



Counting the losses when local media disappears

By Tim Harper

For more than 22 years, Christian Marcoux reported on everything that moved in Vanier, a community in east Ottawa. For *Perspectives Vanier*, he reported on community events and fundraisers, anniversaries, and sporting events – in both official languages.

Marcoux took the photos, laid out the paper, and oversaw the graphic design. He delivered 1,000 of the 8,000-print run of the monthly by car to Vanier institutions, then delivered more on foot, and set up a network of 50 “newsies” who pounded the pavement delivering the other 7,000 copies – then featured them in his pages.

He established a promotion called “Where in the world is Perspective?” in

which readers would take the front page of *Perspectives Vanier* with them on their travels, posing with it in front of the Eiffel Tower or the plains of Tanzania or at the Great Wall of China. He handled the finances, billed his clients, drummed up advertising, decided where the ads would be placed, recorded the minutes of the meetings with his voluntary board, dropped off the bank deposits, took all the calls, and attended all the events.

“The buck stopped with me,” Marcoux said.

Then, in February, the lights went out. In a goodbye message, *Perspectives Vanier* told readers that multiple problems led to the newspaper’s demise: “There was a time when we would have dealt with

them like you eat an elephant: one small bite at a time. However, some problems just stick around no matter what you do – and they drag you down.”

According to the Local News Research Project, 631 local news outlets closed in 391 communities across Canada between 2008 and April 1, 2026. Of those, 447 (73 per cent) were community newspapers, including 115 that closed because they were merged with other newspapers to become regional publications. In the same time frame, 425 news outlets launched in Canada, but more than one-third of them subsequently closed. That leaves 270 that opened in 196 communities and remain open.

Green shoots among a grim ledger sheet.

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Loss of Local Media a Loss for Democracy

The federal government has a suite of measures to try to protect local media, and the philanthropic sector has stepped up to provide start-up and seed funding, but local outlets know well the peril of relying on government support or short-term funding to stay afloat. For too many, the day-to-day battle for survival becomes overwhelming and another goodbye message is published on the front page.

Some are neutered as part of contractions across a chain. Others have left the street for a strict digital life. Many have been hollowed out, and some, like *Perspectives Vanier*, just die. But what is lost when a local outlet locks its door?

The public square is erased. No longer do readers know about the triumphs and setbacks of their neighbours. Jimmy's two-goal performance in youth hockey goes unnoticed. Businesses lose a crucial way to advertise their services to residents, and Main Street takes a hit. Politicians escape accountability and scrutiny, council decisions are made without citizen input, and polarizing views are amplified on social media with no local reporting to soften the sharp edges. Disinformation and misinformation flourish. Every time local media dies, it chips away at the armour of our democratic institutions – and our democracy itself.

A study by the Public Policy Forum (PPF) identified federal ridings in this country that received virtually no local coverage of the candidates in the 2025 federal election. To combat that, the PPF, with the Rideau Hall Foundation and the Michener Awards Foundation, established the Covering Canada: Election 2025 fund and quickly raised and distributed \$525,000 to 40 local news outlets to allow them to better cover the election. Five foundations – Donner, Echo, Gordon, Metcalf, and Rossy – provided the funds.

"Across Canada, local journalists continue to do extraordinary work under increasingly difficult conditions," said Teresa Marques, president and CEO of the Rideau Hall Foundation. "Supporting them is not simply about preserving an industry; it's about encouraging civic participation, social cohesion, and the resilience of our democracy."

There have been other small victories. A network of lawyers who will work pro bono for cash-strapped local newsrooms was established by University of King's College, the Canadian Media Lawyers Association, and the Canadian Association of Journalists. The CBC is planning to hire 33 new local journalists this year. The Inspirit Foundation has launched a \$3-million Journalism Futures Fund with the backing of the McConnell, Sonor, and Euphrosine foundations.

The Canadian Heritage Department has funded a pilot project that would build a public directory of verified independent media outlets in Canadian communities. Mandated Ontario government advertising has provided a boost to community papers in that province, and there is a push for the federal and municipal governments to act likewise.

Canada-Wide Erosion of Local Media

Vanier has often received unsavoury publicity in the nation's capital – too often, and some would say unfairly, linked with crime stories. *Perspectives Vanier* tried to counter that.

"I didn't cover anything with a cherry on top; no cops or ambulances," Marcoux said. "I was not writing about the prostitute of the month or the break-and-enter of the month. My mandate was to shine a positive light on the people of Vanier."

Lucille Collard, the Liberal MPP for Ottawa-Vanier, not only used *Perspectives* to reach her constituents and read what her constituents were doing but, in her first term, she was one of Marcoux's "newsies," delivering copies every month with her children and the family dog, meeting members of her community.

"It did a lot to connect the community and highlight some of the good stuff that was happening," Collard said. "Everybody in Vanier could see themselves in it."

The newspaper provided "a sense of connection," she said. Its coverage of events would spark conversations among residents at local shops or among neighbours wherever they gathered.

"We have seen the centralization of power in politics," Collard said. "Local voices are being silenced, and people want to be heard. Local news gives them a sense of pride and provides a safe place."

Mayor Malcolm Brodie of Richmond, B.C., is stepping down after 25 years. He has seen the erosion of local media in his city of 240,000 and spoken about the danger of residents getting their information from social media. He has been dismayed about the lack of local reporters at council meetings. The print publication of the *Richmond News* was lost when it went digital at the end of 2023.

“It is very difficult to determine if you are really getting a message out to the people,” Brodie said. “The written media, in English and Chinese, has almost disappeared.”

Brodie uses social media to get his messages to voters and hired a Chinese communications person to try to reach the huge Chinese immigrant population in Richmond.

“I’m not sure that we stayed on our toes more back then than we do now, but you had an expectation of immediate reaction when something of consequence happened,” Brodie said. “It may take longer today, and there might not be the same level of interest in some items.”

It was easier for a politician to explain a point of view and get a message out, particularly if they were going against the grain, Brodie said.

“The entire media situation has changed and downsized since I’ve been mayor,” he said.

In Estevan, Sask., the *Estevan Mercury* published its last print edition on New Year’s Day 2025. Its reach went well beyond the community of 12,000, reaching up to 30,000 readers. Glacier Media closed it and integrated it into a regional digital service. The *Mercury* had served southeast Saskatchewan for 122 years, publishing its first edition before Saskatchewan was a province.

It closed weeks after Tony Sernick became mayor. His election was front-page news, but as a kid, the mayor said, when he and his buddies played hockey and other sports, they used to joke about making the front page of the *Mercury* someday.

“We are left with social media,” Sernick said. “But every Wednesday – the *Mercury* was our Wednesday staple.”

Estevan is left with coverage from regional *SaskToday*, published by Harvard Media, and a single radio station, DiscoverEstevan.

“There was that thing about sitting down with your newspaper with your coffee and tea,” Sernick said. “It’s just a feeling of loss. It feels like a family member is gone. There’s something missing.”

The city advertised on the back page, listing every local event, every week. It used to call for tenders for projects in the *Mercury*, and it now sees fewer tenders, Sernick said.

“Now events happen and you hear more and more people say, ‘Oh, I didn’t hear about that,’” he said. “There’s not a day goes by when you don’t hear ‘Boy, I miss the *Estevan Mercury*.’”

Radio Filling the Void

Some of this void is being filled by community radio. According to the Community Radio Fund of Canada (CRFC), there are 255 Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC)-licensed community, campus, and Indigenous radio stations in this country, broadcasting in 55 languages, including 15 Indigenous languages. While local print operations close, there are 14 community radio stations in the queue for licences from the CRTC, said Alex Freedman, executive director of the CRFC.

Community radio stations provide a lifeline during wildfires, floods, or other

catastrophes. They inform residents about local sporting events, flea markets, or town halls.

“They know where the potholes are,” Freedman said. “When there’s a fire, they know whose house is burning. They go to the soccer games. They know why a wall in the library is crumbling.”

And when we continually hear that big media can’t be trusted, Freedman said, “... when you walk in the grocery store and the journalist doing local stories is buying groceries at the same till, there’s a different connection there. Local media is the front guard against misinformation and disinformation.”

The CRFC is seeking \$30 million from the federal government that could provide \$85,000 to \$90,000 for each community, campus, and Indigenous radio station across the country – roughly the salary of a single CBC reporter. Only Indigenous radio stations above the 55th parallel – about one-third of the number of stations – are eligible for government help.

Freedman points to the Australian model, where the federal government grants almost \$20 million annually for community radio and \$12 million for Indigenous radio. The Australian government also announced a \$27-million top-up of its community broadcasting program over three years.

Amidst the ashes, there remains hope. But still, the pangs of loss predominate.

Make no mistake, Marcoux is glad to be retired. But he knows what is lost.

“I tried to shed a positive light on Vanier,” he said. “You lose a light when an outlet disappears.”

Tim Harper is a journalist and author with the Rideau Hall Foundation and The Philanthropist Journal.

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