

Don't Be Tricked by the Statesman Journal

I no longer trust our so-called "community newspaper."

I've been a subscriber since 1977. Most of that time, I believed the Statesman Journal cared about reporting local news truthfully, fairly, completely.

No longer. Along with many others, I now see the paper as being one of the biggest obstacles to improving Salem. Without a well-informed citizenry, a town is easily hijacked by special interests.

I've experienced first-hand how the current crop of SJ executives hired by the Gannett Corporation have sacrificed their journalistic integrity.

Six months ago a Statesman Journal investigative reporter was enthused about my release of a tell-all report, "Outrage: Salem's U.S. Bank tree killings."

Subtitle: "The true story of how City officials and the bank president cut down five large, healthy, beautiful downtown trees for no good reason, and misled citizens about why they did it."

A story was written. It was scheduled for front-page publication. Then the piece was killed by the executive editor, Michael Davis, a Gannett newcomer to Salem.

Earlier Davis had told me that my report provided a glimpse into how power was exerted in Salem. At least he was right about that.

Having forsaken its watchdog role, the Statesman Journal has become a cog in the machine that tries to run Salem. The paper aligns with the Chamber of Commerce types who are its main advertisers; it kowtows to City officials elected and appointed with Chamber support.

So I shouldn't have been surprised when the newspaper squashed an investigative story that cast light on how the power game is played in Salem.

I've also filed ethics complaints with SJ executives and the Gannett Corporation about important factual errors in editorials that were pointed out to editorial page editor Dick Hughes, but left uncorrected.

Never got a response about the errors. Wasn't told why the tree story was killed. And Davis ignored invitations to meet with me and other disgruntled subscribers about the paper's coverage of local issues.

So the Statesman Journal not only refuses to shine a light on shadowy Salem politics and policies, it won't look at its own shortcomings.

What's going on here is journalistic sleight-of-hand, like a magician who misdirects your attention to a shiny object while picking your pocket.

The Statesman Journal has become overly filled with "shiny objects." Kid's page. Human interest pieces. Outdoor articles. Reader responses. Volunteer and non-profit organization showcasing.

All this would be fine if the newspaper was fulfilling its journalistic responsibility to tell readers about what is going on with serious stuff in Salem.

Third Bridge shenanigans. Wasteful City of Salem spending. Back-room dealmaking at City Hall. A shamefully inadequate transit system. Incoherent police facility planning.

There's no commitment to local in-depth, analytic, and investigative reporting. Readers have learned more about the blind bison than the unneeded half billion dollar third bridge we're being asked to pay for.

Find other ways to keep informed. Don't be fooled by the Statesman Journal's trickery.

Strange Up Salem seeks to lift our city's Blah Curse. Give us a Facebook like. Brian Hines blogs at hinesblog.com