

The Leonard Graphic back under hometown ownership

Written by Betsy Blevins

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Leonard's oldest business, The Leonard Graphic, is now back under hometown ownership, effective Tuesday, Nov. 1. Jason and Betsy Blevins purchased the business from Echo Publishing Company, the parent company of the business since late 2006.

"We have thoroughly enjoyed and felt quite privileged to be a part of the Leonard community for these past several years," Scott Keys, president and chief operating officer of Echo Publishing Company, said Tuesday afternoon. "Leonard has such a bright future ahead of it as a growing community. While we would have loved to be a part of that growth through The Graphic, we felt the best opportunity for the newspaper was to be owned by someone living, working and playing in the community."

The Blevins are long-time Leonard residents who love the town, community and people. Betsy Blevins is no stranger to the residents - having moved here in 1985. She attended all 13 years at Leonard ISD, graduating from Leonard High School in 1999. She worked for the newspaper from 2002-2006 under the ownership of Charles and Bethany Russell. It was during that time that the staff and newspaper won several awards at the Texas Press Association's Better Newspaper Contest - including the coveted Sweepstakes Award in 2005, which is presented to the newspaper with the highest total points overall.

"I worked with and learned from some of the best in the journalism industry," Blevins said. "The sweepstakes award was after a year of hard work, but fun work, and it was exhilarating to be a part of that."

Blevins left the newspaper for the corporate world in 2006, but found her way back home in February of 2010, when she accepted the position of Managing Editor for The Graphic.

"I was told at one time that once you work in the news industry, it's in your blood, and it's not easy to get away from," Blevins said. "And I believe that. I love news - reading it, writing it, photographing it."

Jason Blevins is a self-employed construction contractor who works full-time in the Rockwall area and will fill in as needed at the office or events, and be a part of major business decisions.

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"Jason is key for me when covering sports," said Blevins. "He's the only reason I've made it through the last two seasons of football writing. I love football, but some things just need a man's perspective, and football is one of them."

The Blevins have two daughters, Allison, 7, and Taylor, 4, that they are raising here, and they are all active in the community and members at the First Baptist Church of Leonard.

"We have all the confidence in the world that the Blevins family will be outstanding stewards of The Graphic and take it to better and greater heights and we will be helping any way we can and eagerly watching the paper's progress. The Leonard community should be proud that its newspaper is in such wonderful hands," Keys added.

As with any business take-over, customers can expect some changes. The most obvious of them all can be found on this edition's front page and back page - there is no color.

"The decision was not easy from a personal standpoint because it looks great and makes the paper stand out and set apart from others," Blevins said. "But from a business standpoint, keeping the color was not economical for us. We don't have enough color advertising to cover the price differential."

Color will still be available on an as-need basis for weekly issues, and will still be used for all special sections published by The Graphic.

The business will also move to a four-day work week, Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the Blevins are looking to relocate to the downtown square by Dec. 1. They also will be working with just two employees.

"We hated to let anybody go, especially with the job market the way it is," Blevins said. "But Paula (Claborn) had already expressed the desire to retire, so the decision was a little easier, but still the hardest thing we've had to do thus far. She will be missed by us at The Graphic."

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Additionally, all of the accounts payable, accounts receivable and circulation issues will be handled in Leonard again by the staff.

"We are extremely excited for this opportunity," Blevins said. "When you look back at the history books, the newspaper is one of the first businesses mentioned after the town formed. The readers and advertisers should be proud to be a part of a history-making publication - the oldest in Fannin County. And we look forward to continue serving and covering Leonard and the surrounding area."

One thing that will not change is the quality of coverage that the readers have come to know and expect. The newspaper finds pride in the variety of topics that the readers see on the pages each week. The paper is a community effort - with many taking time out of their busy schedules to contribute for articles and content, and for that, the town should be proud. News submissions for news-worthy topics always run free in The Leonard Graphic.