

No organization is immune from the possibility that harmful rumors will arise. And when one of these predicts the early demise of an organization, huge and perhaps irreparable damage can result. Just such a threat menaced the Chicago Daily News, a big-circulation afternoon paper in Illinois. When its rival, Chicago Today, folded in 1974, the illogical, but widely held, theory gained credence that, if one afternoon paper in the city couldn't prosper, neither could the survivor.

With the News' hundredth anniversary approaching on December 23, 1975, its six-member public relations department, headed by Vice President Virginia Butts, saw the milestone birthday as offering the opportunity to emphasize and dramatize the factors, many unique, which guaranteed the paper's successful continuance. They planned a program to reinforce public recognition of the News' independence, outstanding journalism, and community responsiveness and, at the same time, increase employee pride.

An obvious highlight would be publication of a special edition on the centennial date. Since that, however, would be in the midst of the Christmas holiday season, it was decided to postpone the issue until Jan. 17, 1976. Preliminary activities were therefore arranged for culmination on that day.

First event of the celebration came at 10:30 a.m. on Sept. 5, when a Chicago News horse-drawn delivery cart of the 1870s, with its driver and "newsboy" dressed in garments of that era, began a tour through Chicago's busiest downtown area. At several scheduled stops they delivered, to VIPs, copies of a digest of events reported in the News during 1875. This was the first of 20 weekly issues which consisted of a single sheet printed on two sides, carrying "top news of the week," "personals and otherwise," and excerpts from want ads which had appeared during the founding year.

The tour was reported nationwide through UPI photos and evening TV newscasts. (A photo/file assignment memo had notified

the media of the kick-off event and of the best locations for pictures.)

There was wide distribution of all the digests and good pick-up by newspaper columnists and radio and TV personalities. The ads in particular earned editorial attention (e.g., false teeth at \$8.00 a set and gloves at \$1.25 a pair).

The editorial, advertising, art, promotion, circulation, and PR departments cooperated on the production and distribution of "100 Years of Famous Front Pages." The 11 x 17½-inch volume contained 100 reproductions of Page 1 of 100 selected issues of the News between Dec. 23, 1875 and May 1, 1975. These chronicled such major events of the century as: invention of the electric light (1879); abdication of England's King Edward (1936); D-Day (1944); assassinations of John F. Kennedy (1963) and Martin Luther King (1968); resignation of President Nixon (1974); and the end of the war in Vietnam (1975). An introduction included an illustrated history of the News. Editorial cartoons by the News' Pulitzer Prize winner, John Fischetti, appeared on the back cover. Over 50,000 copies of the volume were sold in bookstores and on newsstands in high-traffic areas (@ \$2.00).

A permanent exhibit of full-sized reproductions of the front pages was set up at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry (visited by more than three million people annually).

Numerous media representatives attested to the book's value. A broadcaster reported using it for listener quizzes. Others used such phrases as "very helpful to my children," "fascinating reading," and "a fine piece of public relations."

Memorabilia and artifacts in the News' archives were supplemented through a request in releases sent by PR Director Richard W. Grelecki to other newspapers and trade publications and letters to retired employees. These promised incorporation of donated material in a 220-foot-long display about the News' historic

firsts, illustrious writers (e.g., Carl Sandburg and Eugene Field), sponsorship of community events, and 15 Pulitzer prizes. When completed, the display, titled "A Future Built on Tradition," was set up in the News' building and sections of it are being exhibited elsewhere during 1976.

Another exhibit was mounted by the Chicago Historial Society. Called "100 Years of Chicago History As Seen by the Chicago Daily News," it was composed of 120 photographs selected from the 250,000 negatives in the Society's Daily News collection. A reception and preview, held for Society members, political leaders, and other VIPs, were covered by TV and Wire-service cameramen.

To interest a key public -- Chicago-area business executives -- in the anniversary observance, a Daily News Centennial Washington Bureau Briefing (followed by a 30-minute Q&A period) was arranged. Over 200 current advertisers and others who had placed ads during the paper's first six months of publication were invited to hear a panel composed of Peter Lisagor, the News' Washington bureau chief, and Pulitzer Prize winning correspondents Charles Bartlett and William Eaton. Moderator was the paper's editor Daryle M. Feldmeir. An added attraction was the locale of the briefing -- the new and highly publicized Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Chicago's TV station PBS interviewed the correspondents in advance of the briefing and a radio report later reached 38 states.

A Daily News Centennial Speakers Bureau was equipped by the PR staff with material to take the anniversary story to community groups. For example, an audience of 150 of the Chicago Chapter of PRSA heard Publisher Marshall Field, Editor Feldmeir, City Editor Bob Schultz, and Critic-at-Large Dick Christiansen. Field offered assurance that the Daily News will "continue to be a fine newspaper" for another 100 years.

Social events for employees included an 1875 costume party in the cafeteria and a champagne party in the city room. At the latter, a 100-pound birthday cake in the form of the first edition of the paper was cut by Feldmeir, Field, Fischet-

ti, and columnist Mike Royko. "Editor and Publisher" ran a picture story of the festivity.

The "Souvenir Centennial Edition" was so well publicized that 25% more than the usual number of copies were sold. A four-page release about it described: Founding of the paper.... to sell at 1¢ (the first penny paper west of Philadelphia); its scoops; crusades in the public interest; and "firsts" (e.g., first American newspaper to establish its own worldwide newsgathering organization and to offer fixed advertising rates). It also announced that the News "is still enjoying a healthy growing vitality."

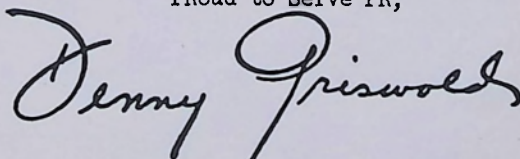
Praise for the lively and imaginative anniversary program has come from several sources. It was read into the Congressional Record for "a record of outstanding accomplishments in the past and a dedication to the future." The City News Bureau of Chicago cited the News as "one of the nation's most respected newspapers." And the City Council lauded it "for its century of service to the public."

The News management credits the effort with making Chicagoans aware of the paper's prominence in national journalism, its rich traditions, and, most importantly, its sound future.

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Editor