

The Overland Examiner - Media Giraffe Profile

The Overland Examiner

John Moyle - Editor/Founder

"I believe citizenship requires vigilance. Citizenship maybe something that most of us simply obtain by being born in the right place, but it is not free. With it comes inherent responsibilities. If we want a government "of the people, for the people, and by the people" then we "the people" need to step up and except our role of oversite concerning our elected officials. Do not simply complain about what is wrong, exercise your rights and change it. Watch, Learn, Campaign for those you feel will best lead our community and VOTE!

John Moyle, in a Sept., 2006, blog post

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About

UPDATES:

Moyle describes success at opening up debate to video coverage

Background on John Moyle and why he started The Overland Examiner.

The move from anonymity to identity

He was age 37, with a five-year-old daughter, four years of honorable Navy service as a fleet electrician, and a sense that he didn't want to spend the rest of his life installing cable and alarm systems.

And John Moyle was frustrated. He felt that the local government in his middle-class St. Louis suburb (population, 17,000) was running without oversight -- and local citizens didn't even know it. The metropolitan daily, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* didn't cover the city regularly, and a neighboring weekly paper -- owned by the same newspaper chain that owns the *Post-Dispatch*, has one reporter covering five communities and so has no time for stories in depth.

So Moyle on July 10, 2006, started a blog. With enough savings to try becoming a journalist, at least for a few months. He called it *The Overland Examiner*, with the tag line, "advanced Citizenship on the local level." Moyle felt like a changed person.

"It is like finding home for the first time. This is what I should be doing," he says. "I don't get tired working on this. I stay totally energized all day long." So he decided to make a career change. He enrolled in an online journalism course from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and started putting in 80-hour weeks.

He was irritated because lots of little things around the suburb didn't get covered. He figured there would be a market for a smaller news source. He looked into buying *The Localite*, a little shopper, but didn't see any future in print longterm.

"I really wanted to do something that was beneficial to my community or to people in general and I don't have the stomach or temperament for politics," says Moyle, who grew up in Belford, a part of Middletown, N.J. "And in my opinion, journalism has the potential to hold the politicians accountable and give the people the ability to hold the politicians accountable by making them more informed. That is my ultimate goal." Moyle's first brush with the Internet and blogging was not local. He began writing commentary on national politics at a website called www.americasdebate.com. "What I've found out is it's a lot easier to do political commentary at the national level than it is on the local level," he says now. "You do it on a local level you gotta face the people every day and justify yourself."

After three months, in September, 2006, the blog was getting about 100 visitors a day and "all the feedback I've gotten from neighbors has been positive." At that point, there had been no word from Overland's mayor. But there was other, important impact. Before a hotly contested election, a sort of referendum on the mayor's closed-government style, about 15 people showed up at town board meetings. Now it is more like 300 or 400 people -- sometimes as many as 700. "People are far more informed than they were," says Moyle, although he is unwilling to credit his site with the change, saying instead that the new mayor's election woke up the electorate.

"My email and my phone traffic has increased dramatically," Moyle says. "I'm starting to be the local guy you contact when you find out something." The small little hobby has become a 12- to 14-hour-a-day job and he is looking to start videotaping a lot of events and streaming the relevant parts."

The hours spent on the news have taken a bit of a toll on the home front. Moyle says his wife is proud of what he's doing, but "like anyone involved in a relationship she gets annoyed when this is all I'm doing. I've got to get more time management. It has dominated my time for the last month. I have to find a better balance. But that's something I'll work out."

THE LAST STRAW

What was it that prompted Moyle to start local news blogging? He says it was when the mayor replaced chief of police and locked him out without council approval. There was a court case filed by the chief of police. The same thing happened with the city attorney. Six residents filed claims of violations of Missouri Sunshine Law and this got a lot of Internet attention. "I went to every one of those hearings," Moyle recalls.

"I just go so frustrated with what's going on. The mayor would tell us one thing," recalled Moyle. "It didn't sound right and I looked up the various Missouri statutes and local ordinances and found out it was wrong. I had created blog sites and I just started one. I tried to be neutral in the beginning, but I don't know if you have faced this where one side is always wrong . . . I try to be fair in what I write but I can't help but have a little snippy moment at one point or another."

Why did Moyle choose to try the work of a citizen journalist on the web? He says that when he was younger, he had no desire to do anything academic. He wanted to be an electrician. But as he aged, he grew tired of crawling around in attics and crawl spaces and his knees grew weary. He always had liked to write, but never found it satisfying -- until he discovered journalism.

FUTURE OF LOCAL NEWS BLOGS

Moyle thinks the stand-alone local journalist that he has become is a precursor of a national movement that is already happening. "I think eventually we are going to see things like this competing with each other all over the country. People want their information now. I think that's the wave of the future, personally." He says that as a new generation becomes accustomed to getting their news and information primarily from online sources, "community-based news sources are going to be the trend of the day."

Is what he's doing financially sustainable? Moyle has some ideas, but they are longterm. He has thought about selling \$20-a-year subscriptions to a print version and wonders about the possibility of producing a print-in-demand newspaper for subscribers who want it that way. "But that's long range. That is not going to happen tomorrow. There is just not enough revenue in it."

(Reported by Bill Densmore)

John Moyle's short list of other St. Louis newsblogs:

St. Louis Syndicate

Urban Review

The Commonsplace

The Diatriber

The Archpundit (politics)

John Combest site

The St. Louis Independent Media Center

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