

The Magazine of the Mizzou Alumni Association

MIZZOU

Building Strong Community (Newspapers)

Alumnus donates \$1 million to J-School fund.

Story by Erik Potter

Published Nov. 20, 2014

Walter B. Potter Jr. spent the first 10 weekends of his community newspaper publishing career researching new technology: personal computers and how they could be used in newspaper production.

Small-town newspapers, almost by definition, have limited resources. “The publisher becomes the employee of last resort, and I had to become the research department for the *Independent-Messenger*” of Emporia, Virginia,



Walter B. Potter Jr. Photo by Nicholas Benner.

said Potter, MA '81, at a ceremony announcing his gift to the Missouri School of Journalism Nov. 19 in the Reynolds Alumni Center. It was a quarter century ago, but “it became increasingly clear to me that what small-town papers need ... is someone to provide the research department for them.”

It's a realization that led Potter, part of a third-generation community newspaper family, to create the Walter B. Potter Fund for Innovation in Local Journalism in 2010. He previously donated \$334,000 to the fund and has now pledged \$1 million of his estate to enhance it.

The fund supports teaching and research on journalism that serves small communities, an annual Walter B. Potter Sr. Conference in Innovation and Transformation in Community Journalism at the Donald W. Reynolds Journalism Institute (this year's conference starts Nov. 20), and satellite conferences across the country.

“We want the Potter conferences and the other things the fund supports to be the go-to destination for community publishers ... when they have questions like ‘What technology do I buy? How do I use it?’ ” Potter said during gift announcement.

The conferences are named for Potter's late father — “A much bigger deal than I am,” Potter says — who owned six community newspapers. Potter's mother,

Alice Kay, is an award-winning reporter and photographer. Potter, a lifetime member of the [Mizzou Alumni Association](#), serves on the campaign cabinet for the One Mizzou comprehensive campaign, where he hopes “to help future students have the gifts I had at the University of Missouri.”

His donation dovetails with the mission of the J-School and the Reynolds Journalism Institute, which is, in part, to train journalists in the technology of the future, said Dean Mills, dean of the J-School. “I’ve gotten great feedback” on the conferences from community newspaper executives, he says. “They’ve been looking for something like this for a long time.”

Topics: [Alumni](#), [Journalism and Communication](#), [News](#), [Web Exclusives](#)

Tags: [Giving](#), [Mizzou Alumni Association](#)

Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916 | Email: mizzou@missouri.edu

Opinions expressed in this site do not necessarily reflect the official position of MU or the Mizzou Alumni Association.

© 2019 — Curators of the [University of Missouri](#). All rights reserved. [DMCA](#) and [other copyright information](#).

An [equal opportunity/access/affirmative action/pro-disabled and veteran employer](#).