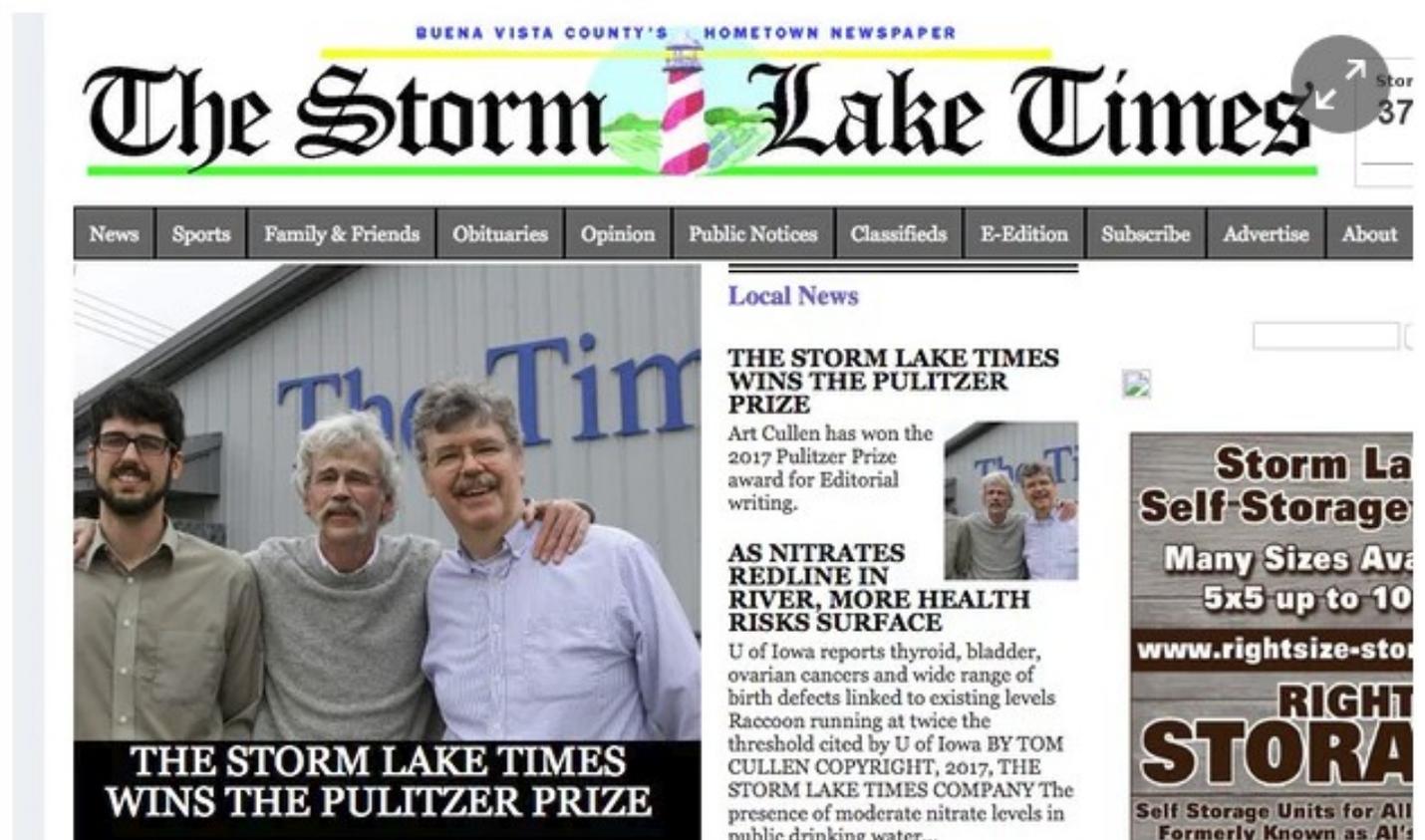


Tiny, family-run Iowa newspaper wins Pulitzer for taking on agriculture companies

Art Cullen owns the 3,000-circulation Storm Lake Times with his brother John. His wife and son also work at the paper



A front page screen shot of Iowa's Storm Lake Times, which has won a Pulitzer Prize. Photograph: Storm Lake Times

A small-town Iowa newspaper with a staff of 10 people - most of whom are related to each other - has [won a Pulitzer Prize](#) for taking on powerful agricultural companies over farm pollution.

Art Cullen, who owns the Storm Lake Times with his brother John, acknowledged it wasn't easy taking on agriculture in a state like Iowa where you see hundreds of

miles of farm fields in every direction. The Cullens lost a few friends and a few advertisers, but never doubted they were doing the right thing.

“We’re here to challenge people’s assumptions and I think that’s what every good newspaper should do,” he said.

Among the other staff members at the Storm Lake Times is John Cullen’s wife Mary, Art’s wife Dolores and their son, Tom. The family’s dog, Mabel also hangs out at the newspaper offices most of the time, Poynter reports.*



Cullen’s writing was lauded by the Pulitzer committee for “editorials fuelled by tenacious reporting, impressive expertise and engaging writing that successfully challenged powerful corporate agricultural interests in Iowa”.

As well as hard-hitting news and editorials, the paper also includes local stories. On Monday, a front-page story told of how a second-grader found a four-leaf clover in the field behind her school.

Cullen told the Washington Post that he knows what readers like. “We strive to have a baby, a dog, a fire and a crash on every front page, so, yes, we do pander,” he said.

But it was the paper’s dogged coverage of farming issues affecting the state that won them the coveted journalism prize.

www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/11/tiny-family-run-iowa-newspaper-wins-pulitzer-for-taking-on-agriculture-companies

* <http://www.poynter.org/2017/tiny-family-run-newspaper-wins-pulitzer-prize-for-taking-on-big-business/455465/>

Discussion:

1. Summarize this article in one or two sentences.
2. How is the article organized? (What elements of “story” do you see in this article?)
3. What will you remember from this article after you have forgotten the details?
4. What do you wish the writer had included or left out?
5. Who is the intended audience?
6. What is the role of journalism prizes such as the Pulitzer Prize?

Useful words and phrases:

to take on
to challenge assumptions
to hang out
fuelled by
hard-hitting
crash (noun)
to pander

Buena Vista county, where the 3,000-circulation, twice-weekly newspaper is based in north-west Iowa, was one of three counties sued by Des Moines Water Works for allowing too much nitrogen to be released through farm drainage systems into rivers from which the utility draws its drinking water. The counties fought the federal lawsuit using money provided by undisclosed sources.

The newspaper worked with the Iowa Freedom of Information Council to force the release of documents showing funding came from the Farm Bureau and other agricultural groups.

“Anyone with eyes and a nose knows in his gut that Iowa has the dirtiest surface water in America,” Cullen wrote in a March 2016 editorial.

“It is choking the waterworks and the Gulf of Mexico. It is causing oxygen deprivation in Northwest Iowa glacial lakes. It has caused us to spend millions upon millions trying to clean up Storm Lake, the victim of more than a century of explosive soil erosion.”

Cullen, 59, says he feels vindicated that the information was released.

A judge, however, dismissed the water utility’s lawsuit last month, giving the farm groups and counties a clear victory.

Cullen is proud that the Pulitzer committee recognised his small newspaper’s efforts alongside those of larger papers. The two other finalists in the editorial writing category were from the Houston Chronicle and The Washington Post.

“We’ve always believed that the Storm Lakes Times should be as good at covering Storm Lake as the New York Times is at covering New York,” he said. “There’s no reason why an editorial written in Iowa shouldn’t be as good as an editorial written in Washington.”

Associated Press contributed to this report.

dogged (dogged coverage)
to covet, coveted
to draw
to disclose, undisclosed
gut (in his gut)
to vindicate, to feel vindicated