

Aurora Banner, Town's oldest-surviving business, placed into bankruptcy protection after nearly 160 years

After nearly 160 years of serving the community, Metroland Media has turned the page on The Aurora Banner.

On Friday, Torstar's Brandon Grosvenor announced Metroland Newspapers had been placed into bankruptcy and its 70 weekly newspapers, including The Aurora Banner and The Newmarket Era, would go to a strictly digital format.

"The difficult decision comes after years of effort and innovation to try and sustain our weekly newspapers in spite of decreasing revenue," he said. "The impact of big tech's dominance as a media choice, even for local marketers, has affected the entire industry. Paired with the unrecoverable decline in flyer usage during the pandemic, we can no longer support the community print/distribution channel and are moving forward with a digital-only model.

This means we have closed Metroland's community print publishing and advertising/flyer distribution operations.

"I want you to know that our important local journalism continues through Metroland's community news websites and our six subscriber-based daily newspapers: the Hamilton Spectator, the Peterborough Examiner, the Waterloo Region Record, the Welland Tribune, the Niagara Falls Review and the St. Catharines Standard. We also have the support of the Toronto Star to ensure the stories of our communities are told."

Following Grosvenor's announcement, Metroland Media Editorial Vice President Lee Ann Waterman, published what they described as "A Letter to Our Readers," and said they were "confident this restructuring will make Metroland a sustainable business moving forward."

"It is a sad day for me personally, as I know it is for Metroland journalists and those who worked beside us to bring the news to your doorstep," she said. "I've spent 25-plus years in community journalism, but I still remember the thrill of seeing my byline in print, above a story that could raise awareness or offer insight, bring tears, smiles or even outrage to readers of the Gravenhurst Banner, Bracebridge Examiner or New Hamburg Independent.

"And it was my privilege to lead teams of award-winning journalists as managing editor of the Orangeville Banner and editor-in-chief of our 11 newspapers in York Region. There is nothing quite like the energy of a newsroom working on something big - an election, a breaking news event, investigative coverage to expose injustices or wrongdoings. And seeing the results of that work on the printed page was always something of a rush. Our newsrooms became digital first - meaning all stories, big or small, were available on our websites before they were published in print, and, as advertising dollars and newspapers shrunk, many stories never made it to print at all.

"The pandemic and continued losses in revenue pushed us out of our newsrooms and left us working virtually. Our ranks have dwindled dramatically. Becoming a digital-only business is the next step in our evolution - precipitated by the loss of revenue from print advertising and our flyer distribution business, as well as the stranglehold Big Tech has on digital advertising.

Our newspapers are gone but we are still here. We are still committed to community journalism, to writing stories that engage and inform our readers and shed light on issues of importance to our communities."

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter