2022 ANNUAL REPORT

How Athens County came together for local news by and for the community.
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Nearly a century of consolidation has left the majority of American newspapers in the hands of a few massive corporations. Decisions about business operations and news coverage that once were made by local people who knew their communities now are made in distant offices by executives who rarely, if ever, visit the towns they serve.

Amid seismic changes in the business environment, America lost 55% of its newsroom capacity in a little over a decade.

My co-founders and I experienced this firsthand here in Athens County, where we’ve lost 85% of newsroom capacity in the same period. The result: ghost newspapers that don’t have enough reporters to function effectively and news deserts that have no local sources of news.

The Athens County Independent is our response to that trend. In some ways, the nonprofit model is bringing journalism back to its historic roots as a purely local operation. Instead of an individual publisher, though, nonprofit newsrooms are owned in trust by their communities. Profits don’t accrue to shareholders; instead, that money helps the newsroom fulfill and expand its mission of public service journalism.

And where does our revenue come from? Mostly from our communities, in the form of donations, advertising and sponsorship. We don’t make anyone pay for news through subscription fees or paywalls. We simply ask that those who can, give what they can so that everyone can access trustworthy information.

Rather than baking a casserole or lending a tool, you help your neighbors get local news reported by people who call Athens County home.

We’re off to a good start on that score, as this report details. Building a new business, however, takes time.

If we were a for-profit, we’d have investors and access to credit to support us as we grow. As a not-for-profit, we need a different kind of investor, who will take their dividends in a healthy business environment, efficient and effective government, and residents who are fully engaged in our community’s civic and social life.

History has shown us that the only ones we can rely on are … us. Not the government, not corporations — just our families, our neighbors and our friends, wherever they may be. When we pull together, we achieve amazing things — look at what we’ve accomplished together so far! I can’t wait to see what we’ll do in the years ahead.

Cheers,

Corinne Colbert
Co-founder and editor
OUR 2022 TEAM

2022 STAFF & INTERNS

Corinne Colbert
Co-Director & Editor in Chief

Dani Kington
Co-Director & Staff Writer

Keri Johnson
Co-Founder and Staff Writer

Jen Bartlett
Co-Founder and Creative Director

Sam Stecklow
Staff Writer

Isabel Nissley
Intern

Malaya Tindongan
Intern
2022 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jen Seifert
President

Susan Urano
Vice President

Eli Flournoy
Treasurer

Tom Hodson
Secretary

Ilya Kogan

2022 PARTNERS

Social Enterprise Ecosystem
Business Coaching

Athens County Foundation
Fiscal Sponsor and Grantor

Athens Business Services, LLC
Legal Advisor

THE INN NETWORK
Member
2022 BY THE NUMBERS

Despite publishing for only four months in 2022, we published 53 pieces. Our first story was published on August 12, 2022.

Our top five stories, totaling 20,066 views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10,527</td>
<td>Something rotten at Hocking College?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,851</td>
<td>Hocking College rejects board overhaul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,845</td>
<td>Sick deer in Athens County: historic outbreak impacts hunting season</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,831</td>
<td>Proposed charter school with controversial connections could divert millions from local schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,607</td>
<td>Hocking College controversy: Caucus reconvenes, replaces board member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From August to December 2022, we reached:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Platform/Channel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>30,515</td>
<td>people via Facebook (grew by 371%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,307</td>
<td>people via Instagram (grew by 100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>541</td>
<td>followers on X (formerly Twitter) with over 110,000 impressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>Indy subscribers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fundraising:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$30,300</td>
<td>in individual donations from 450 individuals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$39,500</td>
<td>in grant funding</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our mission is to empower community engagement through accessible public service journalism. We asked our readers in Aug. 2023 how we’re doing. They said that because of our coverage, they:

**Civic life**
- 20% Attended a public meeting
- 19% Attended a political event or protest
- 15% Got in touch with an elected official or government employee

**Elections**
- 26% Voted in an election
- 24% Decided how to vote in an election

**Community support**
- 21% Donated to another local cause
- 46% Attended a community event
Our readers trust our reporting and value nonprofit news.

Readers answered/responded using a scale of 1–5, with 5 being most trust or most important, and 1 being the least.

### How much do you trust our reporting?

- 63.6% [5]
- 29.9% [4]
- 6.7% [3]
- 0.6% [2]
- 0.3% [1]

### How important is it that the Independent is free to all?

- 58.2% [5]
- 24.2% [4]
- 13.1% [3]
- 3.1% [2]
- 1.4% [1]

### How important is it that the Independent is locally owned and operated?

- 91.2% [5]
- 7.5% [4]
- 1.1% [3]
- 0.3% [2]
- 0.0% [1]
CORINNE: MAKING LEMONADE

I was fired from the Athens News on Feb. 28, 2022 — after just eight months as editor — because I wrote an editorial and posted on social media about deceptive advertising in our community’s corporate-owned newspapers. I sent a series of tweets announcing that I’d been fired, and why.

By the time I got home an hour or so later, the tweets had gone viral. Over the course of that afternoon, a couple of folks suggested that I could leverage all the interest in my firing to set up a truly local news operation. I texted Dani: What do you think about “Athens County Independent”? With a name in place, I set up a crowdfunding campaign on FreeFunder that raised almost $18,000.

We made some crucial connections through personal and professional networks. Some of those connections brought us much-needed guidance and legal advice. Others led to major grants from the Athens County Foundation and the John Glazer Impact Fund. By late spring, we had nearly $50,000 to launch the Independent.

Dani had quit the Messenger shortly after I was fired, so I asked them to join me. Keri and Jen said they’d throw in their lot with us and voila! We had our founding team.

JEN: A MASCOT IS BORN

When Corinne approached me about putting together the Athens County Independent, it really made me excited and honored that she and Dani chose me, along with Keri, to be the founding team.

We gathered at various locations around Athens and began our planning. We had our favorite spots: The Mine in Nelsonville, the Taproom and Casa, to name a few. You could feel the energy around us and know this was going to be a great thing.

As the Creative Director/graphic designer, I began to build the brand. It was very daunting because I knew this step was important because it’s what people will see and know us for. We chose an opossum for our mascot, and I created the drawing of Scoop that’s represented us ever since. For the most part, everyone loves Scoop!

DANI: TAKING THE PUBLISHING PLUNGE

After several months of research, meeting and brainstorming, we realized that generating sustainable revenue required that we actually have a product. We couldn’t publish a few fluff pieces here and there, either. While our capacity was limited, we needed to offer something to our community valuable enough to generate a wide and dedicated following.

We gained attention with our first story — posted in August 2022 — about controversial plans to open a charter school in Athens County. We really started to build a loyal audience, however, through in-depth, consistent reporting on controversies at Hocking College. Three of our top five stories in 2022 were about Hocking. People were not getting news about Hocking from other outlets, and certainly not with the depth we were able to provide.

By the time we launched our membership program in November, we had already begun cultivating the loyal audience we needed to stay afloat.

KERI: GROWING SUPPORT

It was astounding to see the community step up and support local news from the start. We have been so blessed by the enthusiasm, kind words and financial support from the Athens community and beyond — Ohio University alumni, former county residents, and local news supporters from across the country.

We work to create community through our membership program. We wanted it to be affordable and ensure that our members know that their donations — no matter the size — enable local, accessible news for all.

We launched the membership program in November with our first NewsMatch campaign. People who make a recurring donation, monthly or annually, get a monthly Member Bulletin newsletter, featuring an Inside Scoop, a behind-the-scenes narrative about the past month’s stories. Within two months, 125 readers had joined with a recurring donation.

In late 2022, we started on several months of hard work and interviews that led to our acceptance into the highly competitive Indigraf News Startup Fund, which provides direct grant funding, a robust marketing budget to grow our audience, newsletter and website development services, social media assistance and more.
Support from the News Startup Fund, along with our growing membership and the launch of our advertising and sponsorship program early in 2023 was pivotal in allowing us to begin more regular publication.

**CORINNE: NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET**

Building a successful business takes time — up to five years, according to business experts. That means we still have several years before we can achieve our first goal: a financially sustainable business. And to work toward that, we need:

1. Full-time staff with adequate pay and benefits. Of five people on payroll in 2023, only two are full-time. To report news effectively (and daily!), we need everyone working full time. And staff must have health benefits, which we do not currently provide.

2. Dedicated development and sales staff. Grants and small donations got us this far. To be financially sustainable, we need a stronger advertising and sponsorship program and major gifts. That requires hiring additional staff whose sole responsibility is fundraising and sales.

All of this will cost upwards of $450,000 per year.

Grants comprise about half of the revenue for most nonprofit news outlets, but southeast Ohio has much less wealth to support major philanthropy than other parts of the state. Building a sustainable local news outlet here will truly take a village — of both individuals and organizations.

The single most important thing most readers can do to support our work is make a monthly or annual gift at a level that is meaningful to them.

**KERI: WHY THIS MATTERS**

I became a journalist because I knew my community in rural Appalachian Ohio was not represented in national media — and really, not even in local media.

Our local newspaper didn’t report hard, investigative news. It didn’t talk about my neighbors and our fight for county water; nor did it report on several people dying in police custody in the county jail, or the astounding lack of resources for poor families and children when it came to food and transportation.

Its capacity was limited and we were hurt by it. We still are. The whole region is. But local news matters, because you matter.

We envision a future that captures our stories — big and small — for the record. Where everyone has access to news, regardless of their ability to pay for it. Where you know the people reporting your news because we’re part of the same community and care about its future. It’s a future with sustainable journalism jobs, so aspiring reporters don’t have to leave home, heritage, culture, family and community to survive. It’s one where we can stay and fight for a better Appalachia.

Building that future is hard, but it’s fundamental to our democracy, our culture and our community.
2022 FINANCIALS

Gross Revenue: $65,728
Net revenue: $26,535

Sales: 0.5%
Grants: 53%
Donations from individuals: 46.5%

Donation revenue
Annualized value of recurring donations: $15,129

Recurring: 22.7%
One-time: 77.3%
Expenditures: $39,193

- Payroll: 70%
- Advertising and marketing: 4.1%
- Contract and professional fees: 7.3%
- Rent: 1.5%
- Office expenses: 17.2%
2022 DONORS

Bold text indicates our inaugural donors, who gave as part of our FreeFunder campaign.

ORGANIZATIONS
($5,000 or more)
Athens County Foundation
John Glazer Impact Fund

ORGANIZATIONS
(Less than $5,000)
Casa Nueva
Nelsonville Community Foundation
West End Ciderhouse

MEMBERS
(as of Dec. 31, 2022)
Bret Adams
Elizabeth Amoriya
Jennifer Armstrong
Carol Ault

Jen Bartlett
Josh Bartlett
Marlene Bartlett
Joshua Bear

Luke Bentley
Gillian and David Berchowitz
Kathy Berry
Nicholas Bochenek

Martha Boyce
Sue and Alan Boyd
John Brennan
Kristi Buffington
Becky Bunting

Heather Cantino
Dana Carlson
Michael and Jo Carpenter
Linda Clark
Susan Cole

Tanya Conrath
Nancy Cooper
Sarah Cornwell
Crissa Cummings

Kirsten and Geoff Dabelko
Deborah Daniels
Doug Debrick

Robert Delach
Berry Dilley
Mitchell Farley

Jack and Leslie Flemming
Eli Flourney

Katherine Forney
Norman and Maryann Garber
Andrea Gibson
Ryan Gillion

Peggy Gish
Tacy Greenwood
Elizabeth Guarino
Jim Hart
Brent and Sarah Hartman
Lisa Heinz

Matt Hendrickson
Heather Hively

Terry and Debbie Hogan
Ms. Kristine Hoke
Theo J. Hutchinson
Janice Huwe
Chris Innis
Badger Johnson
Heather Johnson
James Johnson
Mollie Jones
Katherine Kelley
Nicole Kellogg

Katherine Kieninger
Katherine King
Laura Kingston
Shannon Kiser
Zion Klinger
Regan Neviska
Faith Knutsen
Madison Koenig
Ilya Kogan

Hannah Kopp
Damon Krane
Shelley Lieberman
Ted Linscott
Brian & Lindsey Long
Jessica Loomis
Christina Lord's

Benjamin Marakowitz-Svigals
Ariel Martian
Tim Martin
Michael McBride
Jan McGarry
Davey McNelly
Wendy McVicker
Lauren Miller
Adriane Mohlenkamp

Ann Moneyenny
Scott Moody
Theresa Moran
Sue Morrow
William Myers
Abigail Neff
Gregory Newton
Chris O'Loughlin

Sherri Oliver
Rebecca Onion
Shawn Ostermann
Delia Palmisano
Christopher Payne
Tim Peacock
Alexandria Polanosky
McCray Powell
Ryan Powers
Shannon Pratt-Harrington

Drea Reany
Mary Reed
Thomas Reid
Robert and Kay Rhyan
Sarah Riddlerbarger

Kelee Riesbeck
Susan Righi
Lynda Rose
Jim Salzman
Kelly Sauber
Jim Scarff

Lucy Schwallie
Jennifer Seifert
Sheila Shafer
Wenda Sheard and Richard Thieret
Susan Shroad
Sasha Sigetic

Terry Smith
Cynthia Snide
Rob Somers
Salem Spinelli
Solveig Spjeldnes
Patricia Stokes

Cita Strauss
Terra Talamh
Victoria Taylor
Nick Tepe
Rachel Terman
Susan Urano
Brian Vadakin
Emily Vique
Melissa Wales

Matt Weeks
Myke and Regan Welch
Susan Westenbarger
Marsha Willan
Jasper Wirtshafter
John Wryst

Rees Wyant
Raymond Zielinski

ONE-TIME DONORS

Lauren A
Gerald A
Michael Abbott
Andrew Abernathy
Kelly Coon Adami
Jeffrey Aicher

Ashley Alderman
Liane Allen
Michael Anderson
Katherine Anderson
Stephanie Ares

Marcie Baker
Charlie and Natalie Barman
Gary Bartlett
Damien Bawn
The Beans

Kathryn Becker
Daniel Bell-Moran
Christopher Belz
Paul Benedict

Laura and Tom Bennett
Elizabeth Bjork
Lora Blankenship
Laura Blazyk
David Blum

Diane Blyth
Hank Bond
Barbara Bootz
Amy Borganstron
Michael Bothwell
Rachel Boughton
Olivia Bower

Martha Boyce
Robert Boyce
Anna Wright and Brad Jokisch
Jamie Brewer

Daniel Briere
Thomas Brincefield
Hilarie Burhans

Jenny Byers
Susan Calhoun
John Campbell
Phil Campbell
Heather Cantino
Joe Capozzi
Janet Carleton

Michael Catheline
Chris Chambers
Josh Chandler

Chris Chmiel
Carissa Christensen
Caleb Chung
Debra Cleaver
Linda Cochran and Richard Duff
 Carla Colbert

Janice Collins
Luke Colpo
Garth Coombs
Anne Cooper

Gary Cordingley
Mary Costello
Cassie Costillow
Lori Crook
Samuel E. Crowl

Kelly Czack
Anaya D
Patrick Daughterty
Kevin Davies

Journée Davis
David Davison
Sydney Dawes
Shelley Delaney

Signe Denbow
Christine DePriest

Berry Dilley
Meg Dillon
Edward Dinell
Kathleen Dobie
Phillip Dodson

Cathy Duke
Rachel Dumaine

J E
Ashley Eastman
Pamela Ecker

Vicky Eggleston

Dan Eickholt
OUR MISSION
The Athens County Independent empowers community engagement through accessible public service journalism.

OUR VISION
We will be Athens County’s trusted, go-to news source, empowering all residents to drive change toward a more fair, connected and participatory community.