

The Seattle Times Family Stewardship Delivers Relevant Print & Digital Content with Community Support

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By Pete DeLaunay

The Seattle Times publisher, Frank Blethen, explained how his 120-year-old “startup” is evolving as a robust print and digital news platform through innovation, reaching out for public support of key initiatives and emerging as a nationally recognized newspaper model - balancing the content needs of boomers, Gen Xers, and millennials for the future. “We were not going to allow the watchdog to become a lap dog,” he said.

Media clutter has never been as intense, with proliferating online news sites, cable news access, e-newsletters and social media channels clouding what is and what is not accurate news reporting.

Frank Blethen leads *The Seattle Times* as the 12th generation of family stewardship dedicated to relevant local content, robust public service, and journalistic excellence.

In his book, “Democracy Detectives,” Stanford professor James Hamilton ranked the *Seattle Times* as 5th in the nation and 2nd on the West Coast for investigative journalism during the period from 1918-2013. With significant public support, *The Seattle Times* is now the 2nd largest newspaper on the west coast, and 5th largest in the U.S. With 1.8 million print and digital subscribers, *The Seattle Times* reaches 71% of all registered voters and boasts some 399,000 millennial subscribers. While digital editions continue to grow, print remains strong as *The Seattle Times* rolls out new approaches to reporting the news with 12 supplemental e-newsletters.



“All newspapers are in a transformation process,” he said. “We’ve sought to accurately determine the needs of Gen Xers and millennials, aligning their needs with our news platforms and balancing content with our traditional boomer audience.”

To continue providing high-quality content, *The Seattle Times* embarked on bold community funding for public service journalism initiatives: *The Greater Good Campaign*, *Traffic Lab*, *Education Lab*, and coming soon – *Free Press Watchdog*.

As the resource-starved environment for local news organizations took its toll around the U.S. with declining advertising revenue and massive layoffs, the Blethen family “doubled down.” “With funding from the [Bill and Melinda]

Gates Foundation, we launched the *Greater Good Campaign* in support of higher education, and *Project Homeless*,” he said, “with many requests for new community-funded labs in the pipeline.”

With a spirited Q&A following his remarks, Blethen was most animated when questioned about recent assaults on the free press (‘Fake News’). “People are focusing on the wrong thing by fixating on Trump,” he concluded. “We need to understand the control and lack of oversight on the internet by Google and Facebook as they selectively steal our content,” he said, “The two biggest threats to our democracy are a broken free press and broken public education.”

President Cindy opened the meeting with **Jimmy Collins** leading the day’s song, accompanied by **Freeman Fong** on the piano and **Skip Kotkins** delivering the day’s inspiration. For the day’s “Foundation Flash” about a Seattle Rotary Service Foundation-funded projects, **Past President Karl Ege** described how SRSF “cut through the red tape” to provide \$2000 in travel expenses for the Franklin High School mock trial team to attend a YMCA national mock trial competition, where they became national champions among teams from 46 states.

President Cindy closed the meeting with a Welsh proverb, “Adversity brings knowledge and knowledge brings wisdom.”

