

Independence is a free speech requisite

by Josh O'Kane and
Brendan Doyle

Wouldn't it be a little annoying to be forced to see the world through blurry glasses?

Not all the details are there, and something is holding you back from getting the full picture. Sometimes, not seeing the full picture can be a minor problem; other times, it takes away from any value the picture had in the first place.

When it comes to news, there's little value to be found if you can't get the whole picture. It's for this reason that independent media sources are often praised as the best "alternative" news source - in other words, a source that you're not force-fed. Just as youth often pick Jon Stewart's Daily Show as opposed to CNN, alternative weekly magazines have come into their own as legitimate news sources.

Student newspapers often cover the news and current events that the mainstream media overlooks. The Brunswickan itself is distributed across Fredericton as an alternative to local or provincial papers such as *The Daily Gleaner* or *Telegraph Journal*.

Some student-run papers, however, lack one thing that others do not: true independence.

Though not a major publishing corporation, student unions can still have negative effects on the content and the writers of a student-run publication.

Though not always a problem, certain degrees of censorship can occur with that degree of association with the Union itself. Writers could be fired or their articles reconfigured if the Union was discussed in an unpleasant way, or if any touchy issues were handled in a manner the Union didn't approve of.

David Shipley was the Editor-in-Chief of UNB Saint John's *The Baron* from 2003-2005, rebuilding it from the ground up and establishing autonomy for the paper along the way.

"Autonomy is another word for credibility, in my books," Shipley explains. "No newspaper, campus or otherwise is truly autonomous or independent when you think about it."

"They depend on advertising revenues, and on the universities to collect and disburse fees. They all depend on their staff to be honest and to have the public's interest at heart."

Student media outlets, be they paper, radio, television, are dependent on these as well.

"Good student media outlets put content ahead of advertising. They also have a staff that puts the organizations' reputation ahead of their own biases or interests... They respect the institutions that they are a part of but don't kowtow to them," said Shipley. "They know how to find the right balance between all of the influences upon them."

Shipley's attitudes helped him fight for his paper's own right to independence. It took him more than two years to complete the process.

"It involved negotiations with the [Students' Representative Council] and the university that became complicated when the issue of how much money we needed became contentious. Eventually the university took a leadership role and concluded negotiations between the SRC."

His belief is that this move was

only beneficial for *The Baron*; it now has a Board of Directors to choose the Editor-in-Chief, and to keep tabs on any staff who may wield their power unjustly - all without external influence.

"The pros of autonomy or independence are increased credibility with readers and safety from student unions. Administrations, for the most part, take a mature approach to campus media," explains Shipley.

The cons? Cutting the ties to the head organization also cuts the ties to their funding. "As someone once told me, you don't have access to Daddy's wallet anymore."

Approximately half of the papers attached to the Canadian University Press, a national organization representing student publications, are autonomous. Recent converts include the University of Ottawa's *The Fulcrum*, and St. Thomas' own *Aquinian*. *The Brunswickan* has been independent since 1999.

Shipley himself has gripes with how things are exercised in other potential areas with regards to being autonomous. "Just because a student newspaper is independent doesn't mean it's always acting in the best manner."

He points out the recent controversy over the delay in reporting the current problems with the UNB Student Union's deficit. Though admitting a lack of full knowledge of details, he detailed that "with a former SU president now a senior editor at the paper, [the delay in reporting was] pretty bad optics."

"It's a significant credibility hit and one that autonomy can't help with."

The dice has more than once side, though: throughout his reign as editor-in-chief, students often complained of his single-handed control of the paper, often referring to it as "The Shipley," given his command of the content.

Second year UNBSJ Health Sciences student Lydia Morin, who now works for *The Baron*, had this to say: "[Under Shipley, the paper] was very controlled... he had ideal things in his head and basically he made the paper the way he wanted to, and not necessarily what the others might have wanted."

"The thing I liked about Dave being there, though, is that it felt like a professional paper."

Regardless, Shipley himself did provide a meaningful metaphor to go along with his attitude on the overall subject: "Autonomy for a student newspaper is a lot like Peter Parker's abilities as Spider-Man. Like Spider-Man, the student newspaper can grasp that with great power comes great responsibility, or it can be selfish and look after its own interests."

So what about those alternative papers we keep hearing so much about?

Alternative papers are catchalls that cover the press big media misses. Independence is important not only because of the additional viewpoints, but also because of



Brendan Doyle/The Brunswickan

These are some of the independent student newspapers and alternative papers we have in the Brunswickan offices. Readers are sure to recognize the *Aquinian* and *The Brunswickan*, but may not be familiar with the *Martell*, the UVic student paper, *The Baron*, from UNB SJ, or *Fred*. [here] was purchased last year by Brunswick News.

the variety of interests alternative papers can present. Like the best relationships, independent newspapers and news magazines are built on a foundation of trust.

Speaking about the level of trust and cooperation at [here], New Brunswick's formerly independent alternative weekly, former Editor Mark Leger said that, "in a lot of ways, it was trust. I quit a \$45,000 job based on that faith."

In the spring of April 2000, the first issue of [here] hit stands and coffee shops throughout Saint John. Mark Leger, Janet Scott, and Judith Mackin came together eight months before by chance and began to formulate a plan. Leger was working at the *Telegraph Journal* as a writer and editor. Scott was working at *Enterprise Saint John*, an economic development organization. Mackin was heavily involved in Saint John's artistic community, running a non-profit gallery and organizing numerous events.

Leger and Mackin had many conversations about the benefits of having an alternative paper in Saint John. "Independently of this," said Leger, "Enterprise Saint John had asked Janet Scott if she would, coincidentally, see if there was any interest in the community for starting an event paper." It wasn't until Scott bumped into Mackin on the sidewalk one day that they started talking about an alternative paper. Mackin suggested Leger as a possible editor, and the rest is history.

"In our case, there was a lack of a voice for young people, loosely defined as 18-35," said Leger. "We just didn't see our views or interests being reflected in the daily [papers] or the CBC."

A lot of Leger's peers at the Tele-

graph weren't putting out a paper that catered to their interests. Newspapers can tap their young staff, but it's typically not consistent; it's "not enough to build a culture in the newspaper," said Leger of the need to focus on issues young people are concerned about. "There may be things in that daily that would interest them, but they don't feel like that's theirs," said Leger.

"We felt an opportunity existed to put something out there that wasn't there - to fill a void. And it just seemed like a fun way to run a newspaper, too," said Nathan White, co-founder of FRED, a weekly alternative paper that ran in Fredericton during 2003-2004.

Frustrated by the content and direction of Irving papers and the student press, White and some friends came together in December 2002 to begin planning FRED. The first issue was printed in May of 2003.

White and Co. "had tons of passion and tons of ideas, but it was hard to be perceived as anything more than just a university kid," said White of some of the challenges he faced.

Another challenge was the student press. With both *The Brunswickan* and *The Aquinian* vying for readership in Fredericton, White admits, "you can't really compete with student papers. There's obviously overlap in the interest, but I think the target market [of alternative papers] is in the 30s."

Student papers typically have significantly reduced advertising prices, making it difficult for alternative papers to compete. One way to offset this is to appeal to a broader market, allowing alt papers to approach a broader range of advertisers.

start his own independent paper, vision is difficult to share.

When your writer came to form ALT magazine in a small apartment in the fall of 1999, the group of former Brunswickan editors and staff members assembled there surprised him with their dedication and willingness to explore the possibilities that other established papers, including the Brunswickan and the Irving dailies, were not willing or able to examine.

Leger agreed, saying, "I think the mainstream media outlets make half-hearted attempts to do that [serve a younger audience], but it's not even their fault, they're just plain not in touch with the needs of that demographic. So alternative papers spring up because they're rooted in those communities."

ALT didn't even make it to the first issue before internal bickering broke the group apart. Though we went our separate ways, two interested parties found themselves working for *The Brunswickan* - a former Editor-in-Chief, Sean Patrick Sullivan, and your current Editor, Brendan Doyle.

But what brought us back into the independent fold? A love of free speech and the knowledge that the paper was free from external control at any level, of course.

Leger tied this in with why [here] was so successful. "It broadened out quickly," he explained, "it became political as well. It didn't focus just on arts and entertainment. It actually tackled issue of interest to people in the city; political issues; cultural issues."

This broad appeal is part of why independent newspapers exist. Though often placed in a category that would suggest a young readership, alternative papers can cover a wider range of topics than the dailies they supposedly can't compete with.

But daily papers can cover all the angles, right? We don't need an independent press to watch the watchdogs, do we?

We make independent newspapers because the ones available do not appeal to our sensibilities. In New Brunswick, all of our daily newspapers are owned by Brunswick News. Brunswick News is owned by the Irving family. The independent press is vital to New Brunswick because it provides an alternative to the Irving news monopoly.

"It's important to have a diversity of voices," Leger stressed. "I don't think one company or one person can serve the interests or needs of everyone."

Long live the free, independent press.

Dr. Richard E. Lee Optometrist

406A Regent St. 458-1580
(2 buildings past Harvey's Hamburgers)
New Patients Welcome

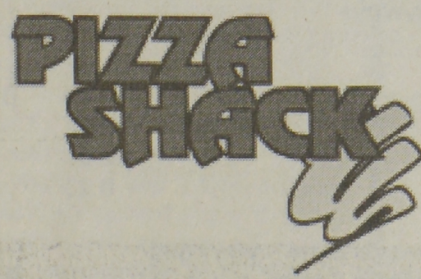
Tired of those Yo-Yo diets? Finally, here is something that ACTUALLY WORKS!

Lose 3-6 lbs a week safely NOW!

AND BOOST YOUR ENERGY LEVEL

Enjoying the foods you love

TO FIND OUT HOW Email: betrlife4u@rogers.com
Call: 471-4917 (Fredericton) Toll Free: 1-877-446-8222

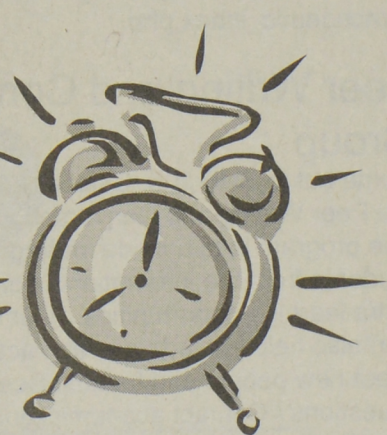
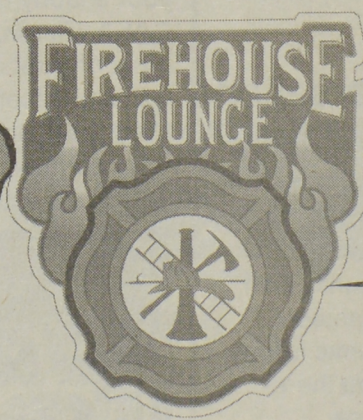
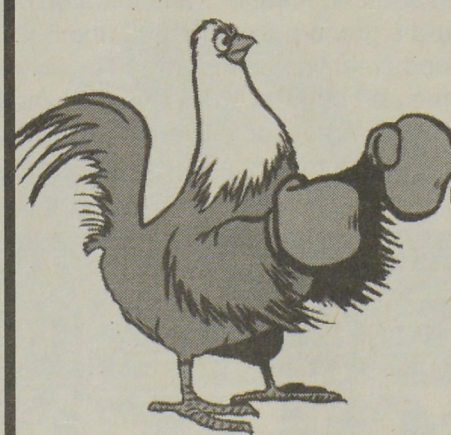


454-4545

Specials

- 1: 16" Round Pizza (3 toppings) \$10.99
- 2: 2 ft x 1 ft Big Deal Pizza (3 toppings) \$16.99
- 3: 12" Works Pizza
9" Garlic Fingers
& donair sauce \$11.99
- 4: 16" Works Pizza
12" Garlic Fingers & Sauce \$16.99

\$1 delivery to most areas



Beat The Chicken
The Clock Is Tickin'

WING Night Mon - Fri

Monday	20¢ each
Tuesday	25¢ each
Wednesday	30¢ each
Thursday	35¢ each
Friday	40¢ each



Happy
Hour
4-5 daily

Dine in only from 5pm - close. With drink purchase

Cheap Appetizers & Smitty's Menu Available Anytime

Regent Mall 454-0030