



From left: Anne Driscoll, Bob Powell, Peter Masucci and Tim Dorsey.

Read all about it: New community newspaper coming to Swampscott

BY STEVE MARANTZ([HTTPS://JEWISHJOURNAL.ORG/AUTHOR/STEVE-MARANTZ/](https://jewishjournal.org/author/steve-marantz/))

August 8, 2024



An online nonprofit community newspaper, the Swampscott Tides, is almost in harbor.

“One thing everybody loves about living in Swampscott is that it’s close to the ocean – it’s part of our identity and heritage,” said Anne Driscoll, founding president. “The name sort of represents the changing times we hope to chronicle.”

Swampscott Tides, Driscoll envisions, will be “a fair and factual independent news outlet” delivering timely in-depth coverage of the town. Seeking to launch in late autumn, Tides will fill a vacuum left by the Swampscott Reporter after it morphed into a regional platform. The online Patch, Lynn Item, and Salem News provide limited coverage of Swampscott.

“I think people in recent years have begun to recognize what a loss it is not to have a local paper,” said Driscoll. “You can’t have a functioning democracy if you don’t have functioning journalism. You can’t get information on what’s going on, events, local politics, how municipal government is functioning.

“It’s been a trend nationally for these nonprofit newspapers to fill in that gap. Nonprofit newspapers are cropping up all over because people are thirsty for community information.”

How thirsty?



(<https://gloucesterstage.com/>)



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“We announced the launch at the Annual Town Meeting to thunderous applause,” Driscoll said. “People are very enthusiastic.”

One newly minted “hyperlocal” newspaper, the Marblehead Current, was approached about a possible partnership, but chose to remain separate, Driscoll said.

Driscoll has written for numerous outlets, the Boston Globe among them, and was senior reporter at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism at Brandeis for 13 years. She lived in Ireland for seven years while investigating wrongful convictions for the Irish Innocence Project.

Other Tides founders include Robert Powell, treasurer; Tim Dorsey, secretary; and Peter Masucci. All are longtime Swampscott residents who have been active in community affairs. Powell has served as chair of the Jewish Journal board of overseers.

At inception, Tides will have a salaried managing editor along with one, and possibly two, reporters. Freelancers and part-timers for technical and financial operations will be built into the start-up budget, projected at between \$200,000 and \$400,000.

Tides’ fund-raising committee includes four members of the Jewish community: Sandy Sheckman, Sylvia Belkin, Ruth Rooks, and Carole Schutzer. Cynthia McGurren and Anne Potts complete the committee.

“Given the times we are in, I will quote the Washington Post tagline: ‘Democracy Dies in Darkness,’” said Sheckman. “I want to do this because I think it’s really important for all of us to be as informed as we can about where we live.

“I used to be a town meeting member and I don’t know what’s happening in terms of town government and policies of town administration. So much is passing me by, and I have to assume it’s passing others by, too.”

A former director of the Jewish Community Center in Marblehead, Sheckman said Tides is relevant “because the Jewish community is part of the larger community we live in, and not an insignificant part. It’s good for the Jewish community to be involved in a paper about the entire community ... my involvement isn’t because I’m Jewish, I just happen to be Jewish.”

Indeed, Jewish Journal publisher/editor Steve Rosenberg welcomed the start-up publication.

“I love the idea, we need it,” said Rosenberg. “We need reporters covering very important meetings that decide budgets, and important decision-making in town hall and the school department. We need journalism to give voice to the community and serve as a watchdog of local government. Transparency is essential, and when you don’t have local journalism, you can lose that transparency very fast.”

Rosenberg acknowledged that Tides may compete with the Journal for advertising and donor funding. “I have no issue with that, it will keep us on our toes,” he said. “The more competition the better.”

Said Sheckman: “Certainly some people will be on the prospective donor lists of both publications. I don’t know that people can’t do both. I like to see it as a way that people can work together rather than be rivals. I’m really pleased that the Journal is understanding that there is room for both of us. It’s an all-boats-rise kind of thing.”

In their book, “Community News: Media Startups, News Deserts, and the Future of the Fourth Estate,” authors Ellen Clegg and Dan Kennedy write: “Local news is essential to self-governance. Meaningful participation in civic life is impossible without it, as we depend on journalism to decide whom to vote for, and to be informed about what’s going on in municipal government, the school system, law enforcement, development, road repairs – the list is endless. Studies show that voter participation is lower and corruption more pervasive in places that lack reliable coverage.”

Driscoll pointed out that the Institute for Non-Profit News was founded in 2009 with 27 members and now has more than 425 members. Twelve members, including the Marblehead Current, are based in Massachusetts.

“I started in local journalism and my work as a journalist has been a passport to the world,” Driscoll said. “But I’m really concerned about the state of local journalism and the lack of a newspaper in Swampscott.

“If this is the last thing in journalism that I do, I can feel good about it. It’s really important to me to have journalism thrive at the community level.” ☹

Mary Hobbins DeChillo August 13, 2024 at 11:11 pm
(<https://jewishjournal.org/2024/08/08/read-all-about-it-new-community-newspaper-coming-to-swampscott/#comment-18803>)
says:

Wonderful news! It is impossible for good government to exist without the presence of real journalism.

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susie katz August 16, 2024 at 5:30 am
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I love to see a Jewish newspaper. I love to read articles by Steve Marantz (my brother) he writes so
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