

The Central Coast Express Advocate does what the name implies - it delivers news and information from around the region both in-print and on-line in a timely and express way and it is a staunch advocate of the people. The result - an amazing readership in excess of 200,000 in a population of 300,000.

The strength of its coverage and the enthusiasm of its staff have resulted in one of the most powerful victories in inter-media rivalry. In April this year the Fairfax-owned opposition on the Central Coast, The Sun Weekly, gave up and closed its doors. It just could not match the strengths of the Express Advocate or win over the readers who remain loyal to "their paper".

The Express Advocate produces four editions a week - two in the southern Gosford LGA and two in the northern Wyong LGA - and distributes them over a huge region in excess of 1000 square kilometres. It also now updates its website seven days a week, breaking news as it happens and campaigning strongly on local issues.

The latter is at the heart of the Express Advocate's appeal to readers - when the editorial team gets on to an issue of local interest it is like a dog with a bone. It will not let go until there is a satisfactory outcome.

Some examples:

**NEWS BREAKING, CAMPAIGNING AND ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY:**

**Mining versus the environment.**

The coast has been targeted by both land and offshore miners for its potential coal, gas and sand reserves. All are in environmentally sensitive area.

The Express Advocate has published a number of powerful front page stories on the issue (Seismic shock, August 13; Sea assault, October 3; A black day, December 19; Air raid, March 20 (See attachment); Is it safe?, June 12; Secret deal?, July 31) along with many other inside news page stories. It has allowed all sides of the debate to flourish. The first result is now in. The state government on Monday, August 10 abandoned plans for a sand mine right next to the Somersby public school.

The Pacific Highway collapse which killed a family of five.

This tragedy in 2007 sparked a long-running coronial inquiry into what went wrong. The result was scathing criticism of Gosford Council, especially from the families of those killed.

The Express Advocate won the trust of the families with its straight forward reporting of what happened. It championed efforts to (a) get the road placed back under the control of the state government and (b) have the new bridge at the fatal washaway site named in honour of those who died. More than 50 stories were published between August 1, 2008 and July 31, 2009 examining every aspect of the tragedy with many emotive front pages as the two families told of their battle to get someone to accept responsibility for what happened and for it to be remembered (Son died a hero, September 24; Just say sorry, October 24 (See attachment); Honour roll, April 1; Bitter creek, June 5; Not forgotten, July 1).

The road is now the responsibility of the state government, millions of dollars have been spent upgrading it and the replacement bridge now carries a plaque in memory of those who died.

**Ettalong to Palm Beach ferry channel.**

The narrow channel linking the seaway between Sydney and the Central Coast began to silt over.

The Express Advocate broke the story that the ferry operator was considering abandoning the service unless this was fixed before it became too dangerous. A row developed between Gosford Council and the state government over who should pay.

The people of the Central Coast didn't care who paid - they just wanted it fixed as in severe bushfire conditions this seaway can be the only remaining link with Sydney. In a series of stories the Express Advocate pushed for the work to be done (Last ferry, August 1; Still grounded, October 17; Scuppered, November 14; Tight squeeze, December 5).

Gosford Council finally capitulated and agreed to do the work (Dredgelock ends, July 10).

The state of our health

The poor state of our hospitals and general shortage of doctors is a cause of concern to all coast residents. The Express Advocate has and continues to break stories on these issues (Operation bedlam, September 3 (See attachment); ER crisis, December 3; Hungry mums told to leave hospital, March 17; Doctor crisis, April 24). The paper is still campaigning to have health delivery on the coast returned to a local service, not the present amalgamated Northern Sydney/Central Coast health service. It has extracted a promise from the state opposition that this will happen if it is elected.

(Minister hits out at board revival plan, July 3)

Handling national issues Iguanagate. It's now part of the lexicon. Who put it there? The Express Advocate. When Federal MP Belinda Neal became embroiled in the now famous row at Iguana's nightclub, the daily papers were first with the news but the Express Advocate was the first to give it that tag (Iguanagate, June 11 (See attachment)). Journalist Denice Barnes was on it from the first with coverage that extended from those first drama-filled days (No apology, June 13; Down and Out, June 18; Paralysed, July 4) to the final wash-up (Neal- I'm vindicated, September 5.) Denice has already won a major media award for the depth and strength of her coverage. She won the Tom Barrass Award for Regional Journalism at the Northern NSW Journalism Awards ``The judges were impressed with Denice's work to feed information to the national coverage but also ensure the local community was able to understand the story in the context of their own community ... and importantly to continue to provide coverage of the issue after the national spotlight had moved on," they said.

This only scratching the surface of the Express Advocate's local news coverage which encompasses everything from bushfires, crime and road accidents to school fetes and success stories from all parts of the community.

## THE WEBSITE

From small beginnings [www.expressadvocate.com.au](http://www.expressadvocate.com.au) has become a growing area of expansion. It updates copy every day and breaks happening news as it happens. It has a twitter presence and a facebook presence. It attracts comment in response to stories every day.

It's photo galleries, particularity of local sports events, are growing in popularity.

There are a number of new ones each week, some attracting almost 2000 hits.

It has almost 6000 unique browsers and gets almost 100,000 page impressions a week. And it's growing.

## CIRCULATION, READERSHIP AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

With two-thirds of the total population of its distribution footprint reading the Express Advocate, it has an audience engagement unsurpassed by any form of the media.

The challenge is to engage the younger generation more and to service the more remote rural areas where physical delivery is not possible.

This is where the website has become an important tool with all efforts being made to use it as the vehicle to attract those last non-readers.

The Express Advocate also reinforces its ties with the community through regular non-commercial wraps on issues close to their heart (Australia Day wrap, January 23 Summer surf life saving guide, September 10; Anzac Day wrap, April 24 (See attachment); Flora festival wrap; September 5; Environmental expo wrap, November 5 and two education wraps - March 11 and May 20).

These boost the feeling that the Express Advocate and the community are "part of the same team".

The whole package is achieved through the efforts of a small but highly dedicated team who both love the paper and love living on the coast. There are no shirkers on the Express Advocate, everyone chips in to do whatever it takes to get a result. High standards of writing, photographing, sub-editing and design are set and are achieved. Creativity is prized and it does show in the finished product.

As part of their development younger journalists in particular are rotated through the two offices of the Express Advocate - Gosford in the south and Tuggerah in the north. The smaller Tuggerah office leaves them "on their own" and having to rely on their own initiative rather than be supervised more closely as they are at Gosford. This has proved highly effective as they tend to gain more confidence after having backed their own judgment and found they got things right.

Young journalists from the Express Advocate have gone on to higher positions not only in News Ltd, but in other media outlets and overseas.