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BDN Editor Bill Barth to leave post amid restructuring

By HILLARY GAVAN Senior staff writer

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Barth

Hillary Gavan



Barth
File photo

BELOIT — After more than 40 years on the beat in Greater Beloit, longtime Beloit Daily News Editor Bill Barth is leaving his post effective Nov. 20.

APG Media of Southern Wisconsin, which in 2019 purchased several daily and weekly newspapers across southern Wisconsin, will expand the role of Sid Schwartz, editor of The Gazette in Janesville, to oversee newsroom operations in Janesville and Beloit.

“As part of a restructuring for the southern Wisconsin region, several positions within our regional newsroom were realigned. The editor position at the Beloit Daily News held by Bill Barth was changed to a regional position, which is held by Sid Schwartz, regional editor for APG Media of Southern Wisconsin,” said Orestes Baez, APG regional president.

Schwartz spent three years early in his career working at the Beloit Daily News as a reporter and later as city editor.

“Beloit was my first daily newspaper job, and I learned much of what I know about journalism from Bill,” Schwartz said. “Bill is a first-class, hard-nosed journalist, and we’ll work hard to keep up the standard he set for the newspaper.”

Baez said Barth is a fixture in the community.

“Bill has a long history in Beloit. We appreciate all that he has done, and we’re confident Bill will continue to be part of our future writing team,” Baez said.

The changes were prompted by the impact of the coronavirus on business and the company’s need to respond. While many media companies are reducing their commitments to newsrooms, Adams Publishing Group continues to invest in newsrooms and local journalism wherever possible, Baez said.

“Sid and I have been friends and colleagues for more than 30 years, and the newspapers are in good hands with his leadership,” Barth said. “In the mid-1980s, Sid joined our team in Beloit and worked as a reporter and editor until he took a role in Janesville, where over the next 30 years he earned the top executive role at a proud and fine newspaper. Beloit deserves good journalism, and there’s no doubt Sid has the experience and professionalism to lead that effort.”

Barth has had a long and award-filled career in journalism. He served as president of the Associated Press Editors Association in 1999. In 2016, he was inducted into the Wisconsin Newspaper Hall of Fame during ceremonies held in Madison, and in 2019 the Beloit Historical Society inducted him into its Hall of Fame.

Barth began his career in journalism at the Times-Courier in Charleston, Illinois, shortly after graduating from Southern Illinois University in Carbondale with a journalism degree. In 1976, he accepted a position at the Beloit Daily News, being named managing editor in 1979 and being appointed editor in 1994. Over the years, Barth has been recognized many times by the Wisconsin Newspaper Association for writing the best editorials and columns in the state, as well as for investigative reporting. In the spring of 2019, the Daily News was named “Best of Division” among newspapers of its size by the Wisconsin Newspaper Association.

Barth also has served on many boards and committees for community organizations and nonprofit groups, including the Stateline Boys and Girls Club, the Greater Beloit Chamber of Commerce, the Downtown Beloit Association, the United Way, the Salvation Army, the American Red Cross and the Peter A. Larsen Foundation.

Barth said one of his best moments was being the winner of a national Associated Press award for a Watergate-era scoop from an interview with President Nixon’s top domestic adviser, John Ehrlichman, in which Ehrlichman became the first Nixon insider to confirm a deal had been struck for President Gerald Ford to issue a full pardon to Nixon in exchange for his resignation. The story went out across the country and was carried widely by other media.

“It was pretty cool for a little paper in Beloit, Wisconsin, to put together a package of reporting that became a national story on what was arguably one of the most tumultuous times in American history in the Watergate era,” Barth said.

Barth said the most gratifying thing about his long career in the business was the pride and satisfaction of working along so many wonderful people, from talented journalists and the advertising professionals who made it possible to those who printed and delivered the newspaper and other staff who helped produce the product.

“We live in an era today that is trying to decide if it still embraces good reporting or if it even believes in the ability of journalists to provide a common factual basis for society. I have always believed in the mission of journalism over decades and in working with hundreds if not thousands of journalists, I would say to readers: You can trust these people. They are professionals. They are devoted to fact, they are committed to accountability in high places and that I do not see how democracy functions as it was intended to function without the power of independent reporting,” Barth said.

Former Beloit Daily News Publisher of 25 years Kent Eymann commended Barth for his unwavering commitment to reporting the truth without fear or favor. Despite challenges to the newspaper industry, Eymann said, Barth remained committed to a newspaper’s role as a community watchdog and was a skilled orator and writer.

“When he dug into something, it was fun to read, and you always felt informed,” Eymann said.

“There is an old saying about journalists like Bill Barth—he has printer’s ink in his blood,” said News Editor Clint Wolf.

Wolf said Barth has been a part of the Beloit Daily News and the Beloit area community for 44 years, but not because his position brought him money, fame or power.

“He stuck with his profession because he truly loves and enjoys it. He has been an inspiration to me and many other journalists through the years. Although he is stepping back from his day-to-day duties at the Daily News, I have no doubt he will continue to be part of the Greater Beloit community,” Wolf said.

Sports co-editor Jim Franz, who worked with Barth for more than 40 years, said they both have gone from banging out stories on typewriters and editing with a pencil to the modern technology of today.

“He may grumble about it, but he also embraced all the changes and dragged me along, usually kicking and screaming. He would say that the evolution of journalism can be a good thing if we made it so,” Franz said.

Franz said Barth gave the sports department a lot of freedom although he would occasionally remind them that the ultimate commitment will always be to the readers.

Hillary Gavan