



With unmatched reach at the national and local level, the USA TODAY Network touchs the lives of millions with our Pulitzer Prize-winning content, consumer experiences and advertiser products and services.

Our portfolio includes USA TODAY, hundreds of local media outlets in 43 states across the country, and Newsquest, which operates over 210 digital news and media brands in the United Kingdom.

We have created a powerful network of news organizations that positions us well to ensure and preserve the future of local journalism.

We will continue to connect people to journalism that matters and connect businesses to the customers they want to reach.

GANNETT SERVES A HIGHLY ENGAGED DIGITAL AUDIENCE OF

200 MILLION

AVERAGE MONTHLY UNIQUE VISITORS*

2.1 MILLION

digital-only paid subscriptions

as of December 31, 2024

2.6 MILLION

in print readership

as of December 31, 2024

The USA TODAY Network touches the lives of 1 in 2 adults** in the United States and is the leading news media publisher in circulation.

* 200 million average monthly unique visitors in the fourth quarter of 2024 with approximately 149 million average monthly unique visitors coming from our U.S. media network, which includes USA TODAY (based on December 2024 Comscore Media Metrix®) and approximately 51 million average monthly unique visitors resulting from our U.K. digital properties (based on Adobe Analytics).

** 2024 Comscore Inc., US Multi-Platform, Desktop 2+ and Total Mobile 18+, December 2023-December 2024

Impact that moves at the speed of news

Journalists tend to meet people on the worst days of their lives.

We trudge through mud to knock on what's left of a person's front door. We wade through hurricane floodwaters for an interview. We follow a rape survivor's case in court. We hop on planes and trains and fly drones to get the story – because every story deserves to be told.

What's significant about the USA TODAY Network is that we are simultaneously the largest news organization in America and yet made up of local and regional properties. This means that for us it's not about parachuting in – we live in the communities we cover. We, too, are neighbors. Our kids go to the same schools. We shop for food in the same grocery stores.

At USA TODAY, our journalists hail from diverse regions of the country and share that same impetus, the sense of mission for keeping people informed and holding those in power to account.

That's why when Hurricane Helene came ashore as a Category 4 storm and whipped through remote mountain communities of Western North Carolina, it was our very own staffers from the Asheville Citizen-Times who alerted us to the scale of the devastation from the front lines. Not only had they lost all water supply, but they recognized that before them was one of the deadliest natural disasters in nearly two decades to make landfall on the U.S. mainland.

This paved the way for some of our most ambitious and innovative service journalism as we were able to connect people with services and emergency help. We enacted a text messaging service, which allowed residents to get updates from our reporting and send any questions they had to a team of Citizen-Times journalists.

Our stories also recounted the grief and devastation of large swaths of towns swept away. In all, Gannett sent about 75 reporters, photojournalists and editors in 14 waves to support the work of our colleagues, many of whom had also lost their homes.

But that's just one major disaster.

Around the country, the work of our newsrooms shed light on some of the most important problems in our communities. In Florida, The Palm Beach Post's coverage of deaths and infractions led to the state amending addiction treatment regulations. The Des Moines Register in Iowa uncovered a scheme in which student loan borrowers were being forced to waive all rights if a lender chose to initiate court proceedings against them. The Arizona Republic found Maricopa County's jails have the highest death rates in the country.

And a decade after a USA TODAY investigation helped reveal the national backlog of rape kits, a two-year effort exposed thousands of kits left untested, cursory reviews and poor rates of convictions.

In the end, the work of all of our newsrooms moves at the speed of news: immediate, swift and unrelenting. But with it comes a commitment to accountability and to serving the people.

Because we will continue to meet people where they are, even on the hard days.

After all, they are our neighbors. Our readers. Our audience.

Caren Bohan

Editor-in-Chief, USA TODAY

Local journalism across nation prompts change during 2024

Northeast

Investigation tracks wasted money, unfulfilled dream at New Jersey racetrack

When owners of Freehold Raceway in Freehold, New Jersey, announced the track was closing, the Asbury Park Press investigated the state's subsidy program, learning legislators were unaware of how subsidy money sent to the raceway was being used. Not only had funds sent to support the park totaled more than \$100 million over the years, but taxpayers had little or no idea how the money was spent – annual reports, mandated by law, were incomplete or even missing. Further reporting showed how the track's failure was tied to an unfulfilled dream: The owners were fixated on having a casino onsite. Thanks to the Press' coverage, legislators and racing commission leaders were able to make changes to the allocation of subsidy money, and the raceway ultimately closed at the end of 2024.

Elected official changes policy on banning nonresidents from events after New York reporting

U.S. Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., in 2023 prohibited the press from reporting on his town hall meetings sponsored by his congressional office. Only residents of his district were allowed to attend, and the press had to agree not to write about the meetings or take photographs. Reporters from the Journal News/lohud in Westchester, New York, went to one of the events without a ticket and reported on it and subsequently went to another town hall, where reporters were told they could attend but not to write about it. The Journal News' photographer was banned because he did not live in the district. Following the story, Lawler agreed to change his policy.

Dogged reporting cited as Delaware landlord forced to shutter problematic rentals

The Delaware Department of Justice reached a unique settlement with longtime Wilmington landlord A.J. Pokorny after nearly two years of city and state officials trying to wrangle Pokorny to maintain his rental properties. The December settlement stems from the condemnation of buildings on North Adams Street after a partial collapse of an exterior wall in May 2022, which displaced dozens of residents. Pokorny is required to pay \$150,000, most of which will be distributed to former harmed tenants, and permanently leave the rental business in Delaware. State attorneys acknowledged The News Journal/Delawareonline.com was dogged in its efforts to regularly check on the status of the state investigation into Pokorny, and the settlement closes another chapter on the saga of the North Adams Street properties.

Funding secured for vital evacuation route after Delaware reporting highlights woes, mismanagement

When the ocean poured over the dunes and onto Coastal Highway on the north side of the Indian River Inlet in March 2024, all eyes turned to Delaware Seashore State Park. The beach was severely eroded and Coastal Highway, a vital evacuation route, was under threat. The News Journal/Delawareonline.com dug in, covering the lack of action and ongoing challenges to repair the beach while elevating voices in the local community. As the News Journal's coverage began to gain momentum, U.S. Sen. Tom Carper sprang into action and publicly addressed the situation. A few

Reporters from the Journal News/lohud in Westchester, New York, went to one of the events without a ticket and reported on it ... The Journal News' photographer was banned because he did not live in the district. **Following** the story, Lawler agreed to change his

policy.



▲ A horse and jockey warm up at New Jersey's Freehold Raceway in 2020, four years before the track closed. A 2024 Asbury Park Press investigation revealed neither lawmakers nor taxpayers knew how state subsidies supporting the failing track were being used because mandatory financial reports weren't being filled out. Peter Ackerman/USA TODAY NETWORK

weeks later, funding announcements started coming. Emergency dredging operations began at the end of November. And despite an ongoing fight for public records, reporters were able to uncover that the state department responsible didn't request the necessary federal funding until after the first dune breach. That oversight cost Delaware taxpayers a lot of money. Department Secretary Shawn Garvin said over \$600,000 has been spent trucking sand and other materials to the inlet in the past year alone, but the total amount spent on temporary solutions is unknown. The story and its impact continue to unfold.

High absenteeism in schools addressed after New Jersey reporter digs in

NorthJersey.com reporter Mary Ann Koruth wrote an extensive story showing the high absenteeism rates in New Jersey public schools since the COVID-19 pandemic. Her focus has prompted the issue to become more seriously addressed. For instance, one school district in the news site's coverage area has set of a series of information sessions for parents to discuss the impact of food insecurity, housing and other issues on absenteeism. Koruth was awarded a USC Annenberg Data Fellowship to drill down even deeper on why absenteeism rates are so high in several districts and what schools can do to attack the problem.

Conversation around mass-burial site changes with NY coverage

In 2008, the graves of more than 100 men, women and children, buried over two centuries ago in New York, were unearthed from an African American burial ground discovered under what is now the city of Newburgh's courthouse. The remains of 99 of them were sent to the State University of New York at New Paltz to be studied and preserved. The Poughkeepsie Journal covered the 15-year wait to see those remains reinterred, and in October, the City of Newburgh unveiled a historical marker to memorialize these people. While the call for a separate memorial site remains, the Journal's photo gallery and related coverage of the unveiling marked another step toward recognizing those who were buried under the courthouse.



▲ The Poughkeepsie Journal has documented the story of a mass African American burial site in Newburgh, N.Y., from the discovery in 2008, seen here, to removal of the bodies for study, to the reinterment in 2024. USA TODAY NETWORK FILE

Virginia city councilman's secret meetings about developer projects come to an end after reporting

Following a monthslong investigation that included former and current city employees and hundreds of pages of emails, recordings and other documents, The Petersburg Progress-Index in Virginia found that city employees felt pressured to prioritize the inspection and code enforcement of certain properties in Petersburg, often while struggling to keep up with an already overburdened case load amid low morale and severe understaffing. The Progress-Index found a city councilman was holding unlisted meetings, where he'd prioritize projects that would serve his interests instead of focusing on safety issues in the city. Following the story's publication, the city council member said he prioritizes safety and began publicizing the meetings.

South

Florida journalists shed light on Gov. Ron DeSantis' ties to appointed sheriff

The Treasure Coast News team's yearlong investigation into Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis' questionable appointment of a midlevel lieutenant to sheriff following a puzzling resignation uncovered a lack of transparency and other issues. Former St. Lucie County Sheriff Ken Mascara abruptly and unexpectedly retired, and DeSantis immediately appointed Lt. Keith Pearson as the new sheriff, passing up multiple higher-ranking deputies. Pearson said he got little advance notice about the appointment and didn't think about running for sheriff until the appointment. However, the TCPalm investigation showed the appointment was worked out in advance, with a local businessman – a Pearson ally – and his family donating hundreds of thousands of dollars to DeSantis' then-active presidential campaign.

We confirmed Pearson attended a DeSantis campaign fundraiser organized by the local businessman, Anthony "Tony" DiFrancesco, weeks prior to the appointment. Pearson and the Sheriff's Office ignored multiple public records requests spanning months, and only released documents after TCPalm hired an attorney and filed a formal presuit notice. Meanwhile, DiFrancesco filed a defamation lawsuit against TCPalm and its columnist Blake Fontenay, among others. DiFrancesco later dropped TCPalm and Fontenay from the lawsuit following Gannett's formal rebuttal, and a judge eventually tossed the full lawsuit. Pearson lost the primary election by a 2-to-1 ratio to the eventual winner. Many credited TCPalm for uncovering the details behind the appointment, especially as most DeSantis-backed candidates were elected.

Florida changes addiction-treatment regulations after reporting highlights deaths, infractions

Palm Beach Post reporter Antigone Barton in 2023 told the story of a couple caught in a cycle of addiction relapse and recovery known as the Florida Shuffle. The man, gone missing for four months, would not survive it. In 2024, the stories brought changes in the way the state regulates the addiction treatment industry. The Department of Children and Families, under the threat of legislation, promised two lawmakers it would post on its website all of the fines and inspections for every treatment center in Florida. The postings would not only help consumers but also hold the department accountable for doing its job. The Post investigation also led to the shutdown of the last recovery residence for Jay Havrilla, who came to Palm Beach County in hopes of recovering from substance use disorder but died. Two others, all linked to Pivot Treatment and Wellness Centers, were closed. The weekend before the announcement that the residences would close, came a report of a fatal overdose at one of the facilities.

Hyundai plant's drain on critical aquifer scrutinized after Georgia reports

The partnership among the state of Georgia, the tri-county Joint Development Authority and the Hyundai Metaplant USA in Bryan County led to rapid approval of Georgia Environmental Protection Division permits for the withdrawal of as much as 6.6 million gallons of water per day from the Floridan Aquifer, the primary drinking water source for parts of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida. It was never made clear publicly or to local governments and stakeholder groups how much water would be required to operate the plant. The lack of transparency and speed with which the applications were approved prompted the Ogeechee Riverkeeper nonprofit group to threaten a law-suit against the Army Corps of Engineers for not asking relevant questions before rubberstamping the permits. Between August and October, The Savannah Morning News/Savannahnow conducted extensive research into applications and sought expert testimony on the impact four deep aquifer wells would have on drinking water and agricultural use in the coastal Georgia region. In August, the ACOE announced it was revisiting the permits.

Pearson and the Sheriff's Office ignored multiple public records requests spanning months. and only released documents after TCPalmhired an attorney and filed a formal presuit notice.

Alabama's execution methods challenged as Montgomery reporters serve as death-chamber witnesses

The Montgomery Advertiser's coverage as a media witness for the nation's first three executions by the controversial method of nitrogen gas hypoxia led to multiple lawsuits challenging the process. The state of Alabama released few details about the process and cited security concerns when responding to Freedom of Information Act requests, or FOIAs. But Advertiser reporters were in the death chamber for each of Alabama's record-tying six executions in 2024 and collaborated with other witnesses to serve as the



▲ Montgomery Advertiser reporters witnessed six executions last year in Alabama. They challenged officials' statements that didn't match what they had seen. MICKEY WELSH/USA TODAY NETWORK FILE

public's eyes and ears. The state directly disputed what reporters observed when responding to legal challenges. Those legal challenges continue, as does the Advertiser's coverage. The paper's coverage, itself, has been the subject of a New York Times story.

Future Black History Makers program activates community in North Carolina

The Fayetteville Observer's Future Black History Makers is a partnership with the local public school system that highlights 28 (or 29 on Leap Year) standout students throughout Black History Month. For many years, Black readers in North Carolina didn't see themselves reflected positively in the Observer. The

paper wanted to change that. The paper started this project, now entering its third year, as part of its work to better serve Black readers in the community. The Observer learned from people it spoke to at various listening sessions and events that they wanted to read more positive stories about Black Cumberland County residents, particularly children. The feedback from the community has been overwhelmingly positive, with previous honorees receiving commendations from the North Carolina General Assembly.

Tennessee governor, commissioner repay travel funds after public-records reporting raises questions

In April, The Tennessean's statehouse reporter, Vivian Jones, obtained public records to show that Education Commissioner Lizzette Reynolds improperly obtained a waiver for free tuition at the University of Tennessee at Martin. After The Tennessean's inquiries, Reynolds paid back the tuition. Later in the year, the newspaper detailed how Reynolds accepted free travel from her former employer. At issue was how the firm and its affiliated political arm employed lobbyists in the state. Tennessee law bars officials from accepting travel from groups that employ lobbyists. The Tennessean's story led to a formal ethics complaint and it led Reynolds to repay the money. Likewise, the newspaper reported on how Gov. Bill Lee also accepted travel from a group that has an affiliated political group that employees a lobbyist. At the time, Lee said he followed all the rules. Later, he asked for an ethics opinion on the issue and also repaid the money. None of this would have happened had The Tennessean not used public records to detail how and where public officials travel.

Tallahassee Democrat exposes that \$237 million gift for HBCU didn't exist

In one week, Florida A&M University went from proclaiming to the world that it had secured the largest donation in HBCU history to scrubbing all mentions of the \$237 million gift from social media. From the beginning, the Tallahassee Democrat injected caution into its reporting. The paper was the only outlet in its initial story to point out how the virtually unknown donor had pulled back a mega-donation to a different college a year earlier. Reporters Tarah Jean and TaMaryn Waters discovered more disturbing facts through public records and exclusive interviews with the donor. During the graduation ceremony announcement, he shouted, "The money is in the bank." But it wasn't.

Instead, he gave private stock over 10 years that could be worthless. Furthermore, the paper revealed the co-CEO listed on his website never worked for the company. After relentless reporting from The Democrat, the university "ceased the donation" and announced a new gift process to ensure something like this could never happen again. The fallout led to the foundation director and university president stepping aside.

Midwest



Reporting leads to senators helping Kentucky families after adoptions left in limbo for years

The Louisville Courier Journal in October wrote about three Louisville, Kentucky-based families caught in a four-year limbo after China halted its international adoption program at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. They were among the approximately 300 families in the U.S. who were told China intended to honor all adoptions once travel resumed, but instead, the Chinese government dissolved its international adoption program altogether. The Courier Journal's story made it all the way to the offices of U.S. Sens. Rand Paul and Mitch McConnell, and both Kentucky Republicans signed a letter asking President Joe Biden to work with China to complete the pending adoptions. Aimee Welch, founder and director of Hope Leads Home, a grassroots group of parents waiting to complete adoptions, wrote in an email to the Courier Journal that "shining a light on this story made all the difference in getting Senators Paul and McConnell to back the letter, something exceedingly rare for someone in a Senate leadership role to do."

Multipart series in Kentucky looks at Christian education juggernaut

In "The Cost of Empire," a multipart series, The Louisville Courier Journal took a close look at the rise of Highlands Latin School, the classical Christian education juggernaut that began in a Louisville, Kentucky, living room in the 1990s. Through interviews with

Like other **U.S.** families who were in the process of adopting children from China, the Welches - from left, Caleb. Aimee. Grace, Stephen and Thaddeus - have been in limbo since **Beijing sus**pended foreign adoptions in 2020. SAM UPSHAW JR./USA TODAY NETWORK

multiple former students and a trove of teaching seminars and other online archives, reporters pieced together the formula for Highlands Latin School's staggering national growth and the way it approaches teaching. "The Cost of Empire" project illustrated a success story, in part, and reflected the rise of classical education in the U.S., but not all of it was pretty. Ex-students who spoke to The Courier Journal painted a picture of an environment based on strict obedience and school success above all else. Some of the students said they turned to self-harm or had thoughts of suicide. They describe stubborn mental scars that they carried into adulthood. Soon after the project's September publication, it fueled conversation in the community. The progressive-minded church that has rented space to the school for many years was alarmed by the project's findings and began a series of meetings examining severing its ties with Highlands Latin. Meanwhile, more ex-students came forward to tell their Highlands Latin stories and a group of local alums started a website as an outlet for other former students to describe their time at the school and explain how it has affected their adult lives.

The plaintiffs say
they had no
idea they
were being
subjected to
court judgments until
they found
their bank
accounts
frozen
or wages

garnished.

Minnesota reporting leads to candidate obtaining bachelor's degree

In Minnesota, the St. Cloud Times wrote a story about a St. Joseph City Council member running for mayor. The candidate didn't finish his college degree, but upon reading the article, school officials looked at his transcript and discovered he now meets the qualifications to graduate. As a result, the candidate now has his bachelor's degree from St. Cloud State University.

Ohio reporter spots \$800,000 error in curriculum funding

The Ohio Department of Education is investigating Akron Public Schools after an Akron Beacon Journal review of curriculum funding, published in August, discovered the district misreported its reading curriculum, leading to an overpayment of \$800,000. Education reporter Jennifer Pignolet discovered the error. Neither the district nor the state was aware of the costly mistake until she found the error. In early September, Pignolet wrote that the district intended to return the money but that the district did not respond to requests for comment on whether it volunteered the funds or if the state asked for them.

New code of conduct in place after IndyStar investigation uncovers allegations

The Indiana Democratic Party in December adopted a new code of conduct including disciplinary action – which could include censure, suspension and a ban – for those who violate the code. In addition, the party said, it has formed an ethics committee that will investigate potential code of conduct violations. The actions come after IndyStar investigations uncovered allegations against state Sens. David Niezgodski, D-South Bend, and Greg Taylor, D-Indianapolis, and Thomas Cook, Indianapolis Mayor Joe Hogsett's former chief of staff. Each has been accused by women of sexual harassment and unwanted romantic pursuit. Taylor and Cook have both apologized for past behavior. Niezgodski has referred to the allegation against him as a "private personnel matter." In multiple cases, the women who made accusations of sexual harassment or assault said their attempts to report the incidents were met with inaction.

Iowa student loan borrowers say they were strong-armed into signing confessions of judgment

In April, Des Moines Register courts reporter William Morris wrote about four lawsuits filed by borrowers against Iowa Student Loan Liquidity Corp., accusing the corporation of strong-arming them into signing a confession of judgment – a legal document which essentially waives all rights for borrowers to participate in a case if the lender chooses to initiate court proceedings against them, including their rights to be notified about a lawsuit. The plaintiffs say they had no idea they were being subjected to court judgments until they found their bank accounts frozen or wages garnished. A little over two weeks after Morris' article published, the corporation's CEO issued a statement saying it had actually stopped obtaining new confessions of judgment more than three years ago. The statement also said it had "recently" directed its attorneys to no longer file to enforce existing confessions with the court. However, Morris found one filling to pursue collection from an existing confession of judgment that was made March 20, less than three weeks before publication of his article. Alex Kornya, litigation director and general counsel for Iowa Legal Aid, which represents the four plaintiffs, told Morris that the changes Iowa Student Loan outlined were positive moves, but he noted that the lender continues to pursue collections using confessions previously filed with the courts.

After six children die in Indiana fire, focus shifts to rental safety inspections

Six children died in January 2024 in a house fire in South Bend, Indiana. In the wake of the fire, the South Bend Tribune reported that the house, which the family was renting, had not only failed federal safety inspections weeks before the family moved in, but the previous tenants were pulled out of the property by the South Bend Housing Authority over unresolved safety issues. Rather than fixing the property, its management company simply stopped accepting federal housing vouchers. After the Tribune reported on the lack of systemic communication between the housing authority and city officials over code violations in rental properties, the two entities agreed to start sharing such information. Meanwhile, the community came together to raise money for smoke detectors and fire extinguishers for needy families, along with raising money to support the single father of the six children who died. The Tribune reported on

A fire inspector stands outside the house where a January 2024 blaze killed six children. The South Bend **Tribune report**ed the rental property had failed federal safety inspections weeks before the family moved in. GREG SWIERCZ/ **USA TODAY NET-**WORK



the father's complaints that city leaders who were running that fund were denying him access to the money, including for his desire to buy a funeral plot near his deceased children's graves. Right away, local legislators tried to capitalize on the attention of this coverage to revive stalled bills that would increase legal protections afforded tenants in Indiana, one of the most landlord-friendly states in the nation. Those efforts failed to convince the majority party on a pretty tight timeline, but lawmakers intend to pursue the bills again in the 2025 session. The Tribune's ongoing coverage, which was honored as the Story of the Year by the Hoosier State Press Association, has kept this issue in the public consciousness and on the legislative agenda.

Cincinnati investigation found homicide cases using informant testimony unraveled

In March, the Cincinnati Enquirer published an investigation of homicide cases in Hamilton County, Ohio, that depended on critical testimony from informants but later unraveled. Reporters Dan Horn and Amber Hunt spent more than a year analyzing cases and identifying which ones relied on an informant's testimony. But the cases in which informants provided testimony didn't always hold up, The Enquirer found. Several convictions were later overturned, raising the question if unreliable informants led to wrongful convictions. The Enquirer's investigation brought to light the correlation of the overturned cases and the use of informant testimony, which led to a response from the county prosecutor. In May, after four homicide cases in Hamilton County were overturned in an 18-month period, prosecutor Melissa Powers announced the creation of a conviction integrity unit to evaluate wrongful conviction claims. Advocates were still critical of the organization of Hamilton County's unit, which is helmed by an assistant prosecutor rather than an outsider.

As other local media outlets report from press release, Wisconsin paper digs for truth

When reporter Karen Madden, of the Wausau Daily Herald in Wausau, Wisconsin, received a tip that the Monk Botanical Gardens planned to remove the founder and land donor's name from the gardens, she reached out to the family right away. They were devastated by the decision, and Madden set to work on a story. In the meantime, the gardens sent out a press release notifying the public of the rebranding and an upcoming renovation, with a more positive spin. While other area media based their reporting off just the press release, the Daily Herald maintained its focus on the family, who said they had not been consulted about the change. This shifted the conversation as other media outlets rushed to add the family's perspective into their reporting, even referencing the Daily Herald's reporting. What followed was a monthslong debate, and the community rallied behind the Monk family with signs through the area and monetary support pulled from the organization. The gardens eventually reversed their decision and the executive director resigned.

▼ When
Evansville, Ind.,
Fire Chief Mike
Connelly quit
suddenly after
12 years, the
Courier & Press
dug into why
he left. MACABE
BROWN/USA TODAY
NETWORK



Fire chief's sudden retirement spurs Indiana reporters to seek answers

When the fire chief in Evansville, Indiana, retired midweek, with almost no recognition for his 12 years of service, leaving a high-paying, and high-profile position, reporters at The Courier & Press got to work to find out why. It took six months of research and investigation, using every tool in their arsenal – from eyewitness accounts and in-person interviews to official documents and public records requests – to find an answer: The chief had resigned so he could retire and retain his benefits after a subordinate employee accused him of filming her without consent.

Sheriff, ex-wife correct tax filings after questions from Illinois reporters

Following up on a tip, the Springfield News-Leader in Springfield, Illinois, began comparing property listed in the Greene County sheriff's divorce proceedings with property the sheriff and his ex-wife declared to the county in subsequent tax filings. Finding a number of vehicles and other equipment missing from the assessment lists, the News-Leader contacted the sheriff about the discrepancies. In response to the reporter's questions, the sheriff and his ex-wife corrected their tax filings and paid the associated charges, which amounted to more than \$2,500 in unpaid taxes to that point.

Michigan police reforms sought after misconduct exposed

The Detroit Free Press podcast "Where Secrets Go to Die" – the first longform narrative podcast produced by the Free Press – chronicled an unsolved murder in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and exposed long-running police misconduct in that remote location. Some local residents were shocked to learn of it, while others who said they had long known about the police misconduct were stunned to see it publicly exposed. At least one state lawmaker noted the issues uncovered by the podcast in his calls for reforms to the Michigan State Police. In a letter to the Free Press, state Sen. Jim Runestad, R-White Lake, said he plans to introduce legislation that would address the issues.

West

Arizona investigation finds 'astronomical' death rate in county jails

An Arizona Republic investigation found Maricopa County's jails have among the highest death rates in the country, and the county was underreporting those deaths to the federal government. Forty-three people died in Maricopa County's jails in 2022 and again in 2023. Drug overdoses, drug withdrawals and suicides were among the leading causes of death. Scholars who study in-custody deaths in U.S. jails and prisons said those numbers were incredibly high when compared with similarly sized jail systems and even jails with much larger populations. "Astronomical," in the words of one researcher. The Republic reviewed more than 50 medical examiner reports of people who died while in Maricopa County jail custody and talked to several families of the deceased. In that review process, reporter Jimmy Jenkins found five people who died in the county jails that the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office did not disclose. In response to The Republic's reporting, the Sheriff's Office updated its deaths-in-custody reporting, and the way the data was presented to the public was changed. Following publication of the investigation, the Arizona attorney general called for action to be taken to reduce the number of deaths in the jails, and the newly elected sheriff promised to conduct an internal investigation into the high death rate.

Arizona Republic partners with Capital B on Black Political Power Tour, curates panel

The Arizona Republic partnered with Capital B, a news outlet focused on serving Black people and communities, to host the Phoenix stop of the Black Political Power Tour, drawing about 100 attendees, including creatives, politicians and thought leaders. The October event was the first of what The Republic anticipates will be many collaborations with Capital B, whose leaders touted the event as exceptional and were eager to seek opportunities to collaborate and nurture thoughtful avenues for connecting with Phoenix's growing Black community. The Republic staff also worked closely with Capital B to make the event a success and both build and fortify connections with a community historically underserved by The Republic. The paper's mission was to drive conversation among Black voters in a battleground state by illuminating two key issues: How growing Black communities are reshaping the Phoenix area, and the ownership

The Detroit Free Press podcast "Where Secrets Go to Die" the first longform narrative podcast produced by the Free Press chronicled an unsolved murder in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and exposed longrunning police misconduct in that remote location.

of Black history in our classrooms. The evening brimmed with connection, thoughtful exchange of perspectives, and hope.

Texas transparency battle spills into court after disclosure of records

Austin American-Statesman investigative reporter Tony Plohetski's reporting reignited a simmering political firestorm between the progressive Travis County district attorney, Jose Garza, and the archconservative Texas attorney general, Ken Paxton. It sparked a transparency battle that spilled into court, propelled the partial disclosure of records related to \$65,000 in enhancements to Garza's home and prompted correction in how county leaders handled the matter, and it exposed a lack of policy and standards about how the county responds to a growing number of political threats toward elected officials and others. Through a public policy lens, at the heart of the reporting were questions about how and when the county decides to secure an official's home, why other threatened leaders had not received the same response – issues for which the American-Statesman found the county had no protocols – and what the public should know about the expenditures. The district attorney's security led to a request among other elected officials, including a judge who narrowly survived an assassination attempt, to receive home security funding, albeit much less.

Oregon landfill tries to hide massive methane leaks

Members of Oregon's congressional delegation are calling for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to complete an investigation into concerns about Coffin Butte Landfill, north of Corvallis. The Statesman Journal was the first to report on an investigation into massive methane leaks at the landfill, which the company tried to hide. The paper also was the first to report on whistleblower complaints of health, safety and environmental violations at the landfill. The Stateman Journal's reporting has mobilized the landfill's neighbors and an environmental nonprofit to oppose a proposed expansion.

Attention on Colorado school district's plans for closures leads to protests, reversal

The Poudre School District in Fort Collins, Colorado, professed financial woes and a need to consolidate school buildings in order to shore up its finances. Reporting by The Coloradoan, however, showed deficiencies in transparency, a lack of evidence in some cases, a targeting of schools in lower income areas and poorly communicated plans for school closures. The added attention, paired with growing frustrations of the district's ineptitude as highlighted by the Coloradoan, led to a fury of public outcry. Multiple protests were staged, sometimes attracting nearly 500 people. At the 11th hour, during a meeting where the school board was set to vote on a final plan of closures, the board shockingly undid a year's worth of working toward the closures and opted to keep all schools open.

California reporting exposes attempted bribery of candidate, continues to dig into likely misuse of funds

The FBI is investigating a half-million dollar bribe offer made to a candidate for county supervisor in a rural, impoverished California county, after reporting by The Desert Sun exposed both the offer and a local leader's futile attempts to persuade federal or county criminal authorities to investigate it. Additional document digging and detailed field reporting by The Desert Sun identified two local officials connected to large, so-called "dark money" contributions in the same supervisor's race and two others. In another story, the reporter detailed how a "Buy a Supervisor" website and billboard were actually further anonymous, negative campaigning. Five people have told the reporter off the record that they have been interviewed by federal agents about details in her stories. One went on the record – the candidate who received the huge monetary offer not to run. Powerful local officials often slide beneath the radar in rural areas, but the paper's continued reporting spurred federal authorities to respond. The reporter has amassed more details and is working on further pieces about likely misuse of public and nonprofit funds and facilities for personal gain.

The
Stateman
Journal's
reporting
has
mobilized
the landfill's
neighbors
and an environmental
nonprofit
to oppose
a proposed
expansion.

'Take Action Now': As disaster strikes Carolinas, Gannett journalists respond

Keith Sharon Nashville Tennessean | USA TODAY Network

When the emergency sirens rang in Western North Carolina, and water rose 26 feet in the Swannanoa River, the staff at the Asheville Citizen Times left their homes and risked their safety to cover the tragedy unfolding from what was then Tropical Storm Helene.

How do you report and publish stories when the roads are out, when there is no internet connectivity, when your own home or the homes of your friends and families have been compromised?

The Citizen Times staff continued to produce much-needed, service- and reader-centered journalism every day in spite of the horrific conditions surrounding them.

That played out elsewhere across the Southeast, too.

From Florida to Tennessee and from the Gulf of Mexico to South Carolina, across the vicious path of Hurricane Helene, the USA TODAY Network covered the devastation and provided readers important information to keep them and their families safe. They told stories of tragedy – but more importantly stories of heroism and hope amid the devastation.

In Asheville, the USA TODAY Network pitched in with reporters, photographers and editors to help the Citizen Times continue providing valuable community-centered journalism.

With roads cut off and power and water out, readers needed critical information more than ever. The team produced printed one-page documents with storm updates, sent text messages to readers and produced low-bandwidth versions of stories to help. Circulation teams took print editions to community centers and other areas where storm evacuees had gathered.

The story of Helene was told in real time as floodwaters rose and receded, as tree branches fell and were cleared away, as businesses closed and reopened.

Across the USA TODAY Network, service journalism teams tracked Helene's approach in real time, using multiple platforms including storm-related text messages to deliver advance warning.

Dozens of journalists nationwide contributed to coverage before, during and immediately after the storm, generating 319 stories, which resulted in 7.5 million visits to USA TODAY Network publication sites. This reporting was the lifeblood of the network's Weather Watch text message platform that included 100 broadcast alerts and 5,000 one-to-one responses to readers in need of help.

"From the beginning, we sought to harness the power of the network – reporters, photographers and editors – to assist our Asheville team in covering the impact of Helene," said Mark Russell, the USA TODAY Network's South region editor and executive editor of The Commercial Appeal in Memphis, Tennessee. "Our Citizen Times team led the way, but we were able to expand our coverage ambitions by pairing them up with veteran Network staffers.

"Covering this historic storm was successful because we were able to tell even more relevant stories and showcase compelling photo galleries and video throughout Western North Carolina when we tapped into the expertise in our network."

The city of Asheville became the flashpoint for Helene. More than 100 people died in North Carolina. For weeks after the floodwaters were gone, reporters from the USA TODAY Network were on the ground (and even traveled by helicopter in some cases) to From Florida to **Tennessee** and from the Gulf of Mexico to South Carolina, across the vicious path of Hurricane Helene, the USA TODAY Network covered the devastation and provided readers important information to keep them and their families safe.



Asheville **Citizen Times** reporter Jacob Biba walks with Mack and **Lucile Thom**ason during the aftermath of flooding caused by the remnants of Hurricane Helene in Pensacola, N.C., in October. NATHAN J. FISH/ **USA TODAY NETWORK**

reach the people who had been cut off from the rest of the world.

The stories there were as numerous as they were compelling.

The reporting put the disaster in context, chronicled communities coming together to help each other and told of the at-times slow government response to the most rural parts of Western North Carolina.

Some of the work appeared under the headline "Take Action Now." There were stories about how neighborhoods were being alerted to upcoming road closures, school schedules and aid giveaways.

Inside the devastation, Citizen Times reporters found heroes who had helped others and heartbreak in the lives that were lost. They showed how the storm affected remote communities like the Hmong farmers, whose residents lost so much but recognized how other regions "lost so much more."

Many of the messages from residents that were sent to the Citizen Times had a consistent theme: "Your article on Oct 14 depicting the C-T staff's experience was harrowing. Windows that won't open in 80° sunshine, overflowing PortaPotties, drinking water at \$5/bottle, NO WI-FI are all ... unbearable. Functioning to put the news out is heroic."

Also this: "You folks have done an excellent job of getting the news online under some very difficult circumstances."

The story told by USA TODAY Network staffers across the South was this: Hurricane Helene could deliver a huge blow, but it couldn't take the humanity of the people who live there.