

# A respectful and nostalgic look back at The Antrim County News

After more than 61 years of reporting the news, The Antrim County News last week announced it was shutting down. The newspaper published

## SIDE BAR



John Tarrant

for the first time on June 19, 1947 by Ken Parker, died a quiet and lonely death on Wednesday, February 11, 2009, its obituary a terse announcement buried on page three, alongside an ad for a local bar and underneath a story advising people to keep their water taps running.

The newspaper that has carried thousands of obituaries recounting the lives and deaths of

Antrim County's rich and not so rich, and famous and infamous, deserved a better, kinder remembrance than it was given upon its own death.

A local newspaper reflects the life of its readers. From birth to death, the local paper reports our good deeds and our misdeeds, our joys and our sorrows and those events and circumstances that frame our lives and shape our character. It is an important task. From that first issue that came off Ken Parker's old flat-bed press more than 61 years ago, The Antrim County News has fulfilled that vital community purpose proudly and with distinction. Over the years, the newspaper received many press association awards for its writing and reporting, but the real proof of how well the newspaper did its job was reflected in the high regard in which it was held by the community for most of its life.

During its relatively short life span, The Antrim County News absorbed The Bellaire Record and C.W. Goddard's Mancelona Herald and, in 1991, incorporated the 600 subscribers to the 100 year-

old Central Lake Torch into its readership circle.

Ken Parker sold The News in 1959 to Jackson Goolsby, who apparently didn't fit in all that well with the community, and the paper, in danger of going belly-up, was put up for sale again. Parker actually came back to Bellaire to manage the paper again, dividing his time between his new job at The Record-Eagle and The Antrim County News, until a suitable buyer could be found again for The News.

Since then, the newspaper has seen a succession of perhaps a half dozen different owners and I'm proud to have been one of them, having purchased the paper from Gregg and Dee Smith and publishing it over a span of ten years from 1988 through 1998. For the most part, The Antrim County News has a history of steady growth in circulation and readership and community support. As a matter of fact, when I sold the newspaper in December, 1998, the newspaper had a paid circulation approaching 6,000.

Ken Parker, now living in a retirement home in Traverse City, told me that he "feels like he has lost a son." The man who started The Antrim County News and rescued it from failure once before, said that he is disappointed that the paper seems to have lost track of its local connections.

The Antrim County News still had about 1,200 readers who would probably agree with him.

By the way, The Antrim County News celebrated its 50th anniversary during the time I owned it and as part of that celebration we published weekly excerpts from a very interesting book Ken Parker had put together, titled, "Start Your Own Newspaper." Despite the title that sounds like its a "how to" book, it's a pretty interesting recap of his trials, tribulations and joys of starting and publishing a weekly newspaper in a small town in northern Michigan. It's available in several local stores.