

LOCAL

The newspaper that time forgot

SAGUACHE – A small town in south-central Colorado is home to one of America's most unique newspapers. The Saguache Crescent is printed with 1800s technology and a simple philosophy: no bad news allowed.



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The newspaper looks like a copy of the past. It has a decorative masthead and simple print. No photos. And it has all the good news fit to print from this town of 550 people.

Dean Coombs is the only employee. He is the third generation of his family to run the paper out of a weathered building on Saguache's main street.

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"I've always said I'm the editor and the publisher and the owner and the janitor," Coombs said surveying his cluttered office. "Then I look around and say, 'If I'm the janitor, I should be fired.'"

Coombs has devoted his life to the Crescent, only one of only four remaining hot-lead type newspapers in the country.

He uses a 1921 Linotype machine to set the print then feeds the paper through a 1921 printing press.

Coombs tried to stifle a smile as he said, "I'm not big on change."

His family never bought new printing equipment because the old always worked. Now, 90 years after his family took over the newspaper, there's not enough money being made to modernize.

The Crescent is the official newspaper of record for Saguache County. The county's paid legal notices are all that keep the paper alive.

Coombs is proud of his old-fashioned newspaper, but not boastful. He was somewhat bemused at the suggestion it would be of interest to people outside his rural town.

"I don't have any delusions about knocking that Denver Post off the map," Coombs said of the Crescent. "It is what it is. It's kinda cute."

The newspaper has approximately 550 subscribers, about the population of Saguache. The readers are also the writers.

"If you bring it, and it's not just absolute insanity, and you want to sign your name to it, then I'll generally print it," Coombs said.

The one thing he won't print is bad news. Not a word of it.

"There's plenty of media that will center on anything bad, the crime, accidents," said Coombs.

"Doesn't sell papers. Good news sells papers."

The good news rule, laid out by Coombs' mother when she worked on the paper decades ago, is non-negotiable.

Take the newspaper from the week of September 11, 2001. Front page news in Saguache was Mountain Valley High School Homecoming, the 9th annual Fall Festival and a tribute to retiring postal worker Joyce Schmittel.



"You can get all the negative you want, turn on the television or pick up the regular newspaper but this is good," said Saguache resident Johnny Baxter. He praises the paper as "a breath of fresh air."

Like all good things, this must come to an end.

"There aren't very many people making wagon wheels anymore, and there's a reason why," Coombs said.

That's why he will not train a successor. When he eventually retires, the long run of the Saguache Crescent will end.

The good news happening in Saguache will not.

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