

Dear Colleagues, Friends, and Critics,

Two Irishmen and a lawyer walk into a bar...

The best jokes derive their humor from real life. Jim and I have spent much of our time in the past few years huddled with attorneys in ongoing litigation over the First Amendment, free speech on the Internet and Backpage.

We have federal court victories for Backpage in Missouri and Washington and are awaiting a federal judge's ruling in Tennessee.

Throughout this struggle we have also locked horns in numerous media venues with the National Association of Attorneys General.

This particular fight is important and not one that we intend to abandon. At the same time, Backpage's battles are an enormous distraction to publishers, editors and readers of Village Voice Media.

Consider the management challenge: our publishing business covers thirteen cities and nine states; Backpage spans 600 cities and contemplated expansion envisions business in more than two dozen countries. Clearly we face a choice.

Consequently, we have decided to sell our newspaper publishing and online media company. Jim and I have never wished to be the last ones at this remarkable party. We are selling to your current management team including: Scott Tobias, Christine Brennan, Andy Van De Voorde, Kurtis Barton, Stuart Folb, Josh Fromson, Gerard Goroski, and Jeff Mars.

Larkin and I depart to devote our undivided attention to the defense of Backpage, which is not part of the sale.

If it seems that we now spend as much time with attorneys as we do with writers, the truth is we have always kept the company's footing through litigation.

In our very first days we successfully sued the University of Arizona when their administrator Marvin D. "Swede" Johnson tried to limit our circulation.

Last month, an 11-judge panel of the Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco reversed a Phoenix District Court judge and held that Sheriff Joe Arpaio is not immune from being sued for pushing a sham investigation that violated the First Amendment rights of *New Times*, its editors and writers, and thousands of online readers, and culminated in the night-time arrests of Larkin and me by the Sheriff's Selective Enforcement Unit.

Since 1997 we have successfully defended more than 45 lawsuits filed by lawyers attempting to silence us.

But it is also true that the Backpage attacks are different from conventional press issues, if only because the attacks are orchestrated with the often unlimited resources of government funding.

As a consequence, the struggle is not an easy one. The outcome is not assured. Litigation is extremely costly in time and money. But this fight is the next step.

Nonetheless, it is an emotional parting for both Jim and me.

We started the company's first weekly, *Phoenix New Times*, in 1970 as a protest over the war in Vietnam and in reaction against the mainstream media. Nothing about our attitude has changed.

In this journey, you have made us proud.

The staff has won every prize from the Pulitzer to the I.R.E. to the RFK.

The Livingston Awards recognize the journalism practiced by young writers. We have had more finalists and winners in that competition than any media organization in America.

This past year is not atypical; our writers have dominated restaurant criticism (the Association of Food Journalists) as well as minority affairs coverage (the National Association of Black Journalists).

You have gone on the road to cover Republicans in Tampa but also filmmakers in Toronto, Sundance and Cannes.

Along the way we instituted minority training of journalists, first at Northwestern and currently at Arizona State University.

Every month our websites and blogs garner millions of page views –more than 17 million uniques in August alone. Our total combined mobile and app page views are nearing 3 million per week, meaning we have successfully opened up a whole new way for readers to access our content. At last count more than 400,000 people have downloaded our mother-site apps.

For these past few decades, we have fought to ensure that our publications stood for the principles of unfettered speech, open government, accountability and freedom of the press.

We have also challenged conventional wisdom, whether delivered by pontificating pundits or self-righteous scolds. You have given readers tales well told, whether unfolding an investigation, spinning a yarn, or venturing an opinion.

Enjoy the hell that you raise.

Michael Lacey & Jim Larkin