	OWNER'S LOCATION
WTAG 580/94.6	Clear Channel/IHeartMedia	San Antonio, TX
WCRN 830	Carter Broadcasting Corporation	Boston
WCUW 91.3 Public Radio	WCUW, Inc.	Worcester
TELEVISION	OWNER	OWNER'S LOCATION
CBS Affiliate	CBS Boston	Boston
Charter TV3	Charter Communications	Stamford, CT
Education Channel	Worcester Public Schools	Worcester
Government Channel	City of Worcester	Worcester
WCCA-TV 13/Public Access	Worcester Community Cable Access	Worcester
ON-LINE PRESS	OWNER	OWNER'S LOCATION
GoLocal Worcester	GoLocal24	Providence, RI, and Portland, OR
Inside Worcester	Rod Lee	Worcester
MassLive.com	Advance Local	New York, NY
OTHER LOCAL COMMENTARY	WEBSITE	LOCATION
Worcester Blogspot (Weblogs)	worcester-massachusetts.blogspot.com	Central Massachusetts

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