



The Unions of Lee Enterprises

STATEMENT ON LEE ENTERPRISES SALE OF THE SOUTHERN ILLINOISAN

Nov. 17, 2023 – The Unions of Lee Enterprises is denouncing plans by Lee Enterprises to sell The Southern Illinoisan newspaper to Paxton Media Group under terms that will result in the elimination of all the local journalists who currently work for it.

Despite pronouncements by Paxton Media on Oct. 27 that it will foster “community-based journalism” and “expand” coverage through the purchase of The Southern Illinoisan, the entire union-represented newsroom has been told they should clear out their desks by Nov. 24.

This ill-advised sale transaction ignores not only the needs of the Carbondale community and the paper’s current employees, but the rights of investors who are being denied the opportunity to benefit from a better offer, from a local benefactor who would actually save jobs.

Paxton Media representatives have been telling major Southern Illinoisan advertisers and community leaders they are “saving” the local paper by acquiring it. These statements are both deceitful and disgusting.

The opposite is true. The Southern Illinoisan journalists are represented by the United Media Guild and have successorship contract language meant to protect union employees – and their collective bargaining agreement – during a sale. But Paxton Media has deliberately chosen not to employ any of the news organization’s journalists so that it can try and take over the paper as a union-free asset. Paxton declines to hire the journalists who know and live in the community.

Shareholders, subscribers, advertisers and community members should question Lee Enterprises and Paxton Media Group about the purchase deal, which shortchanges all these groups. Paxton is a media chain with numerous holdings and a reputation for slashing newsrooms and local news coverage to cut costs.

While the specific terms of the deal have not been disclosed, it appears Paxton is simply buying the paper’s name, advertising and subscriber lists while refusing to employ the 10 union journalists who have spent their livelihoods informing the local community. This is the definition of union busting.

Meanwhile, the Unions of Lee Enterprises is aware of a local investor from the community who has offered to match or exceed the purchase price for The Southern Illinoisan. The counteroffer would continue contracting with other Lee Enterprises holdings, honor the union contract, and maintain the employment of its newsroom journalists, ensuring continued quality journalism for the local community.

Though the potential investor has expressed interest to members of the Lee board, the investor has received no response even though the counteroffer would benefit shareholders to a greater

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degree than the Paxton agreement. We find these circumstances disturbing, as should all investors who deal with a company that would rather hastily shed its news holdings than invest in them, or sell to someone else who will.

If this is the road Lee Enterprises intends to travel, where it guts newspaper holdings and passes on what's left to disingenuous buyers who will disinvest in local news coverage, then all the communities where Lee owns news organizations have reason to fear for the future. This is not a plan for long-term growth. In fact, it's no kind of plan at all.

The Unions of Lee Enterprises endorses all efforts by the Southern Illinois News Guild, the United Media Guild and the national News Guild to address this gross injustice. That includes urging everyone to join in this News Guild letter-writing campaign to Bill Evans, president of the West Kentucky Media Division of Paxton Media Group:

<https://actionnetwork.org/letters/save-the-southern-illinoisan/>

Community and elected leaders must speak out against the pending sale and make their voices heard with the leadership at Lee Enterprises and Paxton Media Group.

Please tell Lee leaders they should care about how much time and money the company will spend defending a bad purchase deal when a better one is on the table. And please tell Paxton Media Group it should either withdraw from the purchase agreement or accept the paper's union contract and employ current journalists who know the community they serve.

The Southern Illinoisan needs an owner who cares. Subscribers and readers deserve that. Investors deserve that. And the journalists who work hard on behalf of the local community deserve that most of all.

Journalists at risk of losing their jobs:

Marilyn Halstead, news reporter, 34 years
Kathy Smits, editorial assistant, 13 years
Shawn Anglin, lead copy editor, 11 years
Byron Hetzler, photographer, eight years
Bucky Dent, sports reporter, five years

Sara Treat, copy editor, four years
Katie Barton, copy editor, two years
John Homan, sports/news reporter, two years
Chris Miller, night clerk, two years
Kedarius Flowers, sports reporter, four months

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The **Unions of Lee Enterprises** represents all unionized NewsGuild members at the St. Louis Post-Dispatch; The Buffalo News; the Omaha World-Herald; the Richmond Times-Dispatch; the Roanoke Times; the Billings Gazette; the Casper Star-Tribune; the Sioux City Journal; the Charlottesville Daily Progress; the Kenosha News; The Daily News in Longview, Wash.; and The Southern Illinoisan. Follow the Unions of Lee Enterprises on Twitter [@LeeUnions](#).

Lee Enterprises is a media chain based in Davenport, Iowa. It owns daily newspapers, as well as nearly 350 weekly and specialty publications in 26 states, according to its website.

Paxton Media Group is a privately-run media company based in Paducah, Kentucky that owns both newspapers and TV stations, mostly in the Midwest and South.