

February 26, 2008

## We want to *b* included

Hey! We DON'T own this place. Despite what they keep telling us.

We don't literally own it because unionized employees have not been offered participation in the Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). And that's okay with us. We still have a defined-benefit pension and a 401(k) with company contribution, while the involuntary owners (all Tribune employees not represented by unions) have neither. While the ESOP has potential to pay off big – and we hope it does, because that will mean Tribune is successful – we believe it's too uncertain to form the largest piece of a retirement plan, so we're certainly not pushing to replace what we have with the ESOP. Beyond literal ownership, Tribune still has a long way to go in developing a culture of ownership, in which the employees and managers are true partners, collaborators in building a more successful business.

We, the people who work at the Baltimore Sun, have as much at stake in its financial success as anyone who works for the Tribune Company, and more than most, yet Tribune treats us like so much furniture.

Without notice, The Sun closed a bureau in Baltimore County, home to the single largest group of Baltimore Sun readers, and displaced the remaining three bureau reporters there, plus two more from the already closed Carroll County bureau.

We're now covering the county where we have the most readers not from a bureau that's close to government and court and school headquarters, but from Baltimore. Reporters are told they can file from laptops with a wireless card (not that they have such laptops). We remind our members: If you're forced to write in Starbucks, you can expense that grande latte.

Why are the reporters displaced? The old Towson office is being turned over to *b*, the new free daily tabloid. We welcome *b* and other innovative ventures, and recognize The Sun needs to develop new revenue sources if it is to thrive.

Why can't Sun and *b* staff members share an office? Tribune is attempting to prove that *b* is a separate business, so that *b* staff members won't be covered by our union contract. It's the same reason that a cash-strapped company is renting expensive digs at Cross Keys for its Web operation when the Calvert Street building has lots of space. That's also why the displaced Towson reporters aren't being offered space in a nearby office owned by Patuxent Publishing, a Sun subsidiary that publishes the Towson Times.

This not only adds to rent costs, but diminishes the products. The Web site would be better, for example, if its staff and the Sun staff – which brings its talent, knowledge and creative energy to producing Web content around the clock – could truly collaborate. Our coverage of Baltimore County would be better if our staff has a place in Towson – with files, with phones, with copiers, with a computer system that connects to the publishing system.

Here's what the Guild proposes to do about it. The Guild is asking The Sun to bargain over the

effects of its decision to close the Towson office because its impact on Guild employees. We also make this offer to The Sun and Tribune: Let our members work in the Patuxent office in Towson. In return, we will agree not to use the sharing of office space as evidence in any labor board action over whether the Patuxent employees should be covered by the Guild contract.

We still think Patuxent and *b* employees would be better off covered under a union contract. They couldn't, for example, have retirement contributions cancelled unilaterally, as Tribune did recently to its unrepresented employees, including managers. We will be exploring whether *b* employees should, as a matter of law, already have the protection of our contract, and we expect Tribune to oppose this. But we shouldn't let this dispute stand in the way of efficient operation and better products, especially at this critical time for our industry and our company.

The results of allowing Sun reporters to share offices with Patuxent or *b* reporters: Better coverage of Baltimore County, lower costs, more potential for collaboration at a time we are being told to "get out of our silos."

There's also a longer-range issue that needs to be discussed openly. We recognize the need to put resources into new products. But the good, old-fashioned daily newspaper is still the largest generator of revenue and profit. A reader on the Web doesn't generate nearly as much cash as a reader in print.

So, as those with a strong stake in this company, we're concerned about what appears to be a policy of rapid disinvestment in the traditional newspaper. At the same time there is hiring for *b*, there is staff reduction – including layoffs in the events department – at The Sun. We understand resource constraints, but a too-rapid shift of resources away from the paper threatens to accelerate the downward spiral. That's as much of a danger to the future of The Sun and of Tribune as not shifting resources quickly enough.

No one in management asked for our advice, or our help. No one knows if this new publication will make a profit, but we do know the effect of Tribune's tactics. They make people angry, fearful, distrustful, more aware than ever before that the employees of the Baltimore Sun, the people who are committed to this paper and who have been working far harder than they ever did before to pick up the slack for all those missing people whose jobs have disappeared, are seen as obstacles, not assets, and at best are unappreciated by the people who run this company.

So, we ask The Sun, will you work collaboratively with us to make a better product and a more successful company? Or is your wish to avoid unions so great that you will decline that opportunity?

-- Larry Carson and Bill Salganik for the Sun Guild unit