

Local News  
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**WGVU's Jennifer Moss:**

Your'e listening to *Tilting the Earth's Praxis*, a weekly discussion of important issues that impact civil society. With host Salvatore Alaimo.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Welcome to this week's episode of *Tilting the Earth's Praxis*. Our topic is the importance of local news in civil society. Our first guest, Gibbs, is a GVSU alum. Tom Norton is the executive director of WKTV Community Media in Wyoming, Michigan. He's been in television for 31 years. He's worked for a local NBC affiliate and speed television in Los Angeles. WKTV has earned three state Emmy awards and Tom is now stewarded w Kate TV towards its 50th anniversary, giving, it making it one of the oldest community media TV stations in the nation. Welcome, Tom.

**Tom Norton**

Thank you for having me.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Our other guest, Chuck Plunkett, is the director of Colorado University News Corp. Chuck's been a professional journalist for more than 24 years, having done stints at the Denver Post, the Pittsburgh Tribune, Review, the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, and he holds an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Pittsburgh. And by the way, you should check out Chuck's TED Talk when you get a chance. Welcome, Chuck.

**Chuck Plunkett**

Thank you Salvatore.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

All right, Tom, we're going to start with you. Give us give us an understanding of what you do at WKTV and how the station fills this hole of this gap. I know in your bio, you talk about this local news desert. So, what is WKTV doing to, you know, take care of this desert, fill the gap in the hole, and bring local news to the citizens of your community?

**Tom Norton**

Well, you know, interestingly enough, we, we can't fill the hole because the hole is so big. West Michigan is now in a news desert. And what is that is and these news deserts are cropping up all over the United States in pockets. And what we see that obviously everybody understands what's happened with the French news media with regard to. That the Internet and how it's impacted revenue and how they've had to do massive

layoffs. The, the what we did is we launched the WKTV Daily Journal in 2013, and almost immediately we noticed there was an intense response from the community that there was now actual hyperlocal reporting. We used to have, up until now, I would say up until about 2016, we had another hyper local news operation here in West Michigan called Advanced Newspapers and Salvatore or now you remember that. And there was *The Advance Wyoming*, *The Advance Kenwood*, *Advance Walker*, the all these little local things. And then poof, they went away. And, that was a for profit venture. But it had been around for many, many years, and that went away. So now virtually the only place that people can get very local news is Facebook. Or from the local television stations, which is a 30 minute newscast and each package is a minute 30. And, you know, it's just not able to do it and it's not going to do it. It's not their job solely. And so anyway, so when it would be advanced newspapers went down, there was even a more critical need for the journal. Now, we only cover primarily two communities, the city of Wyoming and the city of Kentwood. But those two together are about 120, 130,000 people. So there are two decent sized communities and it keeps our little news room busy. We have two full time creative editors and we have a staff of six reporters and everybody stays pretty busy and we're really able to drill down into the local community and we think we're doing a really great thing. You know, and I bang that drum whenever I'm at a conference or whatever. And I always encourage the local community media centers if there's anything you can do. Start a local hyperlocal news operation in your community. So that's the thumbnail sketch now.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

Thanks, Tom. We appreciate that. So, Chuck, does this story sound familiar to you? Is it representative of what's going on across the country in terms of local news?

### **Chuck Plunkett**

Yeah, absolutely. And it's a, it's an awfully sad development. But, but since, since the model for advertising flipped on us in the early 2000s, we've seen that, you know, thousands of newspapers close. And these news deserts pop up all over. I saw it firsthand at the *Denver Post*. You know, when I started at the *Denver Post*, it was around the middle of 2003. We had nearly 300 journalists in the in the newsroom. And nearby. Figuratively speaking, across the street, we had the *Rocky Mountain News*. We were still a two newspaper state and they had upwards of 250. When I say the advertising model slips, you still you can count on 75 to 80% of your of your profit coming from ads and the remainder you would make up in things like subscriptions. And by several years later, that had after the dawn of the you know, the 21st century's popular Internet and so forth, and the innovations of things like Craigslist and targeted micro advertising and those kinds of things. Advertising went away at newspapers, those big, beautiful, expensive newspaper ads that people loved to, you know, long ago loved to see and, and to gauge their buying habits by went away. And so now you're trying to just reply. We rely far more on subscribers and your your advertising revenue is just reduced your classifieds and all that go away. So we saw the *Rocky Mountain News* go out of business by 2000, in the 2009, and then the *Denver Post* went in and out of a bankruptcy. We were part of one of the largest newspaper chains in the country. And in late 2010, 2011, it was taken over by a hedge

fund. The hedge fund at first, like a lot of places, tried to figure out how the Internet was supposed to work and how digital delivery of news could work in a profitable way. But we also started to see the other means by which they intended to handle the loss of income, which was dramatic for Coley and cuts to the newsroom. And by the middle of by the by the start of 2018, that nearly 300 journalists that we had at the *Denver Post* alone had dwindled down to 100. And, then it was cut even further by 30 more positions, which is which is my story that I tell them that TED talk about the Denver rebellion and so forth. But now the *Denver Post* has less than 60 or fewer than 60 journalists out there. A lot of mom-and-pop newspapers are struggling if they're still available at all. And you've got, as Tom was describing, sadly, you've got these news deserts, these pockets of, of areas of the community and of states and regions that are hardly getting any coverage at all.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

So, Chuck, what do you say to the person that maybe discounts or dismisses this and says, well, look, you're an old fart, you get with the times, nobody reads newspapers anymore. I mean, we could probably go down the list of comments you've heard. What do we tell these people that say these things and portray a picture that this is really not problematic. It's just technology and personal preferences taking over?

### **Chuck Plunkett**

Yeah, well, you know, to those folks I understand where they're coming from. Things do change. They're not new. Technology comes and old technology dies and disappears. And I'm a survival of the fittest kind of a person. But for our nation to survive, we need a functioning democracy. We need a healthy democracy. And the way that democracies work are that they have to have a watchdog. You have to have really capable people keeping up with the people who are in power or who are trying to be in power to speak up for the rest of us, for the poor, those of us who don't have we don't have that kind of power, who don't have a voice. We can look to good old founding father Thomas Jefferson, who said if he was given the choice between having a country without a government but with newspapers, that would be acceptable to him, that you could do it, you could manage a democracy if without a strong government or without a government and all, as long as you had a really solid free press out there competing for the news, looking for scandal, holding the power to account and those kinds of things, our it's baked into our, our originating documents. The First Amendment is was meant to ensure that we had this kind of protection. The freedom of the press was meant to be what gave us the country that we now enjoy. And Thomas Jefferson was no big fan of the papers of his time. They gave him trouble just like the current rest gives Joe Biden and, and before that, Donald Trump trouble. Right? It's just part of what we do. But even knowing that the press caused a bit heartburn for him because he had to answer hard questions and because he knew he was being held to account, he knew that that was the beauty of it. And so when we sit back and we talk about technology changing and times changing and all that, we have to realize some key things. And that is if you're going to own a newsroom, you need to understand that it's something that's not just a normal business. It's not You're not just making a profit. You're doing something that is vital to the sustainability of your of your country and of your town and of your region.

And we also need to realize that the great news that we grew up with or that we had coming into the 21st century was always artificially funded. It was never paying for itself. Even back in the good old days, it was what the great newsrooms were built on the backs of strong advertising and on alternate revenue. And so, if we're going to and if we look around, if you guys if our listeners are paying attention to what goes on in the world, I bet many of them, if they're paying attention to a podcast, is as prestigious as this one would, would probably say, the times aren't so good. We've got a lot of mixed. We've got a complicated public debate, and it's not one that's always very intelligent or always very useful. And that's because we're seeing the decline and news and specifically in the decline of local news. People have gone to silos. They're looking at social media. They're not looking at professional journalists who are raised learning best practices in places like I teach at CU Boulder.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

So based on Chuck's comments, Tom, give us a sense. What? What is it that you guys cover, Debbie? KCTV So the citizens of Kentwood and Wyoming are aware of what's going on in their communities?

### **Tom Norton**

Well, you know, to, to Chuck's point a little bit, you know, we. Our operation isn't. For instance, we do not cover politics. The reason we don't cover politics is we don't have the staff to do it. Politics. We, we began covering politics early on and it quickly took all the oxygen out of the room. In other words, it took all the staff time and, you know, staff working 8 hours a day and a lot of other stories were not getting covered. So we began that diversification of really covering other things within the community, all of the other things that were being ignored, and then bringing the professional journalistic technique to telling these stories and reading out a lot of the stuff that you see on social media and getting a lot of that out of the narrative and what the Journal has become, the WKTV Journal has become. We like to think it's become like a community living room where people can learn about what's going on in their community. You know, we primarily cover two suburban communities that are pretty much for the most part pretty squeaky clean. I mean, there's not like there just isn't a lot going on in the city of Wyoming, in the city of Kentwood that's scandalous. Nothing that we know of. And, nothing that we hear of. And, but be that as it may. The, the importance of the journal being here was so underscored when the advance newspapers closed. Now, I should say this to anyone who's listening and watching who might have an inkling to begin a community news operation of their own. One of the great resources that they can tap into is what benefited us, which was when the Grand Rapids Press reduced in size so much, they gave massive layoffs, and we were able to hire some of their best reporters. And it was a real coup for us. And, I think it's one of the reasons why the Journal does so well is because the writing is so good and we do a lot of a lot of investment into local sports because there's no way the local sports scene could be covered by does. It just doesn't cover it anymore. And a parent throwing a game or of throwing a couple of video clips up on Facebook is about all they would get. And, so we have a real following because of that. So there's all these little niches that different operations can plug into to provide this coverage for their community. That's really, that's really missing in so many places.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Now, Tom, Chuck painted as the picture of how local newspapers. Or going away or currently being threatened. What, what can you say about public access TV or community media? Is that world being challenged? Is it being threatened? Threatened by anything? What's going on there? Well, of course. Everything. Yeah. I mean, there's some. Some gigantic or good outer space has a hold of planet Earth, and it's just shaking everything up. Nothing is. Nothing is what it used to be. So everybody is experiencing challenges to funding. You know, one of the funding resources for community media is cable franchise fees. And I don't know if Chuck's familiar with that at all. But throughout every community across America, you have cable franchise fees. Well, the, the big one of the biggest challenges to community media is that the, the technological revolution that's taken place once HD television came about, that people began canceling their cable and signing up for streaming services. Well, that franchise fee is based on the subscribers. Subscribers signal traveling down the street that you, the taxpayer, pay for. Now the stream that the cable company is also sending down that wire is not a part of that franchise. So, the money that they're making off of the stream does not contribute to the franchise fee, even though it uses the exact same right away that the taxpayer pays for. So that situation has to be rectified because, you know, obviously, like everybody across the country, we are seeing our revenue gradually go down, down as people migrate away from subscription services and over to streaming services. And I will say parenthetically that it's almost kind of interesting that they're almost paying the same amount of money. You know, they're, they're, they're doing it initially because they want to save money, but by the time they're subscribed, all their individual streams, plus their Internet bill, they're pretty much at the same spot. So don't cancel your cable.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Yeah, a public service announcement for cable. Yeah. So, So, Chuck, swing it back to you for a moment. And Tom, feel free to jump in in any moment here. I want to I want to tie these things back to what you were talking about, the importance and role of local news in our democracy. More specifically, what can you say about why it's important for citizens to know what's going on in their communities? What more can we say about that?

**Chuck Plunkett**

Well, to take it out of the realm of politics for a second. Thanks, since that seems useful. When I first started at the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, the first state paper, one of my early beats was to cover police. The question about police in the country all these years later rages how to think about police departments, departments. There's the question of defund the police or what have you. Well, certainly we need to help reform a culture that too often is violent in ways that we don't seem to understand it or it messes with our society. One of the reasons is our local news operations aren't covering the police in the same way that they used to, because they can't because we don't have as many boots on the ground by far. Consider this. I would start I did the night, the night cop. I would start at three, 3 p.m. and work from midnight. I would take the scanner from the day guy

and at the end of my shift, plot the scanner into be recharged for the for the day. The next day I would go to the Little Rock police station and look through police reports to talk to detectives. Now, we'd go to the north, Little Rock Police station, do the same thing. I would go to the, the sheriff's office and do the same thing. I would, based on those reviews of records, I would write about local crime and create a 15 to 20 inch story hour, you know, 10 to 15 little small briefs about crime in the area in our in those cities and in our county. It wasn't just me. Obviously, I was talking about the day guy and I was talking about others. I carried a scanner. And if something big happens, a murder or those kinds of things, we would, we would all divert and other folks would come in. When you've got some when you've got a staff that can keep up day by day, day shift, night shift that, you know, nearly 24/7. You're noticing patterns, you're finding out if there are certain cops that get in trouble more than other cops. You're finding out if there are certain parts of town that are more prone to drive by shootings. You're finding out if there are parts of town that have dangerous intersections that lead to fatalities. Are areas near a school where schoolchildren are getting hit more often than than in other parts of your city? You're also developing relationships with patrolmen, with detectives, with chiefs and those kinds of things. And so, when police are making decisions, when policies are being enacted and so forth, you've got a community resource that understands the inside and out of that operation. It even comes down to weird little things. You'll walk in one day to look at police reports. You'll notice that the guy at the desk is normally a patrol guy that you see out on the street late at night. Why is he at the desk? Why are we paying someone a patrolman salary to sit at a desk and welcome people? Well, you ask some questions, you find. But he's totaled three cop cars because he has sleep apnea so bad, he keeps falling asleep behind the wheel. That's good reporting, right? You're going to mention to that level of detail. Now, think about that. That's just one beat. Think about that at City Hall. Think about it at the state legislature. Think about it at the governor's office. Think about it on your sports teams. Think about it. You're up your high school education, your school boards, elementary school education, your arts and culture, all that kind of stuff. You've got reporters spread out, paying attention to all those things. In the old days, we used to also Armstrong editorial boards that would look at all that coverage and say, Wow, what can we do at this to make a lot of sense? How can we, like, talk about the most important policies and issues before our readers and before our residents at any given time and help the community understand and make sense of itself? You can't have a great city if you don't have a great newspaper or a great editorial board helping you understand the issues in in-depth ways. And so, it's those kind of things that break my heart when we talk about this kind of stuff, guys, It's just you lose that. And look at flash forward 2023 and you see let's go back to police, the headlines that are routinely coming out of cities big and small with police shootings and so forth, and the mistrust and the doubt and, and the acrimony between the public and those who are meant to serve. You spread that across all kinds of other areas and you realize why our civic discourse is often so poisoned and so not and so toxic.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

So, Tom, do you guys cover the local government at WKTV?

**Tom Norton**

We cover where we are funding works with them. Okay. So we we cover the local government, you know, with regard to, you know, all the updates, everything that they need to have covered or whatnot. We are very much a partner with them and both cities and, you know, we, we have a proud partnership for these last 50 years. And when they started there, Chuck had mentioned with regard to like, you know, that struck a deal struck a chord with me was that I've noticed since the Journal began in 2013. I know so much more of what's going on in these two communities than I ever did before. And that's because of the reporters that we have here. They really know the street level. They know what's going on. And it reflects in their writing and reflects in their reporting. It reflects in what you know when we sit down an editorial. I may have the inclination that the story might go this way, but then they'll say, no, no, no, no, because of this X, Y, or Z happened. That's, that's a that's a red herring. It's really where this is really, you know, and that's great reporting. And going back to that, that's the beautiful, beautiful thing about Belmont. A beautiful thing. But that's the, the I guess the beneficial thing, for lack of a better term, of being able to hire these real professional reporters from the the local papers here who have been laid off. And, you know, they're more than happy to be back, you know, reporting again. And we're very, very happy to have.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

My my colleagues in public administration and academics who study local government have told me repeatedly that if, if you had this imaginary pie chart of what impacts our lives from government, the largest slice is from local government.

**Chuck Plunkett**

Oh, no doubt it.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

But unfortunately, and I would say sadly to a point, especially with the discourse all the time and attention is on White House, Supreme Court, Congress, that even when you say the word government, I mean, yeah, I think I think people psychologically gravitate automatically to that, whereas their lives really are being more impacted by local government. So, I think you're providing an important service to keep people informed,

**Tom Norton**

Keep them informed, keep them aware of what's going on. Yes.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Yeah, Chuck go ahead.

**Chuck Plunkett**

Absolutely. So here is a great example of that in Denver. It's really easy for someone to put something on the ballot. It's easy for citizens to launch a ballot measure. Painful. I mean, dumb, easy. And so year after year, lately, we've had folks who put things on the ballot knowing that. Not knowing that popular vote can override what a city Council of elected Representatives would likely do with all the checks and balances that normally

are in place with representative democracy. Right. So they're not the ballots that are representative democracy. But it's it's what Thomas Jefferson would have been afraid of, the fear of mob rule. And you put something before the ballot that says, okay, Denver, a sidewalk system is subpar. And it is the and there have been efforts to fix the sidewalks and they need to be efforts to fix the sidewalks. But it's a thorny issue and it's a complicated issue. This ballot measure that got put before voters was a really stupid one. And without going into all the reasons why. I'll just ask you to trust me on that and say it's going to cost residents who own property a lot of money. It's going to take decades before it ever solves any of the problems, and it's going to do it in a way that costs way more money than if you just imposed implemented something a little bit saner. And yet it passed. Didn't pass by much, but it passed by enough. And so now we're saddled with this ridiculous, you know, in my opinion, this ridiculous new ordinance. Think about that happening again and again and increasingly pricey things and increase increasingly invasive things to the way you enjoy your life and your livelihood. And you can quickly see how with you don't have a strong system of newspapers covering what's going on and making sure that your readers understand what's going on. These weird kinds of things are going to keep happening.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

I want I want to build off of that because I want to push this a little. On the concepts of civic engagement, civic participation. If local news goes away, is that not going to make it more difficult for citizens to engage in, participate in local matters and in their local government?

### ***Chuck Plunkett***

Yeah. I mean, what? Well, well, one way it's going to make it difficult for puffer birds or local citizens. You know, we hear the term citizen journalists, for example. We Oh, yeah, okay. So we'll all just be journalists now and we don't have to have newspapers. We can we've all got social media accounts. We're all publishers now. Yeah, well, I teach journalism. And I see now I'm reminded of how hard it is to learn how to be a good journalist. You know, you forget when you're in your fifties what how hard it was when you were in your twenties or your late teens taking those matters up. I now have very smart students and the concepts that you learn to be a good, decent journalist, ask the right questions, follow best practices and ethics so that you're making sure that you're not libeling someone or are committing some awful journalistic indiscretion or violation. And that's before you even get to the basics of how do you do basic good writing and basic communication. It's something that takes even very smart people many years to develop and to do well. When Tom's talking about the professional news writers that are helping his organization. That's what I'm talking about. It takes years to develop that kind of talent, and it's just not true that we can just be this army of citizen journalists who, because we are all so smart and because we have law degrees or accounting degrees or medical degrees, understand how to report the news, because we don't it's much more thorny and complicated than that. And it costs a lot of money to staff a talented and experienced newsroom.

### ***Tom Norton***



And the community is richer for it because the reporting is professional. And like I said earlier, it's the the, the what gets covered is not. Nonsense does not filter itself into the covers it covers like it does with social media. It it's it you have to use a way overused phrase, it's news you can use and it applies to where you live. You talk about the sidewalk thing. You know, we just had a fire millage fire in police millage in the city of Wyoming, and we reported extensively on that police and fire village. We covered all the public hearings. And, you know, we we have a thing here called multiple platforming. So we have the the news website WKTV.org. We have the cable television, we have podcasting, we have film production. And one of the things we do is that everything has to share multiple platforms. So you get the maximum audience. Our new effort is to make every news story on the journal, have video with it. So we're asking the writers shoot video. We're kind of calling it a no comment video kind of a thing where we don't we don't have a time for a reporter to cut together a video package, but there will be just video of the events edited together and the shot that shot, this shot that shot a very kind of an A in a in a in a linear fashion and then just simply inserted in the story. So the reader can also get an idea of the context of the event that the reporter's reporting.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Tom, do you have a sense because you've been at WP TV for a long time now, so if you kind of reflect on, let's just say maybe the last ten years, has there been an uptick or an increase and in your sense that the citizens of Kentwood and Wyoming are more knowledgeable about what's going on in their communities and more, and how about more engaged and participatory as well?

**Tom Norton**

Oh, undoubtedly.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

Okay.

**Tom Norton**

Yeah, I would think so. I would like to think so. I'd like to think we are having that kind of an impact, but I do know that. Our given our given our our readership. I do know, hands down that the people that the people that live in Wyoming and Kentwood are more aware of what's going on in their community because of the Katie Butcher period. I mean, that's like saying, you know, how can two and two before. Well, it just is. I mean, and when, when you had this source out there and, you know, obviously that's the one beautiful thing about the Internet, you could actually see how many people are visiting your Web site and clicking through it. And, and you can tell what was getting traction, what's not getting traction, what stories like. And you could tell what people the viewers are interested in. And that's one of the reasons why we do so much high school sports, is that we found out there is a profound interest in that. Well, because no one else is reporting on it. It's just not getting any coverage. And so there is a profound interest in that. But, you know, interest in many other things as well. But, yes, I would think that anyone in the country who starts a a hyper local news service for their community is

going to find in time. And that's the thing in time they're going to find that they are making a difference in their community.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

And I like your I like your example of the millage, because you're informing the citizens so that when it's time for them to go vote, they're educated, informed and can make a good decision for themselves and for their communities that they've served as important service. Go ahead, Chuck.

**Chuck Plunkett**

And more of them will vote. There have been studies that back this up that if you've got a strong coverage in your area, voter participation goes up or is higher than if you don't. And the millage is a great example. That's what mileages are hard to understand when you have elections and it's a primary or an open election, it's not an incumbent. So you've got a bunch of newcomers. You can have so many different people trying to run. Right now we have an open mayor's race in Denver. We have an all cycle election. And there were, you know, by the time we got our ballots, there were 13 people on there. A lot of people look at that and they go like, ha! And they just run away. It's already an off season cycle. Yeah, You know, it's not normally it's not November Election Day, it's in the spring. So you're already asking people to go the extra mile to vote. Then you give them a lot of choices like, like that. And you throw in a bunch of complicated ballot measures and toss in maybe a millage increase to boot. You could, you could easily it would take you an hour or more to have some kind of decent stab at voting on any one of those different areas. It could take you all day, Sunday or Saturday just to vote in an off cycle election. And you're got a lot of people are just not going to spend that kind of time or they're only going to do it piecemeal and none of them are going to do it as well as they could have if you had to had strong local news coverage.

**Salvatore Alaimo**

So let's, let's bring all let's bring all this back to that macro level perspective. Chuck, earlier you were talking about how and I remember conversations in a documentary about the CBS NEWSROOM where they knew it was a loss leader, but they funded it, like you said, from the advertising revenue and from and across, subsidize it from other sources. How do we get local news to go back to becoming what we would all probably call a public good? What do you recommend are prescribed that we all should do to try to. Try to put the toothpaste back in the tube and get it back to where it once was.

**Chuck Plunkett**

Well, in Colorado, ten of my friends and former colleagues, *The Denver Post* were very brave during that 2018 period that I talk about during the Denver rebellion. And they broke out and they started their own paper, an employee owned Benefit Corporation nonprofit, that is able through its structure to accept deep pocket donations and depend on subscribers. And a couple of things have happened that your listeners should be aware of, and that is in Colorado, because of what was happening to *The Denver Post* and because of all the publicity that the Denver rebellion got when we when we took a stand against our hedge fund owners, the public understood that there was a need. We,

we called on the public to support community journalism and to warn and say that without it, we're there's going to be all these dangers that we're talking about here today and to a large degree, to an exciting degree, to a heartwarming degree, Coloradans stood up and paid attention and reached into their pockets and started paying for subscriptions and donation. Our Colorado public radio station has hired a lot of extra people. They have a much larger newsroom now. They act more like a state paper. Then, they act more like a *Denver Post* used to act. *The Colorado Sun* went from those ten brave people that started when literally everyone that was paying attention to Colorado thought they were not going to last very long. They're still here five years later, and they have a paid staff of journalists. Well, they have a paid staff of like 27, 28 people, and 24 of them are in the newsroom doing, doing news. So there have been a lot of small startups that have popped up around the state. There are a lot of people covering the legislature now that. So, in many ways in Colorado, we've seen a big groundswell of support. It's fragmented. It's it's not unified under a big banner. But there are a lot of journalists out there that didn't exist in the before time. And that brings me back to the answer to your question. People need to understand they have to pay for quality journalism, and they have to figure out how to make that part of their lives. And if you're a business owner, if you're a bigger fish in that and the economy, you've got to realize that if you want the economy and the democracy in the region that you live in to flourish, you've got to find it within yourself and within your budget to help support quality local news.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

Just a quick follow up. Have we seen a new phenomenon now where there are nonprofit news outlets replacing filling the void left by some of the for-profit entities going away? Is that helping this effort at all? You have any sense of that?

### **Chuck Plunkett**

It as long as it's a nonprofit that focuses on. Objective style journalism. And it's not and it's not coming from a particular mindset that readers or listeners can see that it's going to have its thumb on the scale, that it's going to have some kind of bias. But yeah, I think non-profits are a useful way to to help get the word out, particularly when they partner with newsrooms so that you can trust that a newsroom is like minding the store on best practices and ethics.

### **Salvatore Alaimo**

Tom, what do you see as a future for community media, for local news in your world? What's out on the horizon there?

### **Tom Norton**

Well, I think we feel we feel reasonably confident about our future. I mean, you know, there's constant funding challenges, but that's everybody. Does it matter if you're a nonprofit or for profit? Everybody's going to funding, challenge. Constant. Bills, got to get paid. But we have a we have a we have a good sense of the, the appreciation that the community has. Now, we do not have a paywall for the Journal. And that's, you know, if that that's a whole different kettle of fish that, you know, we may have to go

down that road someday. And right now, there are no plans for that. But. But I do I do believe that the Journal will be here for a while. And, and whether, you know, it's a very volatile time we're in. You know, my crystal ball is cloudy. And as most people, anyone who says it's dud doesn't have one because there's just too much too many variables. There's too many balls in the air. The technology is growing at lightning pace, you know, And for all of us here on this podcast, we all grew up when that technology just wasn't there. I mean, you know, I mean, I started in this business in the eighties and I. And to, to see to see how things are done now is just mind boggling. And I can only imagine what it's going to be like 15 years from now. And so, I guess maybe the biggest question is, is, you know, is, is for anyone who anyone out there any, any, any nonprofit or anybody who's interested, a for profit interested in creating a new local community news resource is you know, is find your method of sustainability. How can you sustain this what you what you launched. Yes we have that. We're just going to do it and we do it. But how can we sustain this? How can we be here? One, two, three, four or five years down the road? That's as it's important as I want to do it, you know?

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

Thank you, Tom. Chuck, I'll let you have the final word here. What do you want to tell our listeners in terms of. as citizens, what should we do about local news and making effort to try to preserve it and retain it?

### ***Chuck Plunkett***

Well, if you're not subscribing to a news site or to make sure that you find a way to do it. That would be a big help. Another way to help can be a lot simpler, though, and cheap. And that is to look at the news that you value, to see the to discover and learn and get to know the news organizations that are of benefit to you and your to your community. And look for the journalists that are doing exceptional work, follow them on social media, promote them, promote the benefits of local news to your friends and to your family. Try to help create an ecosystem where we understand that our democracy is a beautiful thing and that it is in peril and we're silly if we don't understand that. It really is. It really, really is. And the way to deal with that is to stay informed and promote the, the news that that you're getting with others and to support it with your pocket when you can't.

### ***Salvatore Alaimo***

I want to thank our guests on this week's episode of Tilting the Earth's Praxis, our coverage of local news. Chuck Plunkett, director of Colorado University News Corp, and Tom Norton, GVSU alum and executive director of WKTV Community Media. Thank you, gentlemen, for an engaging and interesting conversation.

### **Closing music**

#### ***WGVU's Jennifer Moss***

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**Closing music fades.**