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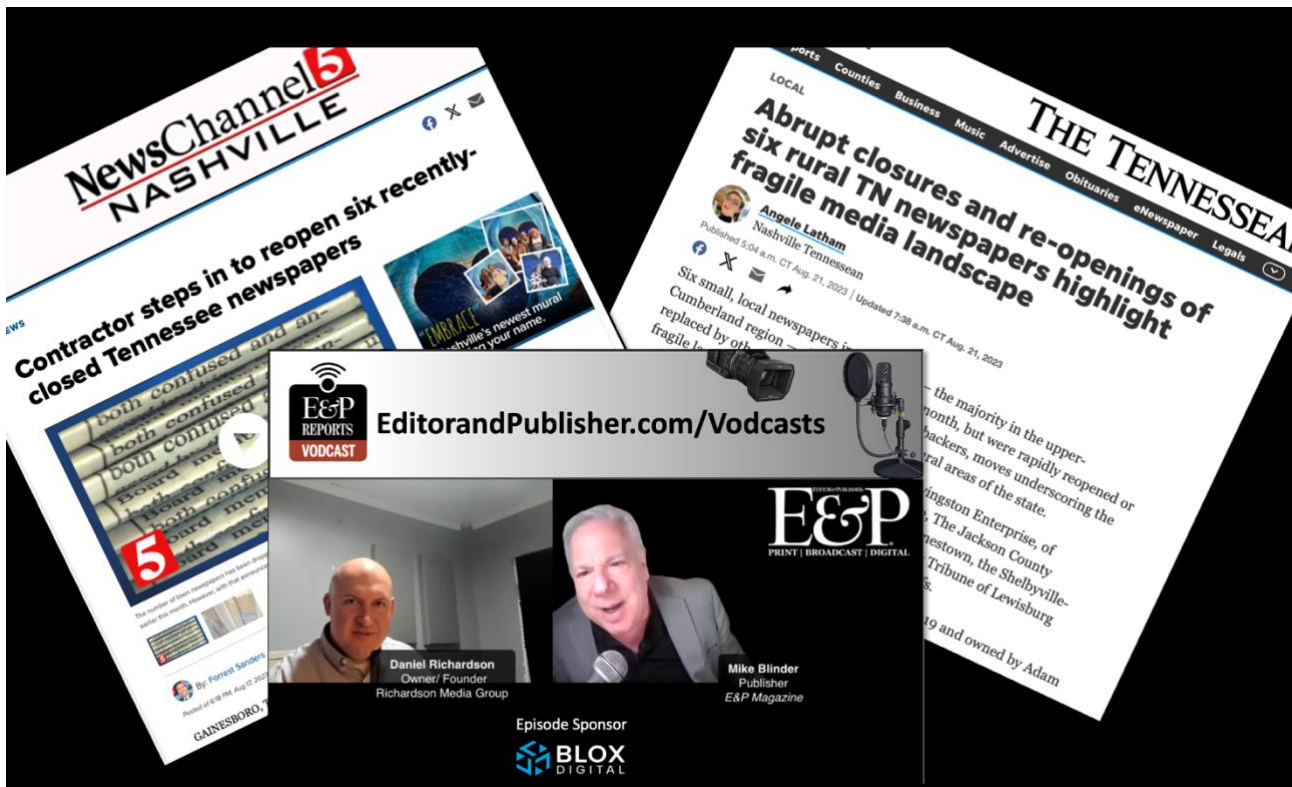
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Audio Transcript

Episode 235 of "[E&P Reports](#)" Vodcast Series
with Mike Blinder

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[Turning the Page: Daniel Richardson's journey to restore local news to Tennessee towns.](#)

In the heart of Tennessee, a quiet revolution is underway, led by Daniel Richardson, a Marine Corps veteran turned media entrepreneur. Armed with a passion for community and a commitment to preserving local journalism, Richardson has embarked on a mission to breathe new life into recently closed newspapers that were handed back to a local bank. Under the banner of Richardson Media Group, he's resurrected several Tennessee titles, igniting hope and rejuvenating the voices of these communities.



0:00:03.9 Announcer: This is ENP reports, a podcast from Editor and publisher magazine, the authoritative voice of news media since 1884, serving newspapers, broadcast, digital, and all forms of news publishing.

0:00:19.2 Mike Blinder: And greetings once again, Mike Blinder, publisher, ENP Magazine. As always, we urge our listeners on podcast platforms they prefer to follow us watching on the YouTube channel. Go below me, there is a subscribe button. Ring the bell to the right. You'll get an update each and every time we upload a new weekly episode of this podcast dedicated to news publishing we call ENP Reports. Daniel Richardson, you're kind of a neighbor of mine. I live in Hendersonville, Tennessee. We're brand new here, only at our home for about five months. You're also in Middle Tennessee as well, correct sir?

0:00:55.4 Daniel Richardson: I'm barely across the river in West Tennessee, in Camden.

0:00:58.8 MB: And this is an interesting story because you've got ink in your veins. I mean, your dad started in this industry at a small newspaper, built a little bit of an empire in Tennessee. You worked for him. And I was fascinated at your ascension within the company 'cause you started off it looks like just as a reporter and ended up being COO over the years. And that was called Mid-Valley Publishing, sir, do I have that correct?

0:01:24.2 DR: Magic Valley Publishing?

0:01:26.0 MB: Sure. From 2012. What did you do before that? Were you just... Go ahead.

0:01:30.9 DR: I was in school. I was in the Marine Corps for two years active and was still involved on reserve status for until 2014. But that was at the beginning of my career. I got out of high school, did one year of college, enlisted in the Marine Corps, was activated for two years, including a deployment to Iraq. Came back, finished my school at University of Tennessee at Martin. And during that time got married, had a baby, and was involved with various roles within the publishing company at entry level, delivering newspapers and stuff like that, some advertising sales. And after I graduated in May of 2012, I went to work in Hickman County, Kentucky.

0:02:20.8 MB: Yep. And your mom still has that company, but you broke off and entrepreneurially, I think that's a word you can play unscramble, maybe not, it made it up. Started your own company, named after yourself, Richardson Media Group, which makes you, in our estimation in the ENP, a journalistic hero because you are saving journalism by saving papers in a small town. And you're doing it in a very interesting business way which sounds a little similar to our business model here at ENP where you outsource yourself. Am I correct? Like I do. You are the owner of the company, do I have that right, sir?

0:02:58.6 DR: Yes, that's correct. And as far as the name of the company, I like to think that I named after my father, or at least my family, not just myself, but.

0:03:08.3 MB: Alright, well, tell you what we're gonna explore the Richardson Media Group on the backside of this message, stick around.



0:03:16.4 Announcer: This episode of ENP Reports is exclusively sponsored by Blocks Digital formerly Town News. Even though the name has changed, their commitment to the media industry is as strong as ever. Blocks Digital is now even better positioned to deliver integrated solutions like content management, audience development, advertising revenue, video management, and more. Join the over 2000 news publishers worldwide, that power their ongoing digital transformation with Blocks digital serving over 141 million monthly users who view over 6.5 billion pages of content each year. You can trust Blocks digital to empower you, to connect you at scale with the community you need to reach. Blocks Digital, formerly Town News now reimagined to help meet the news publishing challenges of tomorrow and beyond. Learn more @bloxdigital.com.

0:04:21.3 MB: Alright, Daniel, so now it's fall of 2023, you amicably part ways with mom, the company that she still has, that your dad started and you got a brother involved in that, and forged on your own. And correct me if I'm wrong, I read some reporting from local TV here about you, that a bank approached you. Is that what kind of made you look at helping out these other markets and becoming their new owner and publisher to save the papers in other cities?

0:04:51.4 DR: Yeah, it was a unique opportunity. The bank reached out to me to reopen some publications that they had financed and had subsequently been closed.

0:05:01.8 MB: Now, which family or ownership are you allowed to tell me? Was the bank holding the paper for that closed this paper?

0:05:10.0 DR: It was Holler Media, LLC.

0:05:11.9 MB: Did you know these people when you were running your dad's company, Magic Valley Publishing?

0:05:16.9 DR: I'd met them.

0:05:18.6 MB: Okay.

0:05:18.8 DR: That's the extent of that.

0:05:20.0 MB: And Holler, I did not dig as deep so may give us. Was Holler just basically saying, we can't do it anymore, we're losing too much money, no one wants to buy our properties, we're out and turn them back over to the bank. Is that what happened?

0:05:33.5 DR: Essentially, I mean, the papers were doing okay, but they had a lot large debt service that they were not able to fund.

0:05:41.2 MB: Some of that was, correct me if I'm wrong, press operations as well.

0:05:44.7 DR: They had a press in Shelbyville that they had that they closed.

0:05:49.1 MB: Wow.

0:05:49.7 DR: Sometime before.

0:05:52.0 MB: Now how can... Are these towns that Holler had, how close are they to each other? Are they kinda clustered? Is it like one region of Tennessee?

0:06:02.6 DR: There's a cluster in the Upper Cumberland area. It's in Livingston which Overton County and Jackson County, Clay County and Fentress County. Those are all contiguous with each other. And then the other paper was the Shelbyville Times-Gazette, which was in Shelbyville.

0:06:20.5 MB: Just for our audience, who doesn't know Mid Tennessee and where you are, what kind of towns are these? Are these rural, are these suburban? What kind of markets are you serving, sir now?

0:06:30.7 DR: The Upper Cumberland communities are all very rural. Clay County is very small county, I think less than 6,000 people in the county. And that's the smallest of the four. But all four of those counties up there, I would say have a population of less than 25,000. Each and the show people's a little bit different. Bedford County as I think 51,000 people, Shelbyville 's a good sized town. It had a daily newspaper and a press for a long time.

0:07:03.6 MB: I read the story there. The woman who was running the Shelbyville paper said that she got a phone call that she'd lost her job, [laughter] And that must have been when the holler family turned them over to a bank. And then how quickly did the bank and you cut a deal where you were gonna save these towns from losing their papers? I mean, how, give me the timeline now. What, when was this and how quickly did you save these, communities from losing their voices?

0:07:31.0 DR: Shelbyville people times, because that was the first one that was closed down. And it was closed in mid-July. And then the Upper Cumberland Publications were closed at the end of July, on a Friday that was when the day they closed down was the day that the bank reached out to me. We worked pretty quickly over the weekend on the formalities of some sort of operating agreement. However, they couldn't hire me technically to run the publications until after they foreclosed on them, which would take some time, because just the foreclosure process. So after Negotiation Tech, technically Holler Media hired me to reopen the publications, until the foreclosure sale took place, that took place on September 28th. So from August 10th, I think to September 28th I was technically working for Holler Media. And then on that day, began working for Apex Media, which was a publishing company that the bank.

0:08:40.9 MB: Sorry. Apex Bank. So they named it Apex Media, but that was all temporary. The bank didn't want these papers on the books. Right. They just wanted to get the debt paid. Correct.

0:08:51.6 DR: Well, essentially, yes. They didn't wanna see the communities without newspapers. They didn't wanna see the newspapers shut down. And at the end of the day, they're responsible to their shareholders. So right. They wanted to recover as much of the capital as they could, which required an ongoing business that was marketable and sellable.

0:09:10.6 MB: So let, I got to ask one question, then we're gonna, we'll go into the other side of the story, which is where you're heading. Holler basically was losing money, couldn't service its debt,

and basically just said, "We're done." I mean, that is inherent in this story because then the bank takes ownership and says, "Damn, we've gotta please our shareholders?" And I love this bank. I've never heard of it. Apex, did I say that correctly?

0:09:32.8 DR: It's Apex with a p.

0:09:35.0 MB: Excuse me, Apex Bank. But must be wonderful that they care about the communities they serve. This is a hyper-local bank obviously, or a local family bank or something. 'Cause they saw the need to keep local journalism alive, but the Hollers paid you out of their own pocket. Even though they had stopped. Where was that money coming from? Just out of their goodwill to try to save the jobs of the employees? They let go.

0:09:58.8 DR: Well, technically the money was advanced from the bank and added to their note.

0:10:07.2 MB: Alright, see, this is why I was, when I was reading that, I was going, wow, this is convoluted. So in a way, because they couldn't legally take possession yet, 'cause you have to go through foreclosure, there was just a deal cut to get you some cash so you could start this company and then the bank let you start working to save these titles. Okay, let's talk about that now. Now you're in these communities where they heard, "Bang, we're losing our paper." Then these communities somehow heard either through social media or grapevine or something, bang. No, we're not, there's this gentleman who was working with another media company. He's got ink in his veins. His name is Daniel Richardson. He's coming in, he's gonna make sure this community gets served with local journalism. How did it feel? What kind of response did you get? Did you meet with civic leaders, bank leaders, chamber of Commerce? What was it like when you went into these communities and said, "I'm gonna, I'm leaving my family business. And you said amicably there was no, I hate my family. I don't, I mean, this was all just because you had an opportunity to go off on your own and build your own company. What was it like? How were you received, sir?"

0:11:16.3 DR: Not the same way in every community. [laughter], I've got to say, but in for most cases the communities and the community leaders were very excited to be able to get their newspaper back. And a community newspaper is something that I think most communities take for granted. And you don't think much about it until it's gone. And I think that was the way it was with those communities. And once then you get the news that, that your newspaper is gone and I think it hits home a little bit. And so they but also I was greeted with some skepticism, honestly, A stranger from out of town coming in these are small communities, and so they had a terrible experience.

0:12:10.0 MB: You had to win their trust.

0:12:11.9 DR: Right. They had a terrible experience with a previous publisher and really...

0:12:14.7 MB: Really holler. Okay, go ahead.

0:12:16.9 DR: And, how did they know that I would be any different? So we like you said, we had to build some trust. I mean the rumors and everything on social media was nice to hear that their newspaper was coming back. But it wasn't real until there was a pretty newspaper in their mailbox and on the newsstands. And that is a big testament to the power of printed media. I think, but

because the website stayed up and, we put some news on the websites but it's just not, it's obviously not the same.

0:12:56.1 MB: I hear you. Alright, so what's your future now? How's it going? Are you get, are you, I mean, are you pushing out a little cash flow? Are you able to put some money away for your kid's education? [laughter]? You know, I asking what's going on in your world, Daniel Richmond Richardson.

0:13:10.9 DR: Well, I certainly hope that we will be able to it's been... So far we've been growing really fast and hopefully are now can take advantage of the opportunity to stabilize what we have and to standardize a few, a few administrative things to help things go a little bit bit smoother.

0:13:35.8 MB: And you got a press and you're running a press too, right?

0:13:39.3 DR: Not, not yet. No.

0:13:40.9 MB: No.

0:13:42.0 DR: I, magic Valley Publishing has a press in Huntington.

0:13:44.4 MB: Okay. So is that where you're printing.

0:13:48.6 DR: Most of the publications are printing there. Yeah, because of geographical reasons. We're the Interest County Paper is printing in Sparta. The Jackson Post is printing in Corinth, Mississippi with... So some of that's just capacity issues and also location.

0:14:08.2 MB: And I got to ask the final question. Are you gonna keep growing or is it None of my business right now. [laughter], every time we ask a broker that they always say is this on the record? I mean, are you gonna build the empire in that region of Tennessee?

0:14:24.9 DR: I hope so.

0:14:25.9 MB: Okay.

0:14:26.6 DR: I hope so. I'm pretty young and we've got, I think, a good opportunity. I think we're in position.

0:14:31.3 MB: How old's your kid? How old's your kid?

0:14:32.8 DR: I've got five kids, so.

0:14:35.1 MB: Oh. How's your, your oldest?

0:14:36.8 DR: She's 11.

0:14:37.3 MB: Alright. She could get a little ink in her veins now, right? Maybe.



0:14:40.6 DR: Oh yeah, they 11.

0:14:43.7 MB: I'm sorry. I just, I'm almost tearing, this is such a great story because I, it, first of all, thank you for your service. Thank you for staying in the industry. So many people just leave it. 'Cause it ain't easy is it Sir [laughter]? I mean, it's just not.

0:14:57.9 DR: It's not easy. But it's really the only thing I know. So I don't, I'm stuck.

0:15:03.4 MB: No, no, you're not stuck. You're investing in helping our society. I mean, that's how I look at my job every day. I mean, without a free press, we don't have a democracy. Don't you agree? And you're, and that at a local level, that's so important.

0:15:19.4 DR: Absolutely. And that's something that's often not really considered is the local media's role in the preservation of democracy.

0:15:29.7 MB: With that being said, we're gonna stay in touch with you, Daniel. Is that okay? And learning what's going on with Richardson Media Group, now nine strong in Middle Tennessee and hopefully growing in the years to come. Thanks for your valuable time.

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