

Diane Newberry

Hometown: North Smithfield, RI

School: University of ND

Internship: Beulah Beacon



My summer internship at BHG Inc. reporting for the Beulah Beacon and the Hazen Star was a great introduction to small-town reporting. My previous reporting experience has been in a university setting or in larger markets, and small North Dakota towns are particularly foreign to me. The size of the office was advantageous for learning because I could work closely with the Beacon's editor-in-chief, Kate. I feel pretty confident about my writing abilities, but I am still learning about how to find sources and how to interview them to get the best information. Working closely with Kate, I could go to her when working on stories and ask who to start talking to about different subjects. Our conversations revealed the kinds of networks she's developed over her four years in Beulah and her background knowledge of the town was super helpful. In watching how Kate navigates some of the small-town politics I ran into during reporting this summer, I saw an excellent example of how to keep journalistic integrity while also balancing relationships with people you will have to use as sources again and again (let alone regularly see at the supermarket, etc.).

In my first few weeks, I stuck to what I know: reporting and writing, contributing some story ideas as I got to know the area better. As the summer progressed, I started to learn more about the editing and running of the newspaper. In planning meetings with Kate, I got to know how to plan ahead for events and how much material is needed for a typical issue. In my second-to-last week in Beulah, I took charge of the editing process, creating and updating the story list and proofing all of the pages. Because I had support from Kate and the graphic designers and knew I could go to them with any questions, I didn't have any panic; it was an instructive week.

My favorite stories to report on have been the hands-on ones, where there was an event or location I could go to in person. I feel like these assignments got me out into the community and gave me a better idea of the people and culture, while also giving the paper visibility around town. A particular favorite of mine was the anniversary of a rural church. The pastor sent a lovely letter to the editor complimenting me on how well I had captured the congregation. In my time at the Beacon, I realized how important representation is to people and how a huge part of my job is making sure my representations of people and intuitions are fair, accurate, and colorful. If you tell a small town that something is one way, you better be able to back that claim up, because people are direct and open with their opinions.

Overall, I believe my time at the Beacon has prepared me well for my upcoming editing position at the McLean County Independent. Seeing the issue of the Beacon that I took charge of come into fruition on newsprint was incredibly rewarding, and hopefully I'll carry that feeling with me each week in Garrison.