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By ROBERT PIERCE

• Daily Leader

History was made at Monday's Seward County Commission meeting.

For the first time in the county's history, two papers placed bids to be the official newspaper, and when discussions were finished and voting took place, the board voted 4-1 to make the Daily Leader the official paper.

Publishers from both the Leader and the Times were allowed to speak on behalf of their papers, and after a presentation by Times Publisher James Gutzmer, Leader Publisher Earl Watt said one important detail is working with the community a paper serves.

"We certainly feel like it's important to have every opportunity to talk to our community," he said. "We provide that opportunity six times a week. We stay in constant communication as a community."

In his presentation, Gutzmer said the employees of the Times, a three- day-a-week publication, work as hard as a daily publication. Watt pointed to the fact the Leader runs its press six days a week.

"It's hard to say you work as hard as a daily unless you're running a press and putting out that paper six days a week," he said. "We do that, and we're proud to do it. We love to do it."

Watt also said most of the employees of the Leader are from either in Seward County or from neighboring counties.

“We know that Seward County is a larger family,” he said. “We have a lot of people who work in our county and live right next door whether it’s in Oklahoma or elsewhere.”

Watt said the owners of the Leader do everything they can to re- invest locally.

“As a matter of fact, 100 percent of what is spent with us is spent right here in Seward County and right here in our service area,” he said.

The bids for the two papers were $3 per column inch for display legals and 23 cents per line for line legals for the Times, with the Leader bidding $3.90 per column inch for display and 35 cents per line for line legals.

The difference, as Watt pointed out, is the Times runs its legals on a six-column format, whereas the Leader runs its on an eight-column layout.

The Leader publisher specifically noted a legal that ran in the Times for the county treasurer’s office for delinquent taxes, which he said would be more affordable in the Leader.

“In a six-column format, it was 126 inches times two because it was two full pages you paid for,” he said. “That’s 252 inches you paid for. With our paper, running that same legal would’ve been much smaller because we would not have run the font size so large.”

Watt said the ad would have taken up just more than a page of print, and the county could have saved $40 versus what it paid for in the Times.

He said the six-column size would force the county to buy bigger ads, meaning it would have to pay more for the space.

“When you run it on the eight column, we’re able to run that same legal in a smaller space, which costs you less,” he said.

Another advantage to running legals in the Leader is that the paper is delivered by carriers to outlying areas in the county on a daily basis.

“We feel like that’s important to keep in contact with the extended community outside of Liberal,” he said. “We’ve been willing to make those expenses to provide the services to the county to make sure that our county residents and our city residents get the same level of service.”

After the presentation, commissioners gave their thoughts on which paper should be selected.

Commissioner Jim Rice said having a daily paper is an important factor in deciding where to publish legals.

“For Seward County, the convenience of being able to publish six days a week in a daily paper seems more beneficial compared to waiting a day or two or more depending on how the weekend or holidays fall,” he said.

Commissioner C.J. Wettstein, who voted against the Leader, said he didn’t see the necessity of having an official paper.

“Personally, I don’t even like looking at the ads,” he said. “I don’t know how many people actually do. I know there’s some that look at legals. I think if the county could print it off on toilet paper, and the ones who really want to read it want to read it bad, they can sit there and go

through the roll of toilet paper and do it. And the ones who don't worry that much about it aren't going to read them anyway."

Commissioner Steve Eisenhauer said the choice was simple.

"It's two things – the fact that it's a daily publication and the fact that they have rural delivery," he said. "The cost is not as significant to me as the service."

Afterward, Watt was pleased with the outcome.

"I want to thank the commissioners for their selection of the Daily Leader as the official newspaper of Seward County. This re-affirms that our community desires a daily newspaper and is willing to support it," Watt said. "We believe that providing a daily vehicle helps our government agencies maintain a connection with the community and helps maintain a better informed electorate.

"We want the community to know we will work hard to keep the costs to the taxpayers as low as possible while carrying out the important duty of providing legal notifications," Watt added.

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