

WATERTOWN

Cliffords' era at Daily Times ends

By **Steve Sharp**

steves@wdtimes

This year would have marked the 100th anniversary of the Clifford family's ownership of the Watertown Daily Times. There was, however, little in the way of celebration. The last of the clan with direct ties to the paper, Kevin Clifford, resigned this month to pursue other interests. He stayed on as director of audience development for a few months following the paper's acquisition by Adams Publishing Group

after 99 years of the Clifford's at the helm.

In light of ending his career with the Daily Times amidst massive changes at the paper, Kevin Clifford took time to reflect on his family's century-long tenure leading the publication, as well as his diverse personal involvement in its production.

"My first job at the paper was like many 12 year olds. I had a paper route," Clifford said. "Right before we went to all mail delivery in

See **TIMES**, Page A10

January of this year we had many (unstaffed) routes and the last papers I delivered that day was my old route. That was some sort of karma, I believe.”

When his sports activities got in the way of his paper route in 1983, Clifford, age 14, began working on Saturdays, part time, cleaning the newspaper’s offices.

“From there, I was in the mailroom counting out routes and collecting money from the carriers,” he recalled. “I was later a pressroom helper, taking papers off the press, filling ink trays and shafting newsprint rolls on the press.”

Clifford started full-time in 1992, straight out of college, having graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Stout with a degree in Business Administration.

“I wasn’t sure if I wanted to come back to Watertown, because I was looking for jobs in the Twin Cities, but with the persuasion of my dad (former Watertown Daily Times Publisher Jim Clifford), who convinced me to come back and see if I liked the newspaper business, I did,” Clifford said. “I had a background in graphic design and print-



Kevin Clifford

ing from Stout with some of the classes I took, so when I came back, I started in the production department. I would take the pages that were played out by Wally Nass and others and shoot the pages on a big camera to make negatives to burn plates for the press. Soon after I was there, pagination started instead of the manual pasteups. It was all on computers, like it is now.”

Clifford worked for a few months in the advertising department, when a sales person was on maternity leave.

“After that, I started in the business office to learn the ins and outs of the accounting and business offices’ functions under the business manager and my uncle, Ralph Krueger,” Clifford said.

Clifford continued in that position until he was named general manager in the early 2000s. He was

named associate publisher around 2012 and named editor and publisher in 2018.

Clifford said he has seen an incredible number of changes in the newspaper business during his tenure. Along with many in the newspaper trade, it is Clifford’s perception that the business changed drastically when the internet became prevalent in the early 90’s and webpages proliferated.

“But the biggest difference was the iPhone and all the hand-held devices after that,” he said. “You could get your news from your pocket and didn’t need to buy a paper anymore.”

In hindsight, he said, the Daily Times should have had customers pay for the news online, instead of giving it away for free.

“We are trying to get subscribers to buy subscriptions online to this day,” he said.

Clifford said the other big thing hindering newspapers in 2019 is where companies spend their advertising dollars.

“The newspaper used to be the place to advertise everything from cars, appliances and flooring, to furniture and rummage sales,” Clifford said. “Now there are so many different avenues, like Facebook, Craigslist, email marketing and direct mail to get customers in the door, making the newspaper less relevant.”

Clifford said there are many things he will miss about his work at the Daily Times.

“First and foremost I will miss the great people that put out the paper each day,” he said. “The Clifford family employed thousands of people over the years of ownership and those carri-

ers and employees were always the key to the success of the paper and very vital to having the paper in the Clifford family for 99 years. We had some great years getting the paper out to all the subscribers.”

He said he will not miss the struggles of running a newspaper in a changing climate in terms of how people get their news and advertising.

“The last 10 years were interesting, to say the least,” he said.

Clifford said he will always be proud of being part of the community and will remain involved in city affairs.

“I’m currently on the Main Street Board of Directors and I’m a member of the Watertown Rotary Club, past president of the Watertown Chamber of Commerce and I will continue to be with these organizations,” he said.

Future plans for Clifford are starting with him taking some time to “decompress.”

“We had a lot going on this year.

“Along with selling the newspaper, we also negotiated with the city to buy the building that the newspaper was in and we had to find another building,” he said of the Daily Times new offices in the historic, former Archie Monuments factory at 218 S. First St. “We had to renovate that building and move the newspaper, which just happened in the beginning of September.”

The Times Publishing Co. stills owns Wepco Printing on South Sixth Street, so Clifford will be focusing on expanding that business after taking some time off.

“I’m pursuing other job opportunities, as well,” he said.