VISUALS

Sunshine: Without laws, government keeps lots of secrets

Laws ensure that ‘democracy thrives in the light of day’

Open records pave path to changes

Sunshine Week BRIGHT IDEAS
Redacted text is a frequently used – and always effective – graphic way to make the point quickly about withholding information. The Sunday Page One of The Carroll County Times in Westminster, Md., (top) got right to the point with its redacted text in the headline and in the modified flag image. Also on the front page were open government stories produced by several Maryland newspapers for members of the Maryland-Delaware-D.C. Press Association. In his editorial published in advance of Sunshine Week, Editor Ethan Dezotelle of the weekly County Courier in Enosburg, Vt., (right) redacted portions of the text and showed clearly what happens when key portions of information are withheld. In a photo illustration, The Berkshire (Mass.) Eagle (below) used its own pages to graphically represent the importance of complete information.
The Sun in Lowell, Mass., made sure its readers couldn’t miss the importance of Sunshine Week. Each morning, across the top of the front page was a red banner reading, “Today’s news is brought to you by the First Amendment. Sunshine Week March 12-18.” Editor Jim Campanini said the response from staff and readers was exceptional: “People were really engaged.” Beyond the banner, lead articles with bold graphics on Monday and Friday looked at government secrecy at the federal and local levels, daily Page One stories examined pending legislation affecting the state’s Open Meeting Law, First Amendment lessons in local schools, and communities’ difficulties maintaining records because of diminishing resources. And if that weren’t enough, The Sun conducted open records audits of 16 government offices, finding “atrocity compliance,” according to a local lawyer quoted in the article. “Protecting the freedom to know” was the theme of the Sunday Focus commentary section kicking off the week.
The Call in Woonsocket, R.I., developed a page on how to access public records in Rhode Island that included a step-by-step process, the basics of the law, and a sidebar on the state’s Open Meetings Law. The Call used the info graphic to kick off its Sunshine Week coverage, and made the graphic available to other participants through the Rhode Island Press Association and via the national Toolkit. RIPA also worked with The Newport Daily News on a Sunshine Week house ad for Rhode Island newspapers.
A similar graphic, in this case a Sunshine Week illustration created by The Associated Press, can anchor pages that are designed very differently. The Times Record of Fort Smith, Ark. (above left); The News & Advance, Lynchburg, Va. (center); and The Herald, in Rock Hill, S.C. (right), combined material from AP with local content, then utilized type and images in creative ways that resulted in three very different – but all commanding – opinion section fronts.
Knight Ridder/Tribune Information Services and Knight Ridder/Tribune Graphics (now both McClatchy/Tribune) produced special graphics for use during Sunshine Week. A special OnePage First Amendment Quiz (above left) featured a picture of First Amendment author James Madison and explained some of the history behind the Bill of Rights. The multiple-choice questions – based on a longer online quiz developed by the Student Press Law Center – ranged from relatively simple to more complex scenarios. Knight Ridder/Tribune Graphics created a series of info graphics (right) for Sunshine Week participants that included a look at money recovered by the federal government because of whistleblowers, annual FOIA requests, growth in government secrecy and an explanation of the FOIA process.