

HERBERT M. "TIPPEN" DAVIDSON, JR.

BIOGRAPHY

Mr. Davidson, currently the publisher of the *Daytona News Journal*, was born in Chicago, Illinois on August 10, 1925. His grandfather, Julius Davidson, and father, Herbert M. Davidson, jointly acquired the *Daytona News Journal* in December, 1928. The paper was a small evening paper with a circulation of only 4,400. Davidson's parents were both graduates of Columbia Journalism School. He attended the local schools in Daytona, but did not work on the paper until he was in college.

Tippen attended the Julliard School of Music with the intention of becoming a classically trained musician. He then married Josephine Field, gave up his career as a musician and returned to Daytona Beach in 1947 to work as a reporter for his father. He learned the business quickly and worked as city editor, managing editor, general manager and in 1985, was named publisher and co-editor with his wife.

As of 2001, the Daytona Beach paper employs around 850 people and has a daily circulation of approximately 100,000 with 119,000 on Sunday. It is, after the *St. Petersburg Times*, the second largest independently owned newspaper in the state.

SUMMARY

During his interview, Tippen Davidson talks about how his grandfather and parents took over the newspaper and the difficult times they faced during the Depression. He mentions his fathers' impact on the county's decision to go with voting machines and signature verification to cut down on graft and corruption at the voting box. He also

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explains that the paper was the first to go to offset printing, was innovative in its use of color and constantly invested in the latest technology.

Mr. Davidson takes pride in the fact that the *News Journal* has managed to remain independent despite many offers by chains to buy the paper. In discussing his career, he fondly remembers the challenges of being city editor, “my idea of a really great job”, and delineates the paper’s strong financial support for community activities- the Daytona Playhouse, the new auditorium, the Museum of Photography, Stetson University, Bethune-Cookman College, the Ormond Beach Museum and the bi-annual visit of the London Symphony Orchestra. In addition, the paper gives a Medallion of Excellence to the 30-40 outstanding seniors in the county’s public schools.

Mr. Davidson makes insightful and often tart comments on *USA Today*; environmental concerns; Bike Week and other events that draw tourists to the area; letters to the editor; crime; Governors Reubin Askew and Bob Graham; the 2000 presidential campaign; comic strips; Jackie Robinson’s integration of baseball; editorial cartoons; and labor unions. Mr. Davidson contends that his newspaper is the conscience of the community and did great service for the city by advocating cooperation between the races during integration of the schools and also by improving sanitation at local restaurants and opening hospital board meetings to the state Sunshine Law.

Tippen Davidson was interviewed by Julian M. Pleasants on November 15, 2000 at Daytona Beach, Florida.

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P: Talk a little bit about your early background and your schooling.

D: My parents brought me here in 1928 when they came to manage the *News Journal*. My grandfather and my father jointly acquired control of it and took possession of it in December, 1928. I grew up here through the Depression. I am a product of local schools and was underfoot at the newspaper all during my formative years. I did not have anything actually active to do with the newspaper until after high school. While I was in college, I worked in the newsroom in the summer. I was not intending to be a newspaperman. I was intending to be a professional musician, so I was really just making the most of a summer job. Then when I left school, I wanted to get married, so I gave up the idea of being a professional musician and hit my old man up for a full-time job and became a reporter here.

P: Explain why your grandfather bought this newspaper.

D: He bought it because my father wanted him to. My father was the newspaperman. My father and my mother were both graduates of Columbia School of Journalism, both great newspaper people. My grandfather was a businessman. His training was in the import/export business.... My father always wanted to have his own newspaper, as many newspapermen have. They looked around. They looked at papers in California and New Mexico and other places, and then this one became available and they bought it.

P: Discuss the difficulties your father faced in the early years of the paper. During the Depression, I suspect, it was difficult for everybody in Florida, since the Depression here started a little bit ahead of the rest of the country.

D: Yes, actually, that little dip after the Florida boom. The bust of the Florida boom

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was really responsible for the existence of the *News Journal* as it is today. The boom shattered, leaving two small papers in Daytona Beach, the *Journal* in the morning, the *News* in the afternoon, both in desperate straits. Somebody with money arrived, Mr. Eugene C. Pullium... and he and a partner bought the two little papers and combined them and proceeded to try to build them back.... During the boom, they [the two papers] ran pages and pages... of full-page advertisements of the real-estate speculators, and nobody ever thought of asking anyone to pay for anything. Their credit was good. Then their credit suddenly was not good... and I think that both of the papers were really up against it when Mr. Pullium arrived. At any rate, he acquired the properties and put them together and... did succeed at putting it back on its feet. When my father and grandfather showed up, it was a going concern, not a rich one, not a gold-mine, but a going concern.... Of course, they had an excellent [year in] 1928, made money. That was the last profit they saw until after World War II. It was pretty desperate.

P: How did they keep the paper going all that time?

D: They kept it going on that money that my grandfather made in the bulk-materials business in the Midwest. He had a few hundred thousand dollars put away, and that sufficed to keep them going. They had a competitor starting in 1933. The politicians here convinced Mr. Robert Gore, the proprietor of the *Fort Lauderdale Daily News*, that this was a fertile field and that there would be no trouble running us out of it. There was a great deal of trouble running us out of it....

P: Discuss your early years on the paper as a reporter and how you developed your skills as a newspaperman.

D: You have to understand that this was a newspaper family. My father and mother

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both worked on the paper. My father was the editor, wrote the editorials, and when that was done, he sat at the desk and served as news editor and, in fact, did everything in the newsroom that needed doing with a very small staff of help. My mother was everything else. She was the Sunday editor, the women's editor.... But newspaper was talked incessantly at home. It just became a language. It became an atmosphere in which I was included.... Along with everyone else who has ever learned to be a reporter, I had to learn the rudiments. I was not given any special treatment by my mother, who did most of the early training. She was tough, but fortunately I was brought up speaking and writing pretty good English and I managed to survive.... My late wife took up reporting,... she was absolutely delighted to find out there was a job in which the main thing you did was stick your nose into other people's business. That was her idea of heaven. She became an absolutely marvelous reporter. I mean, one of the great ones, one of the intuitive ones.

P: One of the things I have noticed about this newspaper is that you have reinvested money over and over again into new technology. Perhaps you could explain your decision to go to offset-printing.

D: Yes, indeed. We were one of the first newspapers in the country to do that. We started up.... the first four-plate wide press in a daily newspaper in the Southeast....

P: When did you go to color?

D: We went to color back in the letter-press days. As I told you, we were doing processed color by curving the photo engravings and scotch-taping them to the blanks, printing color that way. We had been doing color separations in this place since the early 1960s.

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P: Let me ask you about the expansion. You begin purchasing some weekly newspapers....

D: Let me put these in order for you. We had an offer of a shopper in west Volusia [County], the *DeLand Pennysaver*, a very well-run profitable shopper. The man came to see me and said he would like to sell. He wanted to get out and write novels.... So we met this man's price and took over the *DeLand Pennysaver*. It did well from the very first.... At that time, we bought the *Flagler Tribune* from them [*Florida Times-Union*] ... and the *Halifax Reporter*... We started the *Palm Coast News*, in competition with the *Tribune*.... The *Halifax Reporter*... served no useful function at all, since it was not a very good newspaper and did not carry that much advertising and was losing money. So, we laid it to rest, but we took the little shopper... and put a little fertilizer and a little water, and it has done fantastically well, the *Daytona Pennysaver*, and now that has branched out and we have a *Flagler Pennysaver* as well.

P: How do the Pennysavers make money?

D: It is fairly profitable. It makes money very nicely. The problem, of course, is when you own both the shopper and the daily is to find some arena of agreement that will permit them to coexist, and we just have sort of a gentleman's agreement. We do not knock each other. Everybody is free to do as he pleases. We do not destroy the value of *Pennysaver* advertising, and they do not have anything to say about daily newspaper advertising. We have gotten along fine. Both sides have been able to sell. The only part of our operation that has perhaps been affected is liner-classifieds. The *Pennysaver* does vacuum those up somewhat. To finish up the *Pennysaver* story, we started the

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Pennysaver in New Smyrna Beach. That did not do well at first, [although] it is doing fine now. We started a *Pennysaver* in St. Johns County, and that had a long period of limping and it is doing fine now....

P: How many weekly papers do you now own?

D: That are not actually associated with *The News-Journal* itself, there are six little weeklies. They are Daytona, Flagler, New Smyrna Beach, Deland, Palatka and the St. Johns.

P: Are all of those profitable?

D: Five of them are. The Putnam one [Palatka] is in and out, but we feel it is a worthwhile property to hang onto.

P: Are those are run separately from the *Daytona News-Journal*?

D: Those are [a] complete[ly] separate corporation... they are printed here, their plates are made here and the technical computer stuff is all supervised from here, so there is a good deal of interlock. But the staffing, the sales, the management and so on is completely separate.

P: At one time, you owned a printing company. Is that still part of the corporation?

D: No. We had to close that. We were losing so much money at it that we closed it. The loss, generally speaking, was because... we were doing all right in the printing business, no great shakes, and I, the great businessman, employed a nationally-known consultant to come in and advise us to what we should do.... They came down and spent a week and charged us an arm and a leg and wrote us a report and told us everything we should do. We did it, and it was all 100 percent wrong, equipment selection, market selection, staffing, everything wrong, wrong, wrong! So, we got in

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difficulties, and we finally closed down.

P: In 1985, you were named publisher and co-editor with your wife. Why co-editor? Isn't that rather unusual?

D: Yes. That is a good question. I guess it was just that we thought I should have some standing in the editorial part of the paper. I mean, having come out of the editorial side of the paper.... I have always been a thorn in the side of the editorial department whenever they split an infinitive. My being co-editor really meant that when she wanted somebody to help her say no, she could call on me. That is essentially it. I have to tell you that my home was just like my parents' home. A lot of newspaper got talked over the dining room table, and witness the fact that both of my children are working here now. My daughter has a graduate [journalism] degree from Columbia University, following in her grandparents' footsteps, and my son is running the Internet part of it.

P: When you started as publisher in 1985, what were your goals, and do you feel, in retrospect, you have met most of those goals?

D: I think so. We have a five-year plan and a ten-year plan and that kind of thing, but essentially, our goal-planning is like a Persian carpet unrolled in front of you. We planned some territorial expansion. Well, we have done that. Also, when I became publisher, we had some cutting to do. We had some areas which were not working out, and those had to be closed down. We have done that.... I had a complete newsroom to build because we had gotten behind on pay scales and whatnot, and we needed some frontrunners in the newsroom. We had a couple of years of intensive search and hiring and building staff back. Then we needed to completely redesign the product. It was just one thing after another. I cannot say I had any grand overall goals. We always looked

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for the day when we averaged 100,000 in circulation. We have done that. The next one is 200,000, and I will not be here for that....

P: Why did you eliminate the afternoon paper and move to just a morning paper?

D: It was for purely economic reasons. Remember that the afternoon paper was quite a serious paper. It had its own staff, it had its own editorial page, it had its own areas of distribution. It was costing money, and circulation descended from the 55,000 area down to the 25,000 area. Advertising, also; people were just not buying the combination anymore. For a long golden time, from the end of World War II on, very seldom did anybody buy any single-paper advertising. We made the combination rate very tempting, and people would just buy the combination rate [meaning the advertising ran in both the morning and afternoon paper]. It got to the point where people would say, well, I know it is only 20 percent more, but I am going to save my money and spend it on inches. So, the advertising in the *Evening News* went way, way, way down, and it was quite obvious we were losing money on it, as well as readership. It just came to the point where we had to make a decision. It was a tough decision. All hands cried a lot. A lot of the people around had come up through the afternoon paper, me [too]. I started as city editor of the afternoon paper. But we made a business study, and like every good business study, it says what happens if you do and what happens if you do not. What happens if you do was so much more promising than if you do not that we decided to go ahead.

P: Explain how this newspaper has remained a family owned newspaper, when practically every other newspaper is owned by a conglomerate like Knight-Ridder or Gannett?

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D: It has to do with a trick you do with your head. You move it gently from left to right and back, like that [as in shaking his head to refuse a buy-out offer]. A week does not go by that somebody flies by with an offer. There has never been any drop in people's interest in acquiring this paper. We have a big chain minority here. The minority stock is owned by Cox, and it is a large minority. We are very fortunate it has been Cox because they have been good partners ever since they came aboard. When John Perry owned the minority, he had buzzards flying around this place, trying to trick us into selling the stock or get us in the position where we would be forced to sell the stock. It was a relief when the Cox people took it because they became good working partners and have remained good working partners.

P: Do they have much influence on your editorial decisions or running the paper?

D: No, no influence whatsoever, nor do they seek any. Such influences they may have has been to help us. There was a special rate on the Cox wire. When they were negotiating low prices of newsprint, they just included us in....

P: How would this paper change if it were taken over by, let us say, Knight-Ridder?

D: I have no idea. I am sure they would cut the expenses pretty drastically. This paper is heavily involved in the community. It gives away a lot of money. It gives away a lot of time and attention to community things. We not only countenance but encourage staff to participate in community things.... I feel sure they [a chain publisher] would not do it as much as we do, anyway.

P: They would be more interested in the bottom-line.

D: Yes. But it is not their habit to do this kind of thing even in cases where the bottom line is not affected, as, for example, employee participation in community affairs....

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P: Discuss your days as a city editor. What is the most difficult job of a city editor?

D: City editor is my natural home. It is the best job on the paper, the most fun, the most excitement, the most challenge. You have to know the city, geographically and personally, like the back of your hand. You have to have a sense about what is going on. You have to understand the movers and shakers and just who they move and where they shake. You have to have your staff deployed in such a way that things do not escape you. You have a constant problem, especially on an afternoon paper, which is what I was doing, with the clock. I just enjoyed it.... Every day was better than the last....

P: There would be a tremendous amount of pressure, I would imagine.

D: Yes. Thrived on it. I thought it was great. I am not sure at my age now if I could take the pressure.

P: I would like for you to talk about some of the issues that the paper has been involved with. For example, the paper has supported the annual music festival and has brought the London Symphony Orchestra [LSO] here and you have supported the Playhouse and the new auditorium....

D: Having an orchestra like the LSO here every year was a feather in the town's cap.... The community has really rallied around this magnificently. *[The] News-Journal* has not been heavily involved,... we are just... one of the contributors.... The community raises this enormous sum of money, one million dollars, every other year to bring the orchestra. We support all the arts.... We also support the museums, the Museum of Photography at the college, the Ormond Beach Museum. We have a... list [that] fills up an entire page in eight point with the names of all the charities to which we have given.

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Small gifts and large. We support Stetson University in a meaningful way and also Bethune-Cookman College.

P: Discuss your relationship with Mary McLeod Bethune [African-American education leader, political activist and founder of the college that bears her name].

D: I did not have any relationship with Mary McLeod Bethune except that she once stepped on me when I was a little kid. I walked in front of her, and she bumped into me. She was a personal friend of my mother's, turned to my mother for advice.... [M]y father was on the Bethune-Cookman board. He was a very strong advocate of Bethune-Cookman College and the work she was doing. Helped them tremendously when they had Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt here. I remember that, and I was just a child....

P: Did the paper take a position on Jackie Robinson's attempt to integrate baseball?

D: Oh yes. That is an interesting story. Bernard Kahn, our wonderful sports editor, was practically Robinson's PR [public relations manager]. He wrote stories, and because he had many friends in the sportswriting business, he tipped off a lot of people to come and talk to Robinson. He was heavily supportive of Robinson. He was one of Robinson's pals when Robinson was first here. You can say that we had a hand in Robinson's success, mostly because of this one sportswriter.

P: Was there a strong negative public reaction to the integration of professional baseball in Daytona Beach?

D: No, there was not strong public reaction. I have to tell you this about the community. My father always did interracial work, not only Bethune-Cookman but he was [also] the director of the Southern Leadership Conference and was considered a leader in interracial work. [He] hosted and chaired many interracial activities in the

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community, with the result that, at times of crisis, for example, when the school integration became the rule of law, the day came when the courts ruled that the schools had to be integrated,... the schools in Volusia County were integrated without a murmur. The buses ran and the new kids showed up. They did not even have a playground fight in Volusia County because the principals had been so thoroughly briefed and had briefed their staffs and had briefed the student bodies as to what was going to happen and what they could expect. Everything went smoothly. In St. Augustine, they had riots on the same thing. Again, the rule was passed that hotels could no longer discriminate. That was a huge relief to Daytona Beach because the hotels here had not discriminated for years. They quietly took black business, and they lost, sometimes, a convention or something because somebody would go in a motel and see a black guest.... The difference between us and the counties to the north and to the west is striking in terms of the peaceful way in which these integration movements took place. I am very proud of that. Of all the things that he did, I think maybe that is the greatest.

P: Was there any backlash in terms of advertising?

D: Our community had come to recognize us as hopeless radicals. There was not any backlash.

P: But this is still considered in political terms, a liberal newspaper, correct?

D: Yes, unashamedly.

P: Another important development was the increase in the military stationed in Daytona Beach in World War II. There were a lot of WACs [Women's Army Corps] stationed here... and a naval base. How did that change Daytona Beach?

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D: Kept it from starving to death. Claude Pepper [U. S. Senator, D-Florida] was the fellow who wangled the WACs for Daytona Beach because my father told him that the town was going to dry up and blow into the ocean. It was a little winter tourist town, and what was going to happen to tourism during the war was, it was not going to exist. So, we got the WACs and the NAS [Naval Air Station], and when the WACs were finished, an army convalescent hospital....

P: What do you think are the most important functions of a newspaper today, and why?

D: ...I do not think the newspaper's function, which is to inform the public, has changed a bit. It is still the only function we have. We do it a little differently in the light of our electronic competitors. We are more thorough, and maybe we are a little less hoo-ha than we would be if we did not have this competition.... But we cover so much news that the broadcast people do not cover. You know, like twenty, thirty stories to one, daily, every day. We do a really thorough job of informing our public, as the very best we can.... Our job is to do the best we can to note the sparrow's fall in our area. No one can be God, but we have to try to do the best we can....

P: What is your view of *USA TODAY*?

D: ... I will tell you, I think it is a brilliant idea. The idea has perhaps the most imitated thing in the last ten years.... Every newspaper has some *USA TODAY* ideas in it. From that standpoint, from the design standpoint, from the mass-production standpoint, the way it is mass-produced all over the country, [it is] admirable in every way. My objection to it is that in doing this, they have made it a little vapid, a little uninteresting.... It has been pre-digested like these patent cereals that have no taste at all anymore. They

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have been ground and re-ground so many times. *USA TODAY* is so good in so many ways that it is a shame it cannot have a little flavor....

P: How has your audience changed over the years, your readers?

D: The town has become increasingly retired. The average age is getting older. For a newspaper, that is probably a good thing, because even as they curse us for being so liberal, they renew their subscriptions. They do need their newspapers, use their newspapers, respond to their newspapers, which is very gratifying. We have the same readership pattern as every paper in the country, the dip in the eighteen-to-twenty-fives and the mysterious rise in the twenty-five-to-thirty-eights, as though people got to the age of twenty-five and starting reading newspapers. It must be.... And then the fairly satisfactory readership figures when you get to forty-five-and-up.... The newspaper evidently is a tool of maturing people.

P: Do you think the readers are less sophisticated? Do they read for television listings or ads or sports? Is there a reader who concentrates on news and editorials?

D: Oh yes. There is a reader who concentrates on news. There is no question about that. What is more, there are readers who concentrate on local news. Our paper is highly local. It is our life-blood. We got the *Orlando Sentinel* as a competitor to the west, [with] more pages, more sports, more color, more this, more that. People take our paper because we run their socks off on local news....

P: Do you see an end to printed newspapers? Will people get their news off the Internet?

D: No, I do not think so. I tell you what, I see... a possible end to printed newspapers. When the large advertisers lose confidence in us and stop using us, we will fold. It

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cannot live without advertising.

P: But you do not see that anytime in the near future?

D: I have not noticed any trace of it so far. Certainly, some types of advertising have exited the papers, groceries. I have a Thursday food section that has no food advertising, not a line....

P: How would you rank this paper in comparison with other papers in the state?

D: I have to say it is the best. This paper, in doing its duty, which is reporting the news of its area, it is the equal of anybody. I think it is very good. Otherwise, I would say the paper is well in line with its size. It is ninth or tenth in circulation in the state. I would say that it is excellent for its rank....

P: What makes an outstanding newspaper?

D: I guess good news coverage and some sort of sense of honesty. This package goes together. You have to have a certain amount of moral standards to do this job. It is not like selling peanuts in the park. You buy the peanuts from a wholesaler for \$0.50, and you sell them for \$1.00. It does not require any morals to do that. It takes a certain amount of moral energy to keep this engine going. One has to think it is worth doing. One has to have a sense of accomplishment and a sense of duty in order to really make a newspaper valuable to its community....

P: One other standard might be accuracy. Do you believe that newspaper reporters and newspapers today are less accurate in reporting the news than they used to be?

D: In some ways, but most of the inaccuracies are technological ones.... Most reporters, I hope, when they actually understand what is going on, are as accurate as it is humanly possible to be. I know my people care a great deal about it....

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P: What happens when you do make a significant error? How do you correct it, and where in the paper is it corrected?

D: It depends on the nature of the error and to an extent whose ox is gored. We try to make corrections at least as noticeable as the errors, and we always try to explain what happened, and we always apologize....

P: When you look at Florida in general, and I realize you concentrate on local news, but in your fifty years, how would you evaluate the changes that the state and Daytona Beach has undergone?...

D: ...Everybody has grown, grown, grown. Everybody. Go to places that were crossroads, and they are metropolises. Fly over to Naples sometime. Fly over those acres of new housing. Miles of it. Unbelievable. One of my innovations as the general manager was to buy an airplane for the company and arrange to have a pilot.... We used it to fly people to and from football games, the reporters and photographers, and used it for business trips and sales trips....

P: You mentioned that Daytona Beach has changed. The population is older. How else has it changed, in terms of the environment, in terms of crime, in terms of education?

D: I should say we are a little better than average here with respect to the environment. There is a lot of environmental consciousness. Of course, there are always... developers, and there is a constant conflict,...but you are speaking to the editor of a paper in a county which has just passed an eighty million dollar bond issue for buying endangered lands and protecting the watershed, with our enthusiastic approval, of course.... It passed by a 62 percent vote, of which we are very proud....

Crime, we had a bad few years here when we were having early motorcycle troubles.... But actually, the last two or three years, the violent crime statistics have been going down. There is still too much violence here. A lot of it comes out of this so-called event tourism that we have, where thousands of people come to the town for the weekend [like] at this thing Biketoberfest, a weekend without an event. It is an invitation to all the motorcycle people to come to Daytona Beach and raise hell. Four people were killed in three days in motorcycle accidents. To that extent, violence is unchecked [but] violent crime is better.

Now, education. We have been very, very fortunate in this county. We have had a very determined and enlightened school board for a good long period of time and three very good school superintendents in a row, all... different in outlook and different in method, but all determined to improve the quality of the schools. I would say our school system is pretty good. It is not world-shaking. We did for some reason have some schools that did not quite pass the recent tests, schools [in which] I know very excellent work is being done. Schools are one of my enthusiasms, and I keep an eye on this part of it.... The newspaper, by the way, is a big booster of public schools. We give an award, called the Medallion of Excellence, every year to those seniors in the public schools, the public schools only, who show remarkable excellence. We invite them to apply. We put out a poster and applications ... and they do apply, through their principals. Their principals recommend them, and then we have a really bad day and a half when we have to go over the several hundred really terrific applications and choose thirty or forty.... Then we give it a big play in the paper, and that is a big boost to public education because it shows the quality, fabulous quality, of youngsters who come out of

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the public school system....

P: Let me go back to something you said earlier that intrigued me. You mentioned that, in running the paper, you have a moral obligation to the community and that the newspaper was the conscience of the community. Could you give me a specific example of that?

D: I think the things I told you earlier about the way the community responded by its actions on integration. The newspaper's insistence that it was the community's duty to obey the law was the voice of conscience reminding the community what the law was. That was why, when push came to shove, the people in this community obeyed the law. That is what I mean by the conscience of the community. It is a lot more than just sticking your nose into public accounting and catching shortages at the dog pound and that type of thing. It means that the editorial board [and] the editorial board supervisor have to be conscious of what is going on in the community and whether it is beneficial or not. We have to comment, and we do comment. It is our stated policy to keep comment as heavily positive as we can, to push rather than pull, to use the old phrase.

P: Do you do a lot of investigative journalism?

D: Sure.

P: What would be some of your more successful investigations?

D: Successful? We did a shocker a couple of years ago that resulted in a shakeup of the way restaurant sanitation is handled in this community. Restaurant sanitation used to be handled by the department of public [health], the county health officer and his people. Now it is done by the state. The county health officer has no power to do it anymore, and the state, we found, has not closed a restaurant in years and years and

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years. Some of the ratings were awful. We went and visited the restaurants, and they were [makes fainting sound], but they never got them closed. So we ran an expose on that and made every restaurant in town sore at us. Lost a lot of restaurant advertising. I think it did some good because I think people went to these restaurants and said, you better clean up because until we see that A [superior health rating] on the window, we are not coming back. I think that is an example of the kind of thing that we can do.

We are suddenly and explosively interfering when it comes to violations of the Sunshine Law, so investigative reporting has been carried out in the sunshine around here for a long time. We carried out a case against our hospital, carried it all the way to the Supreme Court twice, in order to force our public hospital to open its board meetings. They were having token meetings in the sunshine and then doing everything else privately, so we called them on it, brought the suit. They defended the suit, [and] they lost. They lost all the way up to the Supreme Court. Now, we have a lot of hospital board meetings open....

P: How often would you have subscribers cancel the paper or advertisers cancel because of a stand you took, an editorial you wrote?

D: Not more than two or three times a day. Right in the center of election time, we got a lot of stir. Canceled, a handful, six or eight. Letters and telephone calls, just incessant. Dear Ann [Larson, Davidson's administrative assistant] gets most of the brunt out there. She picks up the phone carefully to see what flames are steaming out of the receiver.

P: Well, if you did not get any complaints, you figure you would not be doing your job, correct?

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D: That is right.

P: But advertisers would not cancel?

D: I have not had any problems of that kind in many, many years, and then it was a personal thing, an officeholder whom we opposed for re-election pulled his advertising when we opposed him. It was not a very large amount of money, and we thought to ourselves, well, it is too bad because he needs the advertising to keep his business going. But those breaches often are healed within a matter of weeks after they take place.

Mrs. Kaney and I both answer a lot of complaining mail, and we find that if we write a person back and say, well, we disagree but this is how we arrived at our conclusion, and that we would like to hear how you arrived at your conclusion, and please stay with us because thinking readers are our most important possession... I have turned away an awful lot of wrath with letters of that kind- ...thank you for your dissent, it keeps us on our toes. I have to write pretty often to defend our editorial practices, which are strictly ethical. I have to defend the work of the editorial board and our practice of endorsing political candidates.... The standard defense is that we have the chance to put these people on the griddle and talk to them, explore not only their campaign promises and their appearance, but also the way their greedy little minds work. This is a chance that a voter seldom has. When we endorse somebody, we have looked at him pretty closely. Occasionally, that argument will turn away wrath from somebody who is objecting to an endorsement. Not often. That is where the pie is thinnest and the skin is sorest, when it comes to your political spaces.

P: Do you get many letters to the editor and will you publish unsigned letters?

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D: We never would publish unsigned letters. We always required identification of the writer. In my father's day, we permitted people to use pseudonyms, provided they gave us their real name and address. In my time about ten years ago, we quit doing that. We just said, okay, if you have something to say, sign your name to it. We do not give out letter writers' addresses except the city. That seems to please the readers. We have more readers than we can say grace over, and readers' editorials, certainly no shortage....

P: How have letters to the editor changed over the years?

D: They are all signed now, [and] ... it is my impression that we do not get nearly as much hate mail as we used to. We used to get stacks of it. As a matter of fact, we had a file, a box at the back of a file drawer, which was called the nut hoard, we would drop these letters in. Every once in awhile, the FBI guy would come by and ask to have a look, and once in awhile, he would find a familiar face, a familiar typewriter or something in there. I think we still have the nut hoard, but I do not know how full it is. I hope we are not becoming less exciting.

P: Do you think when you recommend candidates and issues that the readers respond favorably?

D: They obviously do. Our endorsement is worth a chunk at the polls....

P: I saw the editorial in the paper today about the Florida Secretary of State, Katherine Harris. What is your general assessment of the vote counting [for the November 2000 presidential election. This interview took place on November 15, 200, in the middle of the recount issues in Florida] in Volusia County?

D: In this particular election, it was excellent. The mechanism that we have now,

which is a fairly sophisticated electronic mechanism, worked very well, is understood and trusted by the public. That did not prevent our elections office in De Land from making a bunch of stupid errors, losing ballots and you saw it all. I think this is just loose management. Certainly, we are not in any of the desperate trouble that they are in West Palm Beach with that strange ballot. In one, they have many tens of thousands of wasted ballots and people who punched twice. If you punch twice on our system [optical scan], the collector and the tabulator in the precinct will spit the ballot out and say this is not a legal ballot. Then the elections board points out the error to the voter before he can move, and he has the privilege of having a fresh ballot if he wants it. That saves a lot of trouble. We could not get into the kind of thing they had in West Palm Beach with that chad [the slip of paper remaining when a ballot is only half-punched] and whatnot. We had that for two years, in two elections, drove everybody insane....

P: Is it possible to recount all the votes in Florida?

D: Sure. Somebody said the other day on how long it would take, about eleven days I think it was. An objective that we seek in designing a better election system should be the truth. We really want to know how people voted. This Democratic bias or Republican bias, the motives of Mr. [Ralph] Nader [consumer advocate and Green Party presidential candidate in 2000], all of those things are secondary. We have to have a system which will create a truth, a dependable truth. I think that one of the penalties of this whole presidential election nationally is going to be an erosion of public confidence in the electing process. I hope that will help people swallow the cost of

modernizing their vote-collecting systems....

P: How do you choose your syndicated columnists?

D: Well, we look for a variety of outlook and a variety of style. Syndicated columnists tend to run around like scared ponies, all in the same direction. We try to find some who will not shift that way, who will write about different things. Our mainstays are the best in the business, people like David Broder, and Molly Ivins for laughs.

P: What about comic strips? Who chooses those, and what part do they play in the paper?

D: I do not know what part they play. They amuse everybody and create a considerable amount of contention.... I like to have a certain amount of sophistication. I like to... carry the popular things, and we do. I also like having a couple of sophisticated ones to keep the people who like that sort of thing from being bored.

P: Do you mean like *Doonesbury*?

D: Well, yes. *Doonesbury*, of course. A lot of people read *Doonesbury*....

P: I notice you have an in-house editorial cartoonist, and I looked at his editorial cartoon today, which I thought was quite good. What is his basic purpose, and do you tell him what to do or approve what he does?

D: He uses the old classic format. His purpose, of course, is to give us a chance at cartoons on local area and Florida subjects which we cannot get from the syndicate. But he does national subjects as well. He comes to the morning editorial meeting with three ideas, which are passed around, and they sort of agree. He has a favorite. Almost

always that is the one they agree on. With supervision of the editorial page editor and the executive editors at that meeting, too, and the news editor, they sort of agree on one. Then he goes back and inks it. If we like two of them, we may give him a day off the next day and run the second one....

P: How do you decide main stories, headlines?

D: ... There is a preliminary editorial conference at 11:00 in the morning and another one at 4:00. That is when the paper is laid out and the space allocated and the bad news about... circulation department problems and whatnot is passed out, and then each of the interest editors has a chance to speak up for his requirements and what is coming up [in the] world, what is coming up nationally, what is coming [up] local.... That is a newsroom conference.... [T]he editorial writers meet at 10:00 every morning to talk about what they want to write about. Matters of policy, generally. That is under the supervision of the editorial page editor.... Writers come in with their own ideas. If you come in with an idea and defend it with the others and they approve, then you write it. There is no question about that.... The editorial writers generally, in a vague sort of way, develop areas of interest and expertise. One person finds himself doing more of the foreign ones and national ones, and then another finds that he is concentrating on De Land.... We let those things happen naturally, let the editorial writers sort of find their own sea legs....

P: Do you use a lot of local columnists?

D: As many as I can.... We have an old- timer. She is not so old, but she has been

with us a long time on the desk.... As a little girl, she was a cracker kid running around barefoot and half-naked. She has an interesting local point of view, and she does columns about what it was like in the old days. We had a most marvelous [columnist], rest his soul, John Carter. Referred to himself as the jug-eared kid and wrote an absolutely marvelous column about cracker Florida, with a lot of humor in it....

P: Explain how the role of women in newspapers has changed. Obviously in your case, there was a female co-editor at a very early time, but what about the role of other women in the newspaper?

D: Since World War II, if you are talking about reporters and editors, they have expanded from a limited range of things to an unlimited range of things. There is not anything that women do not do around here. Nothing. I even have a lady sportswriter, and she is tops.

P: How have you encouraged minority participation?

D: All I could. They are hard to get. You find that you get a talented kid... but most of the really talented ones will find themselves on the *Atlanta Constitution*, or some[place] like that, for twice what I can pay them....

P: How would you evaluate Reubin Askew as a governor [1971-1979]?

D: I thought he was okay, very good. He knew his own mind and was a very moral person... In those days, he was not highly sophisticated; [he is] much more so now. But it is nice to have somebody in the governor's mansion whom you feel is really honest and really a good person.

P: Your views of Bob Graham.{Governor, 1979-1987, U.S. Senator, 1987-present]

D: Bob Graham is a person I like very much, personally.... It is so hard to judge. Certainly, his heart is in the right place. He did a good job as governor. It is hard to judge a Florida governor on the basis of performance, because his performance is so hedged in by the antique cabinet system.... I think Graham has showed up well in Washington, too. I think he is an intelligent senator. Lawton Chiles was an enthusiasm of mine from the first. He was a remarkable, remarkable man. Not un-flawed, but a remarkable man.

P: When you look at the history of this paper, you in some ways already discussed this, but I would like for you to focus once again on your greatest contribution to your community. You talked about integration, but I am sure there are other areas where you feel you made a significant impact.

D: There are a number of things that we have interfered in. I think my father's major role in bringing voting machines in to this county, and then fifteen years later, was it, we got the signature recognition. In promoting that, that certainly had a profound influence on local politics. The signature recognition, we finally got it where they cannot vote the graveyard, they cannot steal the election. When my father came here, there was one precinct down in New Smyrna Beach that always came up with enough votes to carry the county for the County Ring candidates, the De Land political ring, even if it was more votes than there were registered there. The election machinery at least is keeping it honest; pretty well stamped [voter fraud] out. I do not know, maybe there is a new

technique of diddling with ballots in Deland. But as far as the precincts are concerned, it is fairly hard to do the kinds of things that were done in those days...

P: One of the images of Daytona Beach in the past has been sex, sand and suds. Do you want to change that?

D: Oh desperately. Terrible, terrible image. The event mentality which hinders the entire working life of the tourist community on bike week and motorcycle races and spring breaks and auto races and that kind of thing, huge crowds which come and go... I am talking about the big events that bring in people in the six figures, leav[ing] a sea of trash and broken hearts behind them. A segment of the motel industry thinks this is the way to live. They do not care how badly their hotels are torn up. The insurance company pays for that. Our city council is getting to be very irritated about this. The bill they got for cleaning up Biketoberfest has come... to several hundred thousand dollars worth of damages and garbage collection and the biggest mess you ever saw. Some people are getting disenchanted with this. That is one reason that we have worked so hard on cultural things. They serve as a kind of counterbalance for that, and quality of life things serve to persuade a different type of person to migrate here to live. It is a continual argument that goes on between the event people and the non-event people.

P: The events provide a mass infusion of money into the community, but the cost of police overtime and all that makes it much more problematic, does it not?

D: Yes, so the city says. They are now pointing out that these two-day events with the disaster figures in the \$200,000 or \$300,000 level are hardly worth doing, as far as

the city is concerned. The city gets very little, cannot charge admission, and gets a bill for \$230,000 or whatever Biketoberfest cost them....

P: Other than your newspaper, what would be the best newspapers in Florida?

D: I think it has to be *St. Pete [Times] haute concours*. [highest contest- best in a public competition] I do not see anybody else... in the picture. There are some other people doing pretty good work. Sarasota is doing some good things. *FLORIDA TODAY* does some good work. I guess if I had to pick a second paper after *St. Pete*, probably West Palm Beach [*Palm Beach Post*]. That is a pretty good newspaper. I do not think the others are outstanding. I think the wonderful *Miami Herald* of twenty years ago is now just a ghost of itself....

P: Is the tendency of newspapers, then, toward the *Miami Herald* which is owned by a chain, rather than the independent *St. Pete Times*?

D: You are only going to have a *St. Pete Times* when you have a management which is really trying to do something.... It is hard when you have a chain which is handed over to a CPA [Certified Public Accountant] to run. It is hard for him. The whole idea of spending money on improving news coverage, spending raw money to add sports pages and add local pages and that kind of thing, just waste, production waste. He is brought up to make widgets square and no rounded corners, so a lot of things that have happened to a lot of the [newspaper] chains are perfectly logical from the business standpoint. You make them all as alike as peas....

P: Have you ever had any difficulty with unions?

D: I had unions for a considerable period of time. I have had some difficulties with unions. No one has unions without some difficulty. But I would say that our union relations have been peaceful and constructive, largely, even when we had the typographical union and they were rambunctious. They were always susceptible to the argument that we were in it together. My father, who dealt with them in the early stages, and I later, always took the attitude that whatever they asked for that we could give them, we would give them without argument, and that they were entitled to a share of what we made, what we were. So that was a little bit disarming for some of these guys who came in with their fangs bared. The only one I was never able to figure out was the Guild. They are so aggressive and so abusive. We had an awful time with them. It only lasted thirteen months. Employees voted them out.

P: Is there anything that we have not discussed or I have not asked that you would like to comment on?

D: We covered a wide field. No, I do not think so. I think it is most interesting that we will hear this kind of narrative from every paper in the state. That will be interesting. I will be interested to know what some of my colleagues say, and I will be interested in other cases to know what excuses they have for what it is they put out.

END OF INTERVIEW