

The Quebec Community Newspapers Association
25 years of good newspapers, good people and accomplishments.

Community Newspapers have served a vital role as cultural, economic and community catalysts for almost two centuries in Quebec. One could say that community newspapers have anchored villages and have provided a voice for communities like no other institution. They continue to be the champions of the charter of human rights and freedom of speech and they have witnessed and preserved the stories of each community.

Community newspapers in Quebec have always been steered by an assembly of dedicated individuals who are as unique as the readers they serve. Some publishers have gained notoriety for their weekly editorial stance and others for their political wit and savvy. Others provided a stage for feel-good community spirit and volunteerism.

One common thread has been evident in the pages for all to see. There has been strong commitment to reporting fairly and accurately despite the challenges of living and publishing in the community one lives in. Community newspaper publishers report the good the bad and the ugly and this has often earned them many friends and enemies. A mayor who loves you one day may turn against you the next after the publication of council minutes.

Throughout history community publishers and their publications have earned respect for shedding light on each and every issue that affects the average citizen. They have done so with a focus on local issues and continue this commitment today.

English community newspapers in Quebec have thrived in the face of a political environment that could have seen their demise. Written records indicate Quebec publishers began to see the need to unite in a network to address political, economic and demographic realities as early as 1956.

On the national front an assembly of community newspaper publishers were already united in a federation. As is often the case Quebec publishers sat on the perimeter before becoming part of the Canadian Weekly Newspapers Association. Eventually a Quebec chapter was born.

These humble beginnings set the stage for what is the Quebec Community Newspapers Association today.

As an officially registered not for profit corporation the Quebec Community Newspapers Association has served member publications for over twenty-five years. Founded in 1980 the association is as diverse as its publishers and publications and continues to address the many varied needs, issues and challenges that persevere in Quebec.

Dedicated to serving primarily English publications and readers the association (QCNA) now includes, weeklies, monthlies, bi weekly, daily, bilingual, first nation and community of interest newspapers.

A commonality and our mission are based on the need to ensure a healthy environment from which to publish and to assist in providing our communities with a voice through our newspapers.

The Quebec Community Newspapers Association continues to be the ears, eyes and voice for the English community newspaper industry in Quebec. Many volunteers, staff and government itself continue to recognize the need for a central voice for publishers and readers who face challenges unlike any other region of the country.

The Association for Quebec Regional English Media (AQREM) provided an extension of the original Quebec chapter of Canadian weeklies. Disbanded for a short two -year period, AQREM sprung out of the ashes of this initial chapter. A solicitation of active Quebec publishers was performed with the question of whether they would or should entertain a new entity with potential support from the Secretary of State (now known as the department of Canadian Heritage). With typical independent and healthy observation, Quebec publishers provided differing opinions on the questions.

One publisher was quoted as saying they had no time for an association, as he was “too busy selling advertising on Main Street.” Another opposed the financial support of government and yet another identified competition between newspapers as an obstacle.

Fortunately enough rationale was provided to enlist a dozen regional publishers who assembled at the top of Mont St. Hilaire 25 years ago in a series of sessions to launch what is known as QCNA today.

The original dozen all continue to be members today and the association has grown to include 32 publications with very few existing Quebec English community newspapers outside of the membership. Current services include advocacy, marketing, professional development and industry alliances. The association has close ties and a membership with the Canadian Community Newspapers Association and includes les Hebdos du Quebec and l'Association de Presse Francophone as allies.

These alliances are not a new phenomenon as documentation shows continued combined industry collaboration throughout the years. In fact it is noted that at one time this association applied for a charter as Les Hebdos du Quebec itself. Yet another piece of history shows a potential merger with The Ontario Community Newspapers Association in late 1957.

A review of many documents and minutes of the association on file reveal many repeating instances of activity. Items of interest include the establishment of a clearing-house for advertising and verified circulation criteria. As early as 1966 these two items have met with mixed emotion and support. A well- known Quebec publisher (John

Sancton) promoted a combined network for solicitation of advertising and audited circulation in anticipation of potential provincial advertising prior to Montreal's Expo 67. He encountered resistance from some fellow publishers who felt that any effort to solicit as a verified group would negate individual liberties. Of course the subject of commissions was hotly debated. Mr. Sancton was the first publisher to coordinate a classified ad network in Quebec and served as a national and provincial president.

Today the association coordinates advertising placement via the federal government and association bylaws include verified circulation criteria. Both activities are still debated by members frequently.

A technological whirlwind changed the way newspapers assembled news and did business. The transition to new technology is well documented and no other single issue impacted the Quebec newspaper industry so strongly and visibly. Emerging tools and techniques provided publishers with new operating challenges and opportunities. Our newspapers have embraced these methods and continually produce award-winning publications that have helped ensure a healthy readership.

Notable changes to our publications include methods of delivery from what was primarily a subscription-based industry to that of a free distribution entity. Many publishers continue to sell newspapers but free distribution is here to stay.

A continued transition to tabloid formats sees only three English broad sheets remaining in the membership.

Group-owned publications continue to be a trend and increased non-traditional competition from other media impacts our association and its members.

A declining English demographic and a fast paced demand for real time information along with political and industry issues of the day make for challenges that continually need monitoring and collective action.

The Quebec Community newspapers association has addressed these issues for a quarter century on behalf of members and will strive to enhance, preserve and grow our member publications for many years to come. We are proud of our accomplishments and particularly proud of our member publications.

The Quebec Community Newspapers Association would like to take this opportunity to thank the many individuals, members, volunteers and the department of Canadian Heritage as well as the thousands of readers in our communities that have supported our newspapers and the association throughout its history.

Perhaps now more than ever your continued support is vital to the continuation of a free press in Quebec.

Thank you.