

# IMPACT REPORT

Stories spurred positive change in 2023



Public officials called for change and at least five bars have been closed after the IndyStar reported on violence and a Wild West atmosphere in downtown Indianapolis. GRACE HOLLARS/INDYSTAR



Marilyn Holley talks about her mother, Kathryn Sales-Darnell, a rubber worker and one of the original litigants in a talc lawsuit, in Akron. MIKE CARDEW/USA TODAY NETWORK



Barbara Esway, a resident of Morse Glen Apartments since 2014, stands in her apartment March 6 in Columbus, Ohio. Esway might have had to move in May because the complex had planned to stop accepting Section 8 vouchers. BROOKE LAVALLEY/THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH



A photograph of Richard Matus Jr., who died in a Riverside County jail, is worn by his 13-year-old daughter, outside the Banning Justice Center in Banning, Calif., on Aug.19, 2022. TAYA GRAY/THE DESERT SUN



Multiple former inmates filed five lawsuits accusing Coffee Creek Correctional Facility, in Salem on Feb. 20, 2019. ANNA REED/STATESMAN JOURNAL

**The right thing happens**

At its very best, local journalism helps make the world a better place. **Page 2**



Ryder Harris plays on his home swing set April 13 in Indiana. Readers responded with donations for a service dog. MICHELLE PEMBERTON/INDYSTAR

**Connecting, inspiring**

Storytelling often leads to community fundraising for most vulnerable. **Page 3**



New Prairie High School educator Tonya Aerts, second from right, helps instruct track team members on CPR. GREG SWIERCZ/EVANSVILLE COURIER AND PRESS

**Catalyst for solutions**

Through hard work and reader support, journalists improved lives. **Page 6**



# At its very best, local journalism helps the right thing to happen

Our core values always include working to improve our world



**Michael A. Anastasi**  
Vice President  
of Local News  
for the  
USA TODAY  
Network

At its very best, journalism helps the world become a better place. At its very best, journalism helps the right thing to happen.

In the pages before you, we highlight a few of our favorite and most significant stories from the past year, stories that impacted the communities we cover in profound, often life-changing and always important ways. They helped the right things to happen.

Take the story of Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Oregon, for instance, the state’s only women’s prison as one. The Statesman Journal in Salem reported extensively on allegations of sexual abuse that were taking place inside prison walls, yet the local district attorney declined to prosecute.

Our reporting continued.

Reporter Whitney Woodworth, who had followed the case from the beginning, continued to invest time in the story. That earned the trust of victims and more came forward. Eventually the U.S. Justice Department launched an investigation and in October a former prison nurse was sentenced to 30 years for sexually assaulting inmates.



**Coffee Creek Correctional Institution in Wilsonville is Oregon’s only women’s prison.** ALLISON FROST/OPB

The right thing happened.

Woodworth is just one of hundreds of local journalists so dedicated who are based in the communities we serve.

We live in an era in which technology is driving change at an often dizzying pace and that includes the world of journalism, which is available on dozens of platforms.

But what is not changing is our dedication to our fundamental mission: finding the stories that help the world — or at least that little part of it in which

we live, this community — become a better place.

This remains the core mission of the USA TODAY Network and the newspaper that you hold in your hands.

Our journalists are your neighbors. They live in this community and believe in the possibility of a better future. They are committed to work that makes an impact.

*Michael A. Anastasi is Vice President of Local News for the USA TODAY Network.*



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Source: Gannett Q2 2023 Earnings Report, Gannett 2022 10-K  
As of 2022 Note: Daily publications produce 5 or more editions a week, including both print and eNewspaper.





Alphonse, a Caring Canines therapy dog, sits next to a Laurel Elementary School student during an occupational therapy session Nov. 28, 2022, in Fort Collins, Colo. When the organization was struggling to find volunteer dog-owner teams, readers responded with more than 100 applications. TANYA B. FABIAN/FOR THE COLORADOAN

# Storytelling connects and inspires fundraising for the most vulnerable

Journalists’ work creates effect in their communities, across the globe

**Bridget Grumet** Austin American-Statesman | USA TODAY

Finding new homes for four dogs in just days is hard enough. • Now multiply that task by 75 cats, 15 birds, a chinchilla and a 250-pound tortoise named Jumanji. • The owners of a pet-friendly assisted living facility in Daytona Beach faced this seemingly impossible mission in July, after the property fell into foreclosure and an eviction deadline loomed (the human residents had long since moved out). Once the readers of the Daytona Beach News-Journal learned of all of these animals in need, however, rescue efforts went into overdrive, and every one of those pets was in a new home within a week.

“We were so inundated with messages that I lost track,” Rebecca Lynch, president of the nonprofit Poodle and Pooch Rescue, told the News-Journal about the public response. “It was overwhelming.”

We all hunger for stories of triumph and redemption, tales that breathe hope into news cycles stacked with disappointment or despair. The best kind of local journalism goes a step further, highlighting a neighbor’s plight and inspiring members of the community to be the heroes.

Maybe we see a shadow of our experience in someone else’s struggles. Or maybe we are humbled by our own good fortune, recognizing it is a gift to be shared.

Either way, readers responded from the heart this past year when powerful storytelling in the local newspapers across the USA Today Network drew attention to neighbors in need.

Just look at the thousands of dollars that readers of the Indianapolis Star donated so that Ryder Harris, a 6-year-old with a debilitating brain disorder, could get the service dog he needs.

Or the bus full of school supplies donated by defense contractor Leonardo DRS after the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that a K-8 school had lost its longtime benefactor when the nearby Master Lock facility closed.

Or consider at the avalanche of support that poured in — more than \$20,000 in donations, a \$25,000 grant from a nonprofit and \$2,500 in Amazon Wish List donations — after the Akron Beacon Journal featured the work of Grace House Akron, an end-of-life comfort care house for people who would otherwise die without caregivers. A dozen readers were so moved they signed up as volunteers.

That is storytelling with impact. It takes journalists who are deeply rooted in their communities to find and tell these stories, even when those being helped are half a world away.

When the Russian invasion of Ukraine halted Dr. David Brown’s annual mission trips to treat severely burned children, the Michigan surgeon shifted his efforts to gathering medical supplies he could send to doctors in a country under siege.

“If we can spread that word a little bit and let people know that something’s being done that they can feel good about, maybe they’d be willing to pitch in and help out,” Brown told the Detroit Free Press.

He was right: Readers responded with \$12,000 in donations.

Elsewhere, readers offered the gift of their

**“If we can ... let people know that something’s being done that they can feel good about, maybe they’d be willing to pitch in and help out.”**

**Dr. David Brown**  
In a Detroit Free Press story

time. After the Coloradoan in Fort Collins profiled Caring Canines, a nonprofit therapy dog program that visits schools, libraries, memory care centers and a youth correctional center, more than 100 applications for new volunteer dog teams poured in.

“Now I will be able (to) contact other facilities that I’ve turned down for lack of volunteers,” Caring Canines Director Sylvia Stribling told the newspaper, awestruck by an abundance that few nonprofits enjoy. “I don’t think I will ever not have enough volunteers again.”

Taking stock of the inspiring work from journalists across the USA Today Network in 2023 alone, I saw stories that touched many lives in small ways — and other stories that touched a single life in a profound way.

Stories from Ohio to Ormond Beach brought in donations of clothing and cash for people on the brink of homelessness.

In New Jersey, help arrived after people read about Raymond Decker, a 64-year-old experiencing homelessness: A housing voucher he hadn’t even applied for suddenly appeared, allowing him to move out of a shelter and into an apartment. Readers and the Diocese of Paterson donated money to help Decker and his cat.

Enormous problems can feel impossible to solve. But effective storytelling can highlight a specific corner of the world where people can make a difference. Fostering that empathy, connectivity and sense of shared purpose is the highest calling of community journalism.

After the Detroit Free Press told readers about the struggles of Tonya Hogan, a woman climbing out of homelessness after her husband died of COVID-19 complications, readers donated \$7,775 to help cover her rent and get her truck back, as it had been sitting for weeks at an auto shop for repairs Hogan couldn’t afford.

When a reporter last visited her, the truck sat with its engine running in front of her new home. Hogan was beaming.



Raymond Decker, with his cat, Tabitha, on Feb. 14, was staying at Homeless Solutions in Morristown, N.J., when readers of The Record in Bergen learned of his story. ANNE-MARIE CARUSO/NORTHJERSEY.COM



Tonya Hogan, 50, opens a treat bag for her dog, Pepper, inside their room at Harbor Light Salvation Army in Detroit on March 9. SARAHBETH MANEY/DETROIT FREE PRESS



Carol Knuth, employee at Leonardo DRS, poses with boxes of donated items the company gathered for Clarke Street School. SUBMITTED PHOTO





# Pensacola journalists, town hall lead to big changes

## News Journal fosters way to help residents, homeless community

Mollye Barrows Pensacola News Journal | USA TODAY

The explosive increase in the cost of living in Escambia County, Florida, left hundreds of people camping in empty buildings and pockets of woods, spilling into neighborhoods like Brent, where the flood of people living in their backyard has overwhelmed business owners and neighbors.

Gwen Gibson lives in the heart of it. Her home, on property that has been in her family for 60 years, borders private property where more than 100 homeless individuals had been camping in and around the woods. Each day a steady stream of people trespassed back and forth across Gibson's property to get to and from their campsites in the woods behind her house. It was like living in a third-world country, neighbors and business owners said. It was normal for Gibson to deal with trash and fires as well as people camping along her back fence. Sometimes she found them on her property passed out from drug use or injured from a fight. At one point, the campers regularly used a makeshift "toilet" around a tree just over her property line and in direct view from her kitchen window. Nearby business owners face the same problems, as well as people tapping into their water and electricity, panhandling or camping in front of stores, and digging through dumpsters. The situation was not safe or sanitary, but neighbors and business owners said their pleas for help from county leaders were ignored.

The catalyst for change was a local magistrate's order to the developer who had allowed people to camp on his land behind Gibson's house. The News Journal steadily reported on the developer's failure to abide by the clean-up order, highlighting the extent of the problem and how local officials and private property owners collaboratively ignored the concerns of people who lived and worked near them. News Journal reporters broke down the 1,005 emergency calls to the area in one year alone. Videos and photographs showed the dilapidated homemade structures, piles of garbage and makeshift toilets where campers lived next to homes, businesses, parks and scenic walking trails. After months of coverage, the problems became too high-profile for officials to ignore. Escambia County agreed to fine the developer every day until the property was cleared, law enforcement agreed to trespass campers, and the developer brought in former Homeland Security staff to safely clear the land before cleaning it. The News Journal did more than highlight local concerns. In partnership with CivicCon, the News Journal brought in Joe Savage, a regional adviser for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, to share best practices in a communitywide town hall. Using President Joe Biden's initiatives, Savage gave the community a blueprint on how to receive the most federal funding to assist with the problem. By the end of 2023, the region's lead homeless agency agreed to create a new board at Savage's recommendation, and the city of Pensacola set aside funds to build the city's first low-barrier homeless shelter. The News Journal's work brought about solutions not just for one neighborhood, but for the entire community — and members of the homeless community themselves.

A man looks on as workers remove debris after demolishing an abandoned house at 1104 North V St. in Pensacola on Nov. 14. Homeless squatters had been living in the dilapidated house, causing problems for neighbors. GREGG PACHKOWSKI/GREGG@PNJ.COM



Dr. Joe Savage Jr., a recognized leader in homelessness and social policy, shares the federal government's strategic plan to end homelessness, during a CivicCon event at the REX Theatre on May 9. TONY GIBERSON/TGIBERSON@PNJ.COM

The News Journal's work brought about solutions not just for one neighborhood, but for the entire community ...



Murphy Lane resident Gwen Gibson displays No Trespassing signs on the front of her home in Pensacola on June 15. Gibson said signs do little to deter homeless people who camp next to her home. GREGG PACHKOWSKI/GREGG@PNJ.COM



# Coverage of Reno man’s plight helps him get placed in home



CJ Stout opens a dinosaur blanket present in his room at Renown Medical Center on Dec. 21, 2022. MARK ROBISON/RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL

## Supportive living agency stepped up when his options narrowed

**Peggy Santoro** Reno Gazette Journal | USA TODAY

A 19-year-old man with severe autism had been lingering in a Reno hospital for months when Reno Gazette Journal reporter Mark Robison heard about his plight. • CJ Stout, who is nonverbal and has the mental capacity of a 3-year-old, wasn’t sick. He just had nowhere else to go.

After CJ attacked his mother and sister in a violent outburst, police took him to Renown Regional Medical Center.

The hospital is set up for those who are sick or injured, not someone with CJ’s mental and behavioral health needs. But it couldn’t release him because he is unable to survive on his own.

The hospital had social workers, case managers, nurses, physicians, even its chief medical officer looking for a place for him – anywhere in the country. Nevada’s department of health and human services said labor shortages and high housing prices contributed to a lack of available facilities.

But two days after Mark’s story was published in the Reno Gazette Journal, CJ was assigned to a group home. A division of the state’s Aging and Disability Services and a Reno-based supportive living agency set up the home, staffed 24/7, just for CJ.

“The story was wonderful, and we think it was helpful in getting him out of the hospital,” said CJ’s legal guardian, Austyn Mahon.

We talked with Mark to find out more.

### How did you learn about CJ?

A friend of CJ’s legal guardian was frustrated with what was happening to CJ. She could see him deteriorating in the hospital and being aggressive with staff.

She thought a little media spotlight would help, and she put me in touch with his guardian and his mom.

### What’s CJ like?

I only met him once, but he was just like a little kid – happy to have familiar

faces visit him, happy for presents, and a big fan of pancakes. He could only say a few words, and they were hard for me to understand as an outsider, except for “love you,” which he said back to his loved ones.

He’s also big. A man, really. His family said he’d put on a lot of weight in hospital. It was thought to be a side effect of drugs they had him on.

### What surprised you most about CJ’s case?

Police reports filed against him by hospital staff. I’m not sure what I thought happened when patients attack nurses, but the hospital said attacks on nurses are not uncommon and it urges that the police be contacted.

The police ended up closing the three cases against him by hospital staff because his mental capacity didn’t allow them to establish cause for an arrest.

### Did you learn of other cases like CJ’s?

Yes, a father contacted me about his autistic son who’d been lingering in a nearby county’s jail after attacking someone. That young man was released not long after I learned about him.

And a young woman with similar issues to CJ’s was stuck at the same hospital. I communicated with her father and grandmother for weeks. Eventually, a group home was found for her, nine hours away in Las Vegas.

### How is CJ now?

His mom tells me there are still some growing pains, but that he’s doing good. He’s now got two roommates at his supportive-living home in Reno.

He’s also back in school, something he’d missed out on for almost a year, so he’s now got a much more enriching life than a bare hospital room.



CJ Stout arrives at his new group home in Reno on Feb. 20. PROVIDED BY AUSTYN MAHON



CJ Stout opens his breakfast at Renown Medical Center on Dec. 21, 2022. MARK ROBISON/RENO GAZETTE JOURNAL





Teenage boys stand for “The Star-Spangled Banner” during a Fourth of July presentation about the armed forces at Multi-County Juvenile Detention Center in Ohio.  
COURTNEY HERGESHEIMER/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

# Local news worked as catalyst for community solutions during 2023

Through hard work and reader support, journalists helped stop the bad and give rise to good, improving lives in many communities

**Manny Garcia** Austin American-Statesman | USA TODAY

As we enter 2024, we proudly share these examples of impactful work that our journalists produced in the past year that have helped reconnect a family, raised money for those most in need, clothed and fed the hungry, exposed shams, uncovered theft, returned taxpayer money and led to the arrests of public officials.

Our work is done without fanfare, requires near-constant fights for public records, and often takes months and calls to our lawyers. We are also heartened by wonderful public servants who direct us to the information, often at great risk of losing their jobs. Intimidation of reporters and their sources is not unusual.

We don’t have subpoena power and cannot convene a grand jury to get people to testify. Instead, we accomplish our mission because our journalists are relentless, committed to the truth and to serve our local communities.

We see our journalism as a public trust. This is who we are at the USA TODAY Network — newsrooms, large and small, that work for the public.

We hope you come away inspired. To our subscribers, we offer a heartfelt thank you. A share of your subscription supports the impactful journalism that we work to produce each day.

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Alcides Gonzalez loads software on Automated External Defibrillators (AEDs) at Defibtech, a company that makes the devices in Branford, Conn., on July 31. The market for AEDs reached a pinnacle after one was used to help save the life of Damar Hamlin of the Buffalo Bills after he suffered cardiac arrest during a game in January 2023. SETH HARRISON/THE JOURNAL NEWS



SOUTH

‘Safer Sidelines’ probe into deaths of young athletes sparks policy changes in Kentucky

“Safer Sidelines,” by the Louisville Courier Journal, investigated sudden deaths in high school sports, including a groundbreaking database of thousands of athlete deaths spanning the past 100 years. The series prompted national conversations regarding the health and safety of high school athletes and school preparedness, including in classrooms, symposiums, conferences, on podcasts and radio shows. Nearly 1,000 flyers were distributed across 11 pediatric offices in the Louisville area to educate parents on the four leading causes of death in athletes. The project also led the Kentucky High School Athletic Association, the state’s high school athletics governing body, to send a reminder regarding health and safety certifications for coaches and athletic directors. The American Heart Association invited Courier Journal journalists to an AED Symposium of 100 global thought leaders on the subject. And two Las Vegas high school seniors who asked to work with a Courier Journal reporter for their senior project used the research to study sudden deaths in high school sports statewide and determine the cost of adding AEDs to all Nevada high schools.

Stories about Florida police officers who jailed son gain worldwide attention, father resigns

In summer 2023, The Daytona Beach News-Journal published stories about two Daytona Beach Shores (Florida) police officers, an unmarried couple who share a child, bringing their 3-year-old son to a city jail cell on two consecutive days to teach him potty-training lessons. The officers persuaded a judge to seal records. The News-Journal, along with the Florida Center for Government Accountability and the LoCicero law firm, persuaded another judge to unseal many of those records — including investigative summaries by the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, a review by the State Attorney’s Office and the city of Daytona Beach Shores. After publication of follow-up stories, one of the officers, Lt. Michael Schoenbrod, resigned.

“I’ve been in DC since 2011 and I can’t remember working on an issue gathering such broad bipartisan support so quickly.”

Alex Siciliano  
National Association of Broadcasters



Matthew Mangine and his wife, Kim Mangine, hold a picture of their son, Matthew Mangine Jr., in their living room in Union, Ky., on Jan. 5, 2023. Matthew died after he collapsed during a Northern Kentucky soccer practice in June 2020. Coaches did not administer CPR. JEFF FAUGHENDER/LOUISVILLE COURIER JOURNAL

Brevard responds to story by FLORIDA TODAY with \$89,000 in donations to help Meals on Wheels

When an old 80-gallon kettle used to prep food for Meals on Wheels and other senior food programs breathed its last, right after the ice machine broke, residents stepped up with an astounding \$89,000 in donations. Those gifts helped replace equipment used at the Community Kitchen, where Aging Matters in Brevard preps meals. Individuals and businesses alike responded to the nonprofit’s initial fundraising campaign. After a May FLORIDA TODAY story, the gifts — from \$20 to \$22,000 — poured in. The largest gifts are from Pineapple Cove Classical Academy in Palm Bay and MH Williams Construction Group of Melbourne.

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Lt. Michael Schoenbrod of the Daytona Beach Shores Public Safety Department greets two Volusia County Sheriff’s Office officials and a Division of Children and Families caseworker outside his home on Oct. 27, 2022, about three weeks after he acknowledged putting a 3-year-old in a jail holding cell, handcuffed, for a potty-training lesson.

DAYTONA BEACH NEWS JOURNAL



Workers prepare Meals on Wheels dinners in the community kitchen on Rosa L. Jones Boulevard in Cocoa, Florida. The group serves clients of Aging Matters in Brevard. TIM SHORTT/FLORIDA TODAY



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### Reporting leads to felony criminal charges against Virginia city councilor

When a credit card charge by Hope-well (Virginia) City Councilor Dominic Holloway found its way to the Progress-Index, we quickly learned that the councilor’s explanations for the charge made little sense. After verifying the authenticity of the document, we found that the event listed on the charge never happened. We talked to the food vendor involved and found the councilor hosted another event, in another city, on the same day. The June 2023 Progress-Index story led to a Commonwealth Attorney’s investigation and felony embezzlement charges against the councilor in October.

### Mystery solved: Palm Beach County apologizes for removing memorial for victims of 1996 Boca crash

Emily Slosberg was livid that a memorial honoring victims of a horrific 1996 wreck — her twin sister was among five children who died; a sixth person was paralyzed in the two-car crash — had been removed from the side of a road west of Boca Raton. The Palm Beach Post reported on the disappearance of four crosses, one Star of David, photos of the five who died and mementos that the families and friends of the victims arranged there. The items were cast in cement and had withstood three major hurricanes and numerous other storms for 27 years. “I was worried initially because nobody reached out to me, except the community members,” Slosberg said. The day after the story ran, the county apologized, put the Slosberg memorial back and called on the county engineer’s office to reconsider how it removes memorials.

### Mayor, citing Savannah Morning News reporting, introduces ordinance to hold gun owners accountable

The Savannah Morning News staff began publishing what will be a continuing focus on Savannah’s gun violence. We obtained an ATF database that traced guns used in crimes to their owners and where they were purchased. This data dispelled many myths, one being that most guns used in crimes were obtained illegally. Instead, most guns were purchased from firearms dealers and pawn shops, often legally. The data showed that many federally licensed dealers did not follow background checks and reporting requirements, which ATF could have used to fine or revoke the licenses of dealers. Other reporting found large numbers of



guns stolen from unlocked cars and sold/trafficked. After the Morning News coverage, Savannah Mayor Van Johnson introduced an ordinance to hold gun owners who do not secure their firearms accountable if they’re stolen and used in crimes.

### Judge stops lawyer from funneling class action lawsuit award money to his own causes

The Knoxville News Sentinel reported that a prominent Tennessee attorney directed money unclaimed by class action litigants to causes he supported unrelated to the lawsuits. The organizations he funneled the money to named facilities after him. After we published a series of reports, a federal judge rejected the attorney’s recommendation to send money from a lawsuit to another unrelated organization: a business research center at the University of Tennessee.

### Pope accepts resignation of Knoxville bishop after allegations he turned a blind eye to sex abuse

After the Knoxville News Sentinel published a series of investigative reports detailing how Bishop Richard Stika actively undermined sex abuse investigations and mismanaged the Diocese of Knoxville, he submitted his resignation to the Holy See. Bishops almost never leave before the mandatory retirement age of 75 — Stika was still 65 when he resigned in June, citing health reasons and journalistic scrutiny.

Irv Slosberg and Emily Slosberg-King speak at a former memorial site where Dori Slosberg and four others were killed in a 1996 crash in unincorporated Palm Beach County, Florida, on Aug. 24. Dori was Irv’s daughter and Emily’s twin sister.  
THOMAS CORDY/THE PALM BEACH POST

### MIDWEST

### Milwaukee Journal Sentinel investigation spawns fraud indictments, state crackdown and federal probe

Wisconsin officials are cracking down on fraud in a program meant to combat infant mortality, citing a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel investigation. “These women and children deserve better,” Kirsten Johnson, head of the state Department of Health Services. She said problems with rampant fraud “highlighted” in the Journal Sentinel investigation, in part, prompted health officials to overhaul the program. The changes include conducting a comprehensive review of each claim submitted, blocking providers who previously worked for fraudulent operations, and referring 20 Medicaid providers to the state Department of Justice’s Medicaid Fraud Control Unit for “engaging in suspected fraudulent activity.” Officials reviewing the program found during the summer of 2023 that the state had been billed for more than \$2 million in claims, but only \$20,000 of those were “legitimate.” The series also triggered a federal investigation and felony indictments against two former owners of prenatal care coordination programs. Both have denied wrongdoing. The investigation continues and more criminal charges are expected.



Erica Olivier, the Milwaukee Health Department maternal and child health director, says there are some "very well-intentioned service providers" in the prenatal care coordination business but also "definitely some that leave a bad taste in people's mouths." MIKE DE SISTI/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL





Eric Kilburn Jr. shows off two pairs of custom-made cleats from Under Armour before he heads to football practice at Goodrich High School in Michigan on Aug. 21. The sophomore, who is 6’10” and outgrew his size 22 shoes, had a whirlwind five months after his mother shared their struggle to find shoes that fit.

SUSAN BROMLEY/HOMETOWNLIFE.COM

### Akron Beacon Journal stories help heirs of rubber workers get share of settlement money

The Akron Beacon Journal reported that thousands of Akron rubber workers were due their share of a settlement with a company that supplied talc containing asbestos to the rubber companies. The story ran with a searchable list of more than 500 deceased rubber workers whose heirs hadn’t been located. After publication, the law firm handling the settlement received nearly 1,100 calls and identified more than 1,600 new rubber worker heirs. A follow-up story about the response led to nearly 300 more calls to the firm.

### Herald-Times story helps Indiana woman reconnect with great-grandson

In July, The Herald-Times in Bloomington, Indiana, published a story about Mary Craft, 79, a Gosport woman who had lost touch with her 8-year-old great-grandson, Tyler. Tyler’s father was in jail, his mother died in a car crash, and his grandparents had given up guardianship and custody of the boy. After he was placed in a foster home, Mary found that in Indiana, great-grandparents have no visitation rights. She tried to contact him, fearing Tyler would think his family had abandoned him. In the days after the story ran, readers contacted the newsroom to offer to drive Craft to northern Indiana. But she didn’t even know where he lived. A few months later, Craft shared that the state had set up weekly video calls for her and Tyler. She was also able to send him five \$1bills in a card. On that week’s video call, he tossed them in the air, exclaiming, “I’m in the money!” When asked what changed, Craft said, “They read your story.”

### Enquirer uses public records to expose diverted funds, prompts railway board to return \$500,000 to taxpayers

The Cincinnati Enquirer showed readers how taxpayers had lost out on \$500,000 in a plan to sell the city’s railroad line to Norfolk Southern. Public records showed money that should have gone to the city was diverted to help the railroad pay for a campaign to promote the railroad sale to voters. Two months after the Enquirer exposed the deal, noting that a 2002 charter amendment banned taxpayers’ money from being used for political purposes, the board overseeing the railway voted to return the \$500,000 to the city’s taxpayers.

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Mary and Oliver Craft hold a picture of Tyler while sitting on his favorite swing in their backyard on July 11.

RICH JANZARUK/THE HERALD TIMES

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### Teen with feet bigger than Shaq gets custom-made shoes after story goes viral

Eric Kilburn Jr. tried to play football and navigate life in shoes that didn’t fit. The custom shoes the Michigan family planned to order for their still-growing son cost \$1,500 a pair. A friend of the family posted a Gofundme request and Hometown Life reported a story, which went viral. Other desperate mothers who couldn’t find shoes for their sons shared their stories. Then Shaquille O’Neal — yes, that one — called. He sent boxes of new clothes for the family and dispatched his personal tailor to measure Eric and create two new suits for him. He also gave the family new MacBooks so they can keep in touch with the former basketball star. Representatives from Puma and Under Armour also called. They sent representatives to Michigan to measure Eric’s feet and made shoes that fit. Fast forward to fall: Eric played football in shoes that fit. And there is a new “Kilburn-sized” shoe, said Rebecca Kilburn, who now helps others through the Big Shoe Network she founded.



Marilyn Holley talks about her mother, Kathryn Sales-Darnell, a rubber worker and one of the original litigants in the lawsuit in Akron. MIKE CARDEW/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL



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Coverage of violence  
in Ohio youth detention  
system leads to calls  
for action, services

Journalists from across Ohio collaborated to investigate the state’s youth prison and local detention facilities, finding that kids were injured, guards were attacked, and, in some cases, kids died. The day after the project was published, Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine designated a panel to come up with solutions to issues raised in the investigation. Democratic legislators have called for an investigation; the Ohio Correctional Institution Inspection Committee questioned the director of the Ohio Department of Youth Services about staff shortages, violent clashes and educational and mental health services. The eight-month investigation by The Cincinnati Enquirer, The Columbus Dispatch, The Akron Beacon Journal, The Canton Repository and USA TODAY’s network of Ohio newspapers included interviews with more than 100 kids, parents, employees, judges and experts; more than three dozen public records requests, and the review of hundreds of pages of documents.

Ohio legally designates  
burial ground for remains  
of Native Americans after  
Columbus Dispatch article

Before Ohio Rep. Jessica Miranda read The Columbus Dispatch article from Jan. 25 on the Ohio History Connection’s efforts to repatriate the 7,100 Native American remains it has and re-bury them in Ohio ground, she didn’t know the struggles the organization was having getting its reburial land designated by Ohio law. As soon as she read it, she sent it to State Rep. Bill Seitz. This summer the state went on to pass a budget amendment that legally designated the land as a state burial ground under the Ohio Revised Code, so the Native American ancestors who lived on Ohio land can be put to rest near where they walked the earth.

Columbus Dispatch story  
helps 61 families keep  
homes after income  
discrimination issue raised

Hours after we published a story about source-of-income discrimination at an apartment complex on Columbus’ Northeast Side — and three days after the City Attorney’s office sent a letter to the private-equity company that owns the development — the company told tenants they could continue to use federal Section 8 housing vouchers to pay rent. Though the tenants had brought their cases to the Legal Aid Society of Columbus, it was not until the Columbus Dispatch began investigating that the landlord was pushed to end its discriminatory policy.

Ford reverses course,  
keeps AM radio after  
Detroit Free Press coverage

The Detroit Free-Press heard that Ford Motor Co. may be starting to remove AM radio from some of its vehicles and wrote not just the company’s plan of action but a comprehensive piece on why the decision was made, how it did not include commercial vehicles (bound by contract) and potential impact during emergencies. Within weeks, Ford agreed to keep AM radio. “After speaking with policy leaders about the importance of AM broadcast radio as a part of the emergency alert system, we’ve decided to include it on all 2024 Ford & Lincoln vehicles,” Ford CEO Jim Farley tweeted. Alex Siciliano of the National Association of Broadcasters wrote, “I’ve been in DC since 2011 and I can’t remember working on an issue gathering such broad bipartisan support so quickly. Your original story on Ford removing AM really helped ignite it!”

Detroit Free Press coverage  
prompts GM to remove  
security officers accused  
of racism, abuse;  
state investigates

The private security force Renaissance Center Management Company was created by General Motors to patrol Detroit’s iconic RenCen. But for over a



Mary S. Washington and her son, 15-year-old Damarion Allen, are shown inside the Franklin County Juvenile Intervention Center on May 7. Allen was paralyzed from the chest down. COURTNEY HERGESHEIMER/COLUMBUS DISPATCH



Sue Clark, a 68-year-old U.S. Army veteran, stands in the entryway to her building at Morse Glen Apartments, where she has lived since 2011 and used vouchers to pay part of her rent. BROOKE LAVALLEY/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

decade, its white officers have been accused of assaulting, targeting, harassing and falsely detaining Black visitors, or just Black people on the property. It’s a pattern that has gone unchecked for years, according to federal lawsuits filed against RCMC, GM, G4S Solutions and a handful of officers. The Detroit Free Press reviewed hundreds of documents including lawsuits and internal complaints. We interviewed current and former employees and an August 2023 victim of an alleged assault. We reviewed footage showing white officers physically harming Black people, corroborating allegations. Our investigation was published on Nov. 16. By Nov. 17, GM told the Free Press they were reviewing their contract with Allied Universal (which acquired G4S in 2021), ordered the officers accused of racism and abuse be removed from its Detroit properties including the RenCen, and mandated racial sensitivity and de-escalation training for security officers. The Michigan State Police and the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards, which grants licenses to operate as a private security police agency, are investigating.



Alex Wesaw of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi is director of American Indian Relations at the Ohio History Connection. BROOKE LAVALLEY/COLUMBUS DISPATCH

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After a windy and wet morning on March 23, Lila Badger attaches a ribbon to a floral baseball marking the gravesite of her cousin, Terry Badger III, who died by suicide weeks before. The two grew up close, spending many days together. MYKAL MCELDOWNEY/INDYSTAR

their foundation’s tips cards from across the country. Since then, the Woods have given 20,000 tip cards, spoken at 85 events and helped 20 families with teen victims of sextortion. Tamia Woods credits the Beacon Journal’s story with helping to raise awareness about the issue and her foundation’s work. “It was a lot of great work that came out of it and helping save additional lives,” she said.

Anti-bullying bill passes after IndyStar writes about baseball phenom who died by suicide

The IndyStar went to the Badger home just days after Terry Badger died of suicide. The 13-year-old baseball phenom had been bullied every day at school. After IndyStar’s story ran, Indiana lawmakers passed an anti-bullying bill called TB3 in Terry’s honor (his nickname was TB3). A state lawmaker told the IndyStar that the bill had been stuck until he brought the story about Terry to statehouse chambers and passed it to legislators. “I handed them a copy of Terry’s story. I told them, ‘Read this until the end,’” said Rep. Vernon Smith. “I think that must have been what convinced (them) to pass this bill.”

Governor calls for investigation after Arizona Republic reports on troubled assisted living center

Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs announced she would force state agencies tasked with protecting seniors to investigate where they “fell short” in their response at a Phoenix assisted living facility. She also announced legislative priorities to improve accountability for health care institutions, including assisted living facilities. The move came one day after The Arizona Republic’s reporting revealed how Heritage Village continued to make mistakes that endangered residents even after a woman with dementia killed her roommate more than three years before. An employee had skipped the woman’s Lorazepam, which she took to control agitation. Since that event, the facility has received nearly 150 citations from the state.

Indiana officials, safe-drinking advocates push for changes in law following IndyStar investigation

Changes are coming to Indiana’s alcohol enforcement system after the IndyStar exposed how weak enforcement by the Indiana Alcohol & Tobacco Commission has contributed to a Wild West atmosphere at some Indianapolis bars. At least five bars have been closed. Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb proposed a 35% boost in funding for the chronically understaffed ATC, and state officials proposed new policies intended to crack down on problem bars and the creation of a task force to target nightclubs known for violence. Call for changes came after we identified more than 600 reports of bar-related violence, including 49 homicides, since 2016.

SOUTHWEST

Arizona Republic spotlights conflict after state earmarks \$850,000 for feasibility study of gondolas — by gondola manufacturer

An Arizona lawmaker directed \$850,000 in the state budget to an Indiana company to study the feasibility of aerial gondolas for transportation in Sun City — gondolas the same company wanted to build. The Arizona Republic published a story about the funding, noting that the principal of the company had a questionable record of past business dealings. Worse, reporters found a recent deposition from one of several lawsuits against him in which the principal told a lawyer he would soon have the money to pay his court judgment because he expected to get the \$850,000 grant. He did not receive the grant after the story was published.

Continued on next page



Almost one year later, the sting of the absence of Secoya Williams still lingers for family members. In honor of Williams’ life, Marilyn Johnson, mother of Williams, created a foundation to help those in need. Gloria Johnson, left, Marilyn Johnson and James Harney photographed on Oct. 31, 2022, at their home in Indianapolis. GRACE HOLLARS/INDYSTAR

A collage made for James Woods’ celebration of life shows his personality through the years, on March 24 in Streetsboro, Ohio. JEFF LANGE/AKRON BEACON JOURNAL



Continued from previous page

Wisconsin’s GOP-led legislature approves \$125 million PFAS fund after Journal Sentinel spotlights problem

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel devoted extensive reporting into the emerging problem of PFAS contamination in drinking water, including a grant-aided investigation in which tap water was tested (with the help of a certified private lab) from 40 homes across Wisconsin connected to municipal water utilities. The testing found 30% of those had had at least one forever chemical compound over federal recommendations, and since they were connected to a public drinking water supply — as opposed to a private supply — others in their communities also were likely to have contamination. Republican lawmakers, who for years stripped PFAS funds from the Democratic governor’s budget, voted in a \$125 million trust fund to clean up “forever chemical” contaminations across the state.

Hamilton County credits Enquirer video in decision to move police gun range

The Cincinnati Enquirer chronicled the impact of a city police gun range on Lincoln Heights, a predominantly Black suburb that backs up to the range. The Enquirer spoke to residents and made a video so readers could see and hear what it’s like to live nearby. Afterward, Hamilton County and the city agreed to move the gun range. Commissioners watched the video at their meeting. “That video is pretty powerful,” one of the commissioners said.

Sexual extortion story raises awareness about the problem and what’s being done to address it

The Akron Beacon Journal wrote about James Woods, a teen who took his life after becoming a victim of sextortion, and his parents’ efforts to raise awareness about the issue. After the story was published, his parents, Tamia and Tim Woods, received requests for

“I handed them a copy of Terry’s story. I told them, ‘Read this until the end.’ I think that must have been what convinced (them) to pass this bill.”

Rep. Vernon Smith  
Indiana House of Representatives





People attend a rally for justice for the people who have died while in the custody of the Riverside County Sheriff’s Department. The rally was held at the County Administrative Center in Riverside, Calif., on Oct. 31. JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

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NORTHEAST

Donations in Cape Cod cover students cost of national board exams

The community answered a call to help Cape Cod Technical High School students pay the \$270 cost of national board exams after learning from the Cape Cod Times that some students could not afford the fee. The exams are required for certification. Principal Bill Terranova said so many donors pitched in that Cape Tech students won’t have to pay for expensive certification exams for years.

Correctional officer indicted after Daily Democrat reports on alleged coerced sex

In April, a female inmate at Strafford County (N.H.) House of Corrections told a reporter her story of sexual abuse at the hands of a correctional officer. And she said she was not the only one. Foster’s Daily Democrat of Dover, N.H., accessed investigative reports showing that other female inmates had been coerced into sex by this officer and that the officer had admitted his acts to investigators. The officer was arrested and charged in June 2020 but not prosecuted; it’s unclear why the initial prosecution was dropped. As a result of this reporting, the officer was indicted in October and arraigned Nov. 9 on aggravated felonious sex assault charges. He faces up to 80 years in prison and has pleaded not guilty.

Couple who paid cable company’s electric bill for 22 years gets \$25,000 after York Daily Record reporting

For 22 years, Elaine Nied paid the electric bill for a meter mounted on a utility pole about 100 feet from her home near York, Pennsylvania. She had been told the second meter was for an addition to her home. Eventually, she asked Met-Ed about the meter. The power company disconnected the meter to see what would happen, and that resulted in neighbors losing cable and internet service. It turned out Nied had been paying the power bill for Armstrong Cable for 22 years. She was getting the run-around from Met-Ed and Armstrong about the bills until the York Daily Record told her story. Almost immediately, Armstrong reimbursed her — with interest. Met-Ed also reimbursed her about \$4,000. Total net reimbursements: \$25,000. She credited the Daily Record’s reporting for getting the companies to respond.



Elaine Nied describes how, for 22 years, she paid for a second electric meter — one that supplied cable company equipment — at her home in North Hopewell Township. PAUL KUEHNEL/YORK DAILY RECORD

Cape Cod Times Needy Fund raises record \$1.62 million to help neighbors

The Cape Cod Times founded the Needy Fund in December of 1936, a tradition of neighbors helping neighbors. Between Thanksgiving and New Year’s Day, the Times publishes three short articles a week about people who received Needy Fund assistance, accompanied by a list of donors. In the past six or so years, the fund added a summer fundraising campaign. The money is used to help Cape Codders who fall behind with rent, mortgage or other bills due to a job loss or illness. In 2022 the fund raised \$1.62 million, a record. The Times expects 2023 fundraising, which hadn’t yet concluded by publication, to break the record again.



Jennifer Duckworth said she hopes speaking about sexual misconduct by officers in the Strafford County jail will lead more women who were inmates to speak as well. DEB CRAM/SEACOASTONLINE.COM

WEST

California launches probe after Desert Sun investigation exposes record inmate deaths

After The Desert Sun exposed a record level of inmate deaths in Riverside County jails in 2022, the California attorney general launched a civil rights investigation of the county sheriff in 2023. That new investigation stemmed in part from The Desert Sun’s coverage of the problem. The sheriff could stymie some of the reporting. But now the attorney general’s investigators will be able to uncover much more.



Mattacheese Middle School teacher Donna McCuish holds a piggy bank filled with money collected for the Needy Fund surrounded by her math students. STEVE HEASLIP/CAPE COD TIMES