



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY BILL SIEL

Kenosha News journalist Bill Guida poses at his desk on his last day on the job Friday. He reflected on all of the stories he's covered over the years and was proud of the "organized chaos" at his desk.

Guida: Closing out a career covering the Kenosha community

BY BILL GUIDA
SPECIAL TO THE KENOSHA NEWS

Friday marked my official retirement from the venerable Kenosha News.

It's been more than 25 years since my byline first ran in the paper, which has covered the city and county of Kenosha since 1994.

After interviewing me over breakfast at Franks Diner, City Editor Steve Lund, with Editor-in-Chief Dick Martin's apparent blessing, hired me in 1991 as a part-time, general assignment reporter.

The News still was an evening paper then, put together in the morning, printed and delivered in the afternoon.

The rest of the staff worked from the wee morning hours, filed their stories, put the paper to bed and departed long before I let myself into the building to write up night meetings, spot news, features, whatever. So, the faces that went with the names I read in the bylines were a mystery to me.

By day, I continued working as a journeyman painter, a trade I practiced for 15 years, starting as a high school senior and picking up the tools — and a lot more skills — after a three-year Army enlistment.

I had earned my bachelor's degree in English at the University of Illinois-Chicago, going to school full time and working full time. After I graduated in 1982, I got a job as a reporter with the City News Bureau of Chicago.

The pay was bad. To make a living, I continued to use my tools as a tradesman.

Truth is, nobody gets into journalism for the money. As Corky Siemaszko, who reported for the New York Daily News and is now with NBC News, put it this way when we worked together 34 years ago at CNB: "We do it for the adventure."

After six months part time with the Kenosha News, I took a full-time job writing, reporting, shooting photos and editing for a weekly Lake County, Ill., newspaper chain. There, as at the Kenosha News, I learned about the communities by covering them and telling their stories.

In October 1993, Lund and Martin hired me full time at the Kenosha News, after I'd been tipped to an opening by reporter John Krerowicz, who told me they needed to fill the position fast.

Over the past 25 years, I got to know and love the city, and so many of the people who call this community home, the neighbors and friends we've made since moving here in 1989 to raise our family.

As a local journalist, I've come to know and told many of the stories of people and places that are the lifeblood of Kenosha County, the city of Kenosha, the towns and villages east and west of I-94.

Some of my coverage dealt with investigative reporting. I covered K-12 education, primarily the Kenosha Unified School District, mayors John Antaramian and Keith Bosman, the City Council, County Executive Jim Kreuser, the County Board.

I wrote about the rides people loved. I wrote of complaints about streets in disrepair, even traffic signs vandalized with sliced cheese.

For four years, my opinion column ranged far and wide, delighting some folks, angering others. Sometimes, they provoked laughter; sometimes head scratching.

I covered Michael M. Bell's successful drive to reform Wisconsin law to require all police-involved shootings to be investigated by agencies from outside jurisdictions. I covered the successful public drive, led by key city aldermen, to install life rings on the Lake Michigan shoreline and at Kenosha Harbor.

I sadly covered the circumstances that led to those outcomes as well: respectively, the fatal 2004 shooting of Bell's son by a Kenosha police officer and the Sept. 6 drowning of a 17-year-old high school student in

Kenosha Harbor.

That's what journalists do. When we set out to do our job, we're interested in looking into the hard stuff so those who can make a difference are spurred to action.

But we tell the stories, too, of people, like former Kenosha Anna Soens, who overcome tremendous odds to conquer formidable obstacles in their lives.

Along this 25-year journey, and for many years even before this one began, I grew to respect the vast majority of police officers, firefighters, teachers, doctors, nurses and other healthcare practitioners for their incredible professionalism, empathy, dedication and unremitting hard work in service to all of us.

I even respect most of the politicians who run for office believing they can help to better our lives. Even when I don't necessarily agree with them or vote for them.

But, I have to say, working for the Kenosha News, I had the honor and privilege of working with bright, talented journalists equally dedicated and committed to serving their community.

And I'm honored to have served as president, executive board member and contract negotiator as a member of the Kenosha Newspaper Guild representing editorial workers here and at the now-defunct Kenosha Labor Paper.

Lund, Krerowicz and others of whom I'm proud to have called colleagues, retired before me. My friend and fellow journalist, Kenosha News photographer Bill Siel, retired along with me on Friday. Sports reporter Jeremy Reeves departed Friday, too, after 19 years here.

Dick Martin and Howard Brown have, as it is said, passed on to their greater rewards.

Although I took a 33 percent cut in pay from my 15-year career as a journeyman painter and decorator, primarily as a union member in the Chicago and Milwaukee areas, I've never regretted accepting this job.

It allowed me to work close to home and participate more fully, with my wife, in the lives of our son and daughter.

Today, Desiree, Ross, his wife Kelly, and their daughter Nora, our only grandchild at the moment, live in Texas. Nora turned 8 months Friday, the day I retired. Perhaps that reinforced the feeling that it was time for me to retire, maybe travel more frequently.

Truth is, I've weathered, with the support of my family, friends, and, yes, my Kenosha News colleagues, some critical health challenges.

Most recently, a year ago I was diagnosed with an abdominal cancer. Because of permanent complications from a life-threatening illness I incurred in late 2000, the cancer, a fairly rare type, was determined to be inoperable.

Instead, I underwent six weeks of daily radiation and chemotherapy, followed by three months of stronger chemotherapy. Although I was scheduled for six months of the latter, when the side effects became too great for me, I decided to end the treatments. That was in late May.

In June, I turned 63.

Taken altogether, I decided it was time for me to retire.

Oh, I plan to continue subscribing to the Kenosha News and reading it every day.

I know the journalists here, despite the challenges newspapers face, will work hard to cover the community as best they can. And I hope they will find the work they do fulfilling and rewarding, as did I.

I'll miss coming to work here, but I won't miss having to make the daily deadlines. I did this job every day for long enough.

Now, it's time for others to keep the fire lit.

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