



# The Frontier Reporter

Spring Edition 2026

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## How Guild members covered the Sabres' playoff run

*The Buffalo Sabres made the playoffs this year after a 15-year drought. Guild members who covered the playoff run offer their reflections.*

### A busy, exciting month

*By Mike Harrington – The Sabres' first playoff run since 2011 lasted basically one month, from April 19 to May 18. They played 13 games in 30 days against Boston and Montreal. There were lots of planes and trains, both Amtrak and subway. Lots of press conferences, a few morning skates and practices thrown in. All of that before you ever got to a game.*

And as I reminded some of my colleagues after it was over: That was less than halfway to a Stanley Cup. The Sabres won seven playoff games and you have to win 16 to get the Cup. They won a playoff round for the first time since 2007. You have to win four rounds to claim the Cup.

But it was great to finally have a chance to cover the playoffs again. Reporters don't care who wins or loses, but I like covering hockey and I basically never did it after mid-April covering this team. I have colleagues in other cities who had covered more than 100 playoff games of their team since the last one we had here. It was time.



Photo by Joed Viera



*Mike Harrington*

One of the unique challenges of this run was the “newness” of all of it to people both inside and outside the team. Many of the players had never been in the postseason. None of the team’s public relations staff had ever

dealt with the playoffs and its accompanying media crush before. Our editors either were not at the paper or not in their positions the last time the Sabres had made it. And virtually no one on the staff, sports or city, had ever been involved with the playoffs either.

Except for me. I helped out on the playoff chases in 2006 and 2007 that made it to the Eastern Conference final. I was on the beat covering the team for its first-round losses in 2010 and 2011.

So there were meetings to prep for it, both internally and in the arena. As the Buffalo chapter chair of the Professional Hockey Writers Association, I ran a meeting for the local media after practice one day in March to get people ready. Had multiple consults with the PR staff about the new physical setup for us in the arena and the media rules for the playoffs, many of which differ from the regular season. And of course there were meetings in house prior to the playoffs and quick chats as we went along.

By the time Game 1 against Boston rolled around, I was ready to not talk as much and watch some hockey. And we got a lot. That first night was crazy, with the Sabres rolling out four goals in the last nine minutes to wipe out a 2-0 deficit. That was a finish certainly worth waiting 15 years for – but it sure created a lot of fast rethinking of stories when you spent most of the game pondering a dreary loss!

Love Boston and Montreal. Great towns. I snuck away on an off night to a Red Sox-Yankees game at Fenway. (Still wish the Expos were available up north!) Both arenas were jazzed like KeyBank was. Montreal’s Bell Centre was simply on fire – starting with the pregame torch walk by a Canadiens’ legend – so props to the Sabres for winning twice there. And for all of our ears for surviving the noise. Wow.

One takeaway I have is I feel bad for the fans and for us, both story-wise and photo-wise. There was not that signature moment of celebration in Buffalo for fans to always remember and for us to chronicle. Consider all these: The Sabres finally clinched their long-awaited playoff berth in Washington. Their first division title since 2010 was wrapped up in Chicago. They lost Game 5 in overtime to Boston when they could have clinched the series at home, and instead wrapped it up in Boston. And then they

lost Game 7 at home to Montreal in overtime and didn’t get back to the East final.

As for post-playoff rest? You try to sneak some in. But there were player and coach exit interviews to do. Award announcements to track. The NHL scouting combine and NHL draft here in June. Free agency in July. And prospect development camp.

Some downtime hits in mid-July before the long grind starts all over again in September. And it will be earlier than ever: The first regular-season games in September in NHL history will be played this year, with the schedule expanding to 84 games.

It’s a long time from now to May and June of 2027. It will be quite a ride to see if the Sabres can get there.

*Mike Harrington has been a News staff reporter since 1987, covering 18 World Series, six Stanley Cup Finals, six Final Fours and numerous ALCS and NCAA regional showdowns. He has been on the Sabres beat since 2007.*

## Capturing history

*By Rachel Lenzi* – There is something indescribable about covering history. Sports may not be the history you study in school, but history is recording significant events and keeping a chronological record of what happens, including the causes and effects of those events.

That’s what we do in journalism. We chronicle significant events, particularly on a local level. And let’s be real: Sports is a significant part of Buffalo’s history. Our city, community and region is just as defined by the Buffalo Sabres and Buffalo Bills as it is blue cheese on chicken wings and Niagara Falls.

Prior to this spring, the Sabres hadn’t made the playoffs since 2011, one of the longest postseason droughts in professional sports history. Very few had expectations of the Sabres even being in contention for the playoffs.

But after the Sabres reeled off a 10-game winning streak in December, Mike Harrington and I hit a very valid realization: This team is going to make the playoffs. This team is going to make history, and end a 15-year playoff drought, one of the longest in professional sports.

We knew another valid realization: The Buffalo News is going to be the outlet that chronicles this run, on a day-to-day basis – and the only outlet in this region that will devote resources to the kind of coverage we provided.

One of the things you find when you’re embedded with a team, covering them on a day-to-day basis, is how personalities emerge and how values emerge from success and defeat.



*Rachel Lenzi in Montreal*

After the Sabres' 10-game winning streak, this year's team's values crystallized: Players understood and embraced their roles. Trailing 3-2 in the third period of a game was unacceptable. Losing a lead was even more unacceptable.

Rotating goalies – and carrying three goalies on the roster – wasn't just a gambit, it was a necessity. Getting pushed around was not an option, and the Sabres proved such in an 8-7 win against Tampa Bay in one of the most eventful NHL games of the season.

By that point in early March, a playoff berth was a validity, not a possibility. But in my first season of covering the NHL, I had no idea that the playoffs were a completely different beast.

You know you've reached a moment in the Stanley Cup Playoffs ... when you look around a dark media room and think, "I am so tired, but then again, everyone else in this room is just as tired as you are, at this point of the spring."

Imagine how the Buffalo Sabres felt. Or did they? The best thought is that they were so amped just to be in the Stanley Cup Playoffs, that adrenaline and excitement rode them through a month of hockey.

Which, in my first year of the beat, I learned that ... that month of playoff hockey was nonstop, from a media coverage standpoint.

The difference between covering the Sabres in the regular season and covering them in the playoffs is that there is no rhythm in the playoffs. During the regular season, you have off days to recharge, road trips to look forward to, mornings and afternoons at the rink. The playoffs? Every day is stepping on a treadmill, at full speed, while juggling baseballs and singing karaoke at your fullest pitch.

Finally, at 12:30 in the morning in a hotel in Montreal, after a day that began in Buffalo with Sabres coach Lindy Ruff speaking at the podium, continued with filing a story, then getting in the car to drive to Burlington, Ont., to catch a commuter train to Toronto's Union Station, then catching a Via Canada train for a five-hour trip to Montreal ... I succumbed to the craziness.

I ate a bag of Doritos, drank a Diet Coke and laughed at what, exactly, got me to that point.

*Guess what, kid. This is exactly what you've wanted to do, for most of your life.*

And I had no complaints! None! Despite the constant sense of being on a treadmill, we were ready to head to North Carolina to cover yet another round of the playoffs. We had hotels booked and flights picked out ...

Until Montreal forward Alex Newhook scored the game-winning goal in overtime of Game 7 on May 18 at KeyBank Center. It ended the Sabres' hopes of reaching the Eastern Conference Final for the first time since 2007. Hotel rooms were canceled. Flight plans deleted. Offseason stories already being planned.

But we reminded ourselves of one thing, when it comes to projecting history. This year shouldn't be a one-off for the Sabres. Making the playoffs, as left wing Jason Zucker said two days after the Sabres' first playoff run in 15 years ended, is an expectation, not a fringe benefit.

*Rachel Lenzi has been at The News since 2018, and began covering the Sabres in June 2025. She previously covered college sports for The News.*

## **The rinkside view**

*By Joed Viera* – This season I had the privilege of watching the Buffalo Sabres flip back on the city's electricity. Fans went from covering their faces with paper bags to shaking KeyBank Center's foundation. I watched it all from, in my opinion, the best seat in the city: Hole 1.

I bore witness to Tage Thompson's hustle, to Rasmus Dahlin's leadership and to Zach Benson's chirps. I feel blessed to have been able to share my perspectives with the city.

There are two games I'll never forget: March 8 and April 19.

In March, seeing the Sabres' comeback win against the Lightning was incredible. You could feel fans cheers in your bones. Every goal, it grew louder and louder until the place exploded with Josh Doan's powerplay clincher.

In April, Bruins fans left upset after yet another Sabres comeback. It led to my favorite picture of the playoffs: Alex Tuch's empty netter. Seeing him break away was surreal – I tracked him the best I could and was rewarded with a photo that I felt encapsulated the feeling of breaking the drought.

It's such a great feeling to know that I got to be at the right place at the right time for such a historic moment in the city's story.

*Photojournalist Joed Viera joined The News in 2024. This was his second season covering the Sabres.*

# What the pension termination means for Guild members

*By Jon Harris* – Important deadlines have arrived for current and former Buffalo Newspaper Guild members with a pension as Lee Enterprises moves forward with the previously agreed-upon termination of the pension plan.

Friday, June 12, was the deadline for members to review and correct any information that was on their personalized pension benefit statement. That statement was included in the notice of plan benefits mailed by Lee, and important information that needed to be reviewed included birth date, hire date, termination date, normal retirement date, credited service and vesting service.

If you missed that deadline and need to correct any of that information, please let Jon Harris or Kim Leiser know and we will help to alert pension administrator Aon.

The Guild also is working on arranging meetings with Aon, which will provide an overview of the options available to plan participants during the decision period as eligible members consider a lump-sum payment or an annuity.

These virtual meetings will likely occur the week of June 22 and there will be two meeting options (one in the morning and one in the afternoon), so stay tuned for more details.

## **Background on how we got here**

In our negotiations with Lee in 2024, the Buffalo Newspaper Guild agreed to allow Lee to terminate the pension plan. (As a reminder, the pension plan was frozen on Dec. 31, 2021, and no additional benefits were accruing after that date.)

We have language in the contract to ensure we'll be updated at every step along the way. That language includes: Lee will inform the Guild of all insurance companies selected as finalists for the annuity contract; Lee will arrange for meetings to provide an overview of options available to plan participants during the decision period; and members who elect a lump-sum payment can directly roll over that amount into their Lee-sponsored 401(k) plan.

According to the notice of benefits sent to members in April, the plan termination is being reviewed by the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp. and the Internal Revenue Service. Members will receive more information later this year on how to make specific choices (annuity versus lump sum), and Lee currently anticipates paying out member benefits in October.

## **How common are pension terminations?**

Fairly common as companies look to avoid long-term risk and shed pension liabilities at a time when the market is performing well.

In our talks with Lee Enterprises in 2024, they made it clear they were looking to terminate the pension at that point because it was 101% funded. (A fully funded pension means the assets in the plan are deemed sufficient to cover the future present values of the plan.)

Obviously, the market can change. So if the market took a downturn, the pension could become underfunded and Lee would be on the hook to make up the gap and keep the pension fully funded.

So they are looking to settle obligations under the plan and transfer the pension to an insurance company.

We don't know yet which insurance company would be selected, but it's a fair bet that the insurance company chosen will be in better financial condition than Lee Enterprises.

In the last couple of pages of the notice of benefits, Lee lists all the insurance companies that will be considered for the annuity contract.

## **I'm already collecting my pension. What would this mean for me?**

If you're already collecting your pension, your benefit would be packaged up and paid as an annuity by the insurance company selected by Lee Enterprises.

Your monthly payment would stay exactly the same – the difference is the insurance company selected by Lee would be the one writing the checks each month.

Essentially, the insurance company selected is taking over the plan and will be the new administrator and point of contact for plan participants.

The big difference with a change like this is pension benefits are no longer protected by the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corp., which is the federal pension insurance program.

That's because insurance annuities are covered by state guaranty associations, which still provide protection if an insurance company fails.

For those who live in New York, the state has one of the best guarantees of \$500,000 for the present value of an annuity.

## **I haven't started collecting my pension yet. What would this mean for me?**

If you haven't started collecting your pension, you will have a choice to make later this year.

You could either pick an annuity or a lump-sum payment. (These choices are detailed starting on page six of your notice of benefits.)

If you decided to go with an annuity, you would get the same accrued benefits that you would have under the pension. By law, the annuity payments have to be the same as the pension payments. (With an annuity, you can choose to take your monthly payments right away on the distribution date or defer starting payments until a later date.)

You could also select a lump-sum payment.

Lump sums can then be rolled into another retirement vehicle, where you can continue to invest the amount and grow it. If you cash a lump sum, however, and the money hits your hands, it is subject to a high tax rate.

At its simplest level, here is how Aon representative Kevin Quinn described the choice between an annuity and lump sum during talks with the Guild:

“If you pick an annuity, the plan just exists as if none of this ever happened – except when you retire, you call up a different place.

“You get a one-time chance to take your benefit as a lump sum. And if you don't, it's like this never happened. And instead of calling up The News, you call an insurance company.”

### **Which insurance company would take over the plan?**

From that list of potential insurers to provide annuities, Lee will have to inform the Guild of all companies selected as finalists in the running to be the annuity provider.

The company will have to fully investigate any concerns we raise and take that into account before any final selection is made.

The Guild's financial adviser sat in on calls in 2024 with Aon, where officials reviewed the process for

selecting the insurance company. Our adviser felt the process was thorough and should be sufficient in determining a qualified company to handle the pension.

### **Additional years of service**

As part of the agreement to freeze the pension in 2021, the Guild negotiated for members to get additional years of service. Here is that language:

(i) All actively employed Pension Plan participants as of August 6, 2021, with at least three (3) years of vesting service shall be considered 100% vested as of the Freeze Date.

(ii) All actively employed Pension Plan participants as of August 6, 2021, shall be entitled to eight (8) additional years of credited service, up to a maximum of thirty-three (33) years, effective as the Freeze Date.

(iii) For all actively employed Pension Plan participants as of August 6, 2021, the cap on credited service shall be increased to thirty-three (33) years (from 30 years), effective as of the Freeze Date.

So when you're reviewing your pension benefit statement, please make sure you are getting all your additional years, per the 2021 contract. So if you were someone hired in 2009 and worked here through 2021, you have 12 years of credited service, *plus* the eight additional years of credited service from the frozen pension agreement. So you should be getting 20 total years.

We are aware of at least one member who did not have his additional years of service reflected on his pension benefit statement. The Guild is reaching out to Lee and Aon to have them double-check that members are getting their extra years, but carefully look over your information and call the Pension Administration Center at 877-852-3582 if anything looks off.

## **Protecting local journalism requires community involvement**

*By Sandy Tan* – This month, the Buffalo Newspaper Guild marched in the Pride Parade and is hosting a “Meet the Journalists” happy hour event at Britesmith Brewing, 1250 Niagara St., on Wednesday, June 17, so that members of the public can meet and appreciate the journalists who produce local stories on a weekly and daily basis.

We are also looking ahead to hosting a more formal community forum in the fall and are on the hunt for ideas about what topics might attract the most people.

These are not just some feel-good activities. They are vital to keeping our mission of protecting local

journalism front and center with the community whom we depend on for support. Next year, the Guild will once again be in contract negotiations, and we need the community to stand with us.

Do you have an idea of something the Guild could be doing, both with its own members or with the public? Great! We want to hear from you. Please share and consider ways you can help make it happen.

Given the many threats against the stability of The Buffalo News, it isn't enough anymore to simply rally the community during contract years. We need

to involve them year-round. We are too few to stand alone.

Getting the message out regarding our value to this region requires effort. It's unreasonable to expect that a small handful of overextended Guild

members can sustain this effort on their own. So thank you to those who have played a role in building the strength of the Guild. And to those who haven't yet found a way to get more involved, it's never too late to start!



*Members of the Guild, and supporters, at Buffalo's Pride Parade.*

## Lee Enterprises names Nathan Bekke as CEO

Lee Enterprises named Nathan Bekke as its CEO on April 24.

Bekke had been serving as interim CEO since Kevin Mowbray retired in December. Before that, Bekke served as the company's chief operating officer.

In a [news release](#) announcing his appointment, Bekke said: "I look forward to building on this progress, enhancing shareholder value, and continuing to position Lee for sustained, long-term

success. We have a powerful opportunity to build a durable, growing business anchored in compelling local journalism that reflects, informs and uplifts the communities we serve, and I am confident in our ability to realize it."

Bekke began his career in 1988 in a business-side role at a Lee-owned newspaper in Montana, and he previously served as publisher of the Lee-owned Casper Star-Tribune in Wyoming.



## Major Guild happenings since the winter edition

- **April** – The Guild participates in the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper's spring cleanup. Guild members and supporters help clean the Scajaquada Creek shoreline. The Guild has taken part in the cleanup for nearly two decades.
- **May** – Pension-eligible Guild members receive notice of Lee's pension termination plan. The Guild discusses what the termination means at its general membership meeting.
- **Early June** – Guild members march in the Pride Parade on Elmwood Avenue in Buffalo. Also,



*Members of the Star Tribune Guild with boxes of pizza.*

members of the Star Tribune Newspaper Guild in Minneapolis use a gift card from the Buffalo Newspaper Guild to purchase pizza and doughnuts as a pick-me-up after learning that the Star Tribune would be cutting staff. The Buffalo Newspaper Guild in February sent the Star Tribune Guild a \$500 DoorDash gift card to recognize its members' coverage of the federal immigration crackdown in Minnesota.



*Nine Guild members and friends joined the Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper cleanup effort on April 25. They include (left to right) Aaron Besecker, Steve Watson, Matt Glynn, Jon Harris, Sandy Tan, Mackenzie Shuman, Ben Ingalls and Francesca Bond. Also participating but not pictured, Elizabeth Licata.*

## Comings & Goings from The Buffalo News/Hamburg Sun

### Comings:

Emma Kresge, Editorial, intern  
Matt Trunfio, Editorial, intern

### Goings:

Nicole Crage, District Manager  
Jack Harzynski, District Manager

## Upcoming meetings

Executive Committee meetings are currently scheduled for the remainder of 2026 as follows: July 13; Aug. 10; Sept. 14; Oct. 12; Nov. 9; Dec. 14.

The next general membership meetings are currently scheduled for Aug. 12 and Nov. 18. For the most up-to-date meeting schedule, visit: [buffaloguild.org](http://buffaloguild.org)

## Meeting minutes

*These approved meeting minutes in the Frontier Reporter are slightly edited and abridged. To view full minutes, visit [buffaloguild.org](http://buffaloguild.org), select "Meeting Minutes" tab and enter the password. If you need the password, email [santan716@gmail.com](mailto:santan716@gmail.com)*

### Executive Committee Meeting minutes: Feb. 9, 2026

**Attendance:** Aaron Besecker, Francesca Bond, Eric Bridenbaker, Jon Harris, Kim Leiser, Rachel Lenzi, Dave Robinson, Sandy Tan, Steve Watson, Rick Wiorowski, Trey Wydysh

**Absent:** Jason Kremblas

**Excused:** Mike Harrington

**Call to order 5:08 p.m.**

Approval of minutes from Jan. 12 meeting: Harris motions to approve with approved changes (adjust to signed "waiver and release," Hoffmann has two Ns). Wiorowski seconds. Approved.

### President's report – Harris

New publisher. Kim, Margaret, Tammy and Jon met with new publisher and he seems like a good fit, will get more advertising and not affect newsroom much.

Lee will report first quarter earnings tomorrow morning for late September through December, will go over that during Wednesday's general membership meeting.

### **Mobilization report – Tan**

BuffaloGuild.org website updated with meetings, contact info, minutes and guild history

Flyer for general membership meeting on Wednesday is out

NOW group continuing to meet.

Still looking for someone willing to take over role of The Frontier Reporter.

Reached out to Minnesota Star-Tribune to see how our union can support them in their coverage of ICE in their community. They were very appreciative of the offer to cover a meal for their members and that they have 30 to 50 guild members who show up to work several days a week, so Tan suggested we'll send a DoorDash gift card for them to use whenever they want. Heard back from person organizing new and responsible ownership for Pittsburgh Post-Gazette who suggested making a donation to PAPER and posting support on social media. We could financially support them if there's an interest or we could wait. Wydysh said we should make the donations. Wydysh said we sent \$250 to two families affected by the California fires.

Tan says we should send a \$500 DoorDash gift card to cover a meal for the Minnesota paper. Wydysh motions to approve. Tan seconds. Approved.

Tan needs grievance updates from 2025 to update website.

Tan reached out to Hoffmann on behalf of unions of Lee and the Buffalo Newspaper Guild. He responded within a half hour to say he's waiting for quarterly earnings reports to be official on Feb. 10 and that he can't meet before then, but then to circle back for a chance to talk next week, and that he very much wants to meet.

### **Grievance report – Wydysh**

Problem with contributed photos for high school sports photos. Wydysh said Kenny is trying to strengthen lines of communication between Clevis and Scull so assignments are in and Scull can go get photos.

Lenzi brought up issue re: Brady that it's a continual issue of Brady not staying in his lane. Leiser said he is not supposed to cross the line that an existing staff member is doing. Besecker said the crux of the issue is getting our work done cheaply by a freelancer. Harris said if we can keep Brady in his two lanes then it's a good way to keep everyone happy.

Managers doing DM work – Eric said it's still an issue with Bob, that he doesn't know how to take the DM hat off, and it's hurting the staff. Wiorkowski said they also don't see contracts, debit or credit slips anymore. Taking more and more away from guild workers. Wiorkowski said they should all have a meeting to clarify everyone's roles.

Wydysh said there are concerns on the digital desk about the weather alerts and if it's violating the AI policy.

### **New business – Harris**

Lee closed on \$50 million investment from Hoffmann and other members. He is now board chair and majority shareholder. Part of money will likely go toward unpaid bills to make Lee's accounts current. Interest on Berkshire Hathaway debt dropped from 9% to 5%. Bekke is interim CEO and sent out email on high school sports priority. Lifeline for company that was heading toward bankruptcy this year. Hoffmann thinks

news coverage leans too far to the left and needs to be centered, he was kind of talking about the St. Louis community. He loves high school sports. He also brought up a point about journalism building up a community and not tearing it down. Lenzi wondered what his definition of "too left" is and said we should talk to him about it. Tan said she appreciates what Hoffmann said about how he doesn't believe in layoffs.

Level Financial is steward of our investment accounts, which have performed really well over the last three years. Harris was talking to them about our accounts being 50/50, which is conservative, and Steve Elwell said we could meet to talk about more aggressively investing some of our money to grow it faster. We have \$1.6 million, could let Steve Elwell be more aggressive with \$250,000, could make us more financially secure in the future. Besecker and Tan think it's a great idea and that our investments have been extremely conservative and we've lost out on a lot of revenue growth. Robinson said to remember where we are in the market, in a record market that has been doing nothing but going up but that was once somewhere else. Robinson said we could gently change our investment mix, like 60/40. Robinson thinks our investments are actually more aggressive than they think. He wouldn't go beyond 60/40.

Leiser said Quickbooks will no longer support the software we use and that it will cost \$115 a month to continue using Quickbooks online. RCS Union Software is a different company we could use, does everything Quickbooks does for us, and could also do direct deposit, which Quickbooks doesn't. \$1,530 one-time set-up fee to transfer records into new software, then it costs either full-service (\$4,538 per year) or software-only (\$2,138 per year. \$1,380 Quickbooks on top of \$4,250 for Sipple, total \$5,630, for this year otherwise.) Harris said RCS Union Software is a good switch. Depends on which Leiser said would be easier to deal with.

Leiser motions to approve \$6,098 on transition to RCS Union Software. Robinson seconds. Approved.

Meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

## **General Membership Meeting minutes: Feb. 11, 2026**

### **Jon Harris – President's report**

Lee's Q1 results – Lee is profitable in operating basis, but net loss after interest payments to Berkshire Hathaway under previous, higher rate, print and digital advertising down from a year ago, print subscription revenue fell significantly, digital subscription revenue grew a bit. Lee interim CEO Nathan Bekke said digital is more important than ever (paraphrasing). Harris said at least they're publicly acknowledging that digital and customer experience is lacking. Lee plans to reduce pension, print legacy costs. "It wasn't a bad quarter," Harris said.

### **Sandy Tan – Mobilization report**

Hoffmann agreed to meet with us after Q1 results come out. Hopes he will be more communicative as owner and is optimistic.

Donating \$500 DoorDash gift card to Minnesota Star-Tribune to support them during ICE coverage.

Potentially donating to Pittsburgh Post-Gazette amidst news of publisher shutting down paper.

Seeking editor of quarterly Frontier Reporter, a stipended position.

### **Trey Wydysh – Grievances report**

Open grievance with management doing Guild labor.

Keeping eye on Erik Brady's freelance columns stepping on toes of sports reporters.

Also monitoring contributed photo situation in sports.

Going to take closer look at Lee's AI policy re: weather alerts.

Discussion of intern hirings, need for more help on digital desk, interest in hiring more reporters.

Meeting adjourned at 1:20 p.m.

#### **Guild Executive Committee minutes: March 8, 2026**

**Attendance:** Aaron Besecker, Francesca Bond, Eric Bridenbaker, Jon Harris, Mike Harrington, Kim Leiser, Rachel Lenzi, Dave Robinson, Sandra Tan, Steve Watson, Rick Wiorkowski, Trey Wydysh

**Absent:** Jason Kremblas

**Excused:** Rachel Lenzi

**Call to order 5:04 p.m.**

Approval of minutes from Jan. 12 meeting: Harris motions to approve with approved changes (Edit from Star-Tribute to Star-Tribune / change other Steve Elwell). Wydysh seconds. Approved. / Approval of minutes from general membership meeting. Harris motions to approve (with edit of newspaper name). Wydysh seconds. Approved.

#### **Mobilization report – Tan**

The Frontier Reporter will be out this week. William Perkins is new Frontier Reporter editor.

Union of Lee Enterprises is finishing its letter to Lee Enterprises objecting to the decision that we triple our assets in light of job cuts over the last few years. Also opposing AI and its use in community pages.

NOW group on hiatus.

Sending \$500 to Star-Tribune.

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper spring sweep sign-ups happening soon.

#### **Grievance report – Wydysh**

Leiser met with company to talk district manager issues. Had good conversation and received assurances that delivery would only happen after all other routes for DM employees have been pursued. Only under extreme circumstances, not on day-to-day basis. Talked about route lists, debits, credits, dispatching. Leiser was assured all DM work would be reverted back to DMs. Only difference of opinion was route lists because DMs haven't had exclusive jurisdiction over it. DMs have been spoken to and changes are supposed to be coming.

Wydysh is keeping his eye on the pending release of vacation schedule. Not everyone has put in requests. Contract requires vacation schedule to be posted by March 1. Leiser said schedule selection is by seniority.

#### **President's report/New business – Harris**

Update on new RCS Union software – Leiser said we signed contract and have login but haven't migrated information yet.

Lee community AI page – on BuffaloNews.com/community a bunch of outdated press releases from a small number of places. There is an AI disclosure at the bottom. AI language from last contract allows generated lists without human supervision but people disagree this counts as purely aggregated content because of how few releases it's getting. Needs specific blurb on the page that states that it is AI. Potential to file a grievance about it because it's not dissimilar from the newsroom putting out briefs, but it is worse. Discussion on human oversight re: this page. AI blurb needs to

be at the top. Could argue this is a violation of the professional standards because of our contract, standards clause. Wydysh motions to file a grievance. Tan seconds. Motion approved.

Tan has not heard from Hoffmann since sale closure. Tan did follow up on a Saturday night. After Unions of Lee files letter, Tan said she plans to forward to Hoffmann.

Meeting adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

#### **Executive Committee meeting minutes: April 13, 2026**

**Attendance:** Aaron Besecker, Francesca Bond, Eric Bridenbaker, Jon Harris, Mike Harrington, Kim Leiser, Dave Robinson, Sandy Tan, Steve Watson, Rick Wiorkowski, Trey Wydysh, and guest Steve Elwell, partner with Level Financial

**Absent:** Jason Kremblas

**Excused:** Rachel Lenzi

**Call to order 5:01 p.m.**

#### **Meeting with Steve Elwell**

Big defense fund account is more than \$1.3 million, mix of 50/50 stock and bond, want to switch to 60% stock and 40% bond, want to earn a bit more to ensure the pot of money doesn't run out if we're going to remove 80k a year, want to diversify Berkshire Hathaway stock, reduce 22% of Berkshire Hathaway to 6%, our operating budget is about 4.92% of our stocks.

Approval of change stock bond mix to 60/40. Robinson motions to approve. Leiser seconds. Besecker abstains. Approved.

Approval of reducing Berkshire Hathaway stock from 22% to 6%. Wiorkowski motions to approve. Wydysh seconds. Besecker abstains. Approved.

Approval of minutes from March meeting. Harris motions to approve with approved changes: fewer details. Tan seconds. Approved.

#### **President's report – Harris**

Hoffmann story from Forbes. Should visit Buffalo but not newsrooms. New management-level digital editor who will be here one week per month beginning in May, based in Montana.

#### **Mobilization report – Tan**

BN Waterkeeper Spring Cleanup – April 25

Pride Parade – June 7

Mobilization Committee should be year round committee. Going to reconvene next Tues or Weds. NOW Group also going to reconvene. Mobilization thinking of doing some sort of event.

Community Foundation received grant to improve local journalism. Want to do a landscape study to look at local journalism in eight counties of WNY.

#### **Grievance report – Wydysh**

DM issues and newspaper dealers insurance issues happening. Dealers struggling with gas increases.

Meeting with management over AI grievance. Management resolving community page AI stories in web pages. AI disclosures not showing up on app.

Meeting adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

#### **General membership meeting minutes: May 27, 2026**

#### **Trey Wydysh – Grievances**

Gusto story on split page – Will continue to address this issue.

Kim Leiser – Lee requiring all dealers to carry commercial insurance or issue Lee as co-insurance on vehicles. On June 1, expect there to be dozens of down routes. It will be treated as an emergency and will be treated as all hands on deck. People have no choice but to deliver if they're asked to, otherwise they'll be written up. You can't refuse a direct order during your working hours, but you can refuse overtime. Giving an extension of 30 days for people who are trying to get insurance or will you stay on while we find someone to cover your route. Leiser and DMs also discussed ongoing concerns about job descriptions and the need to adhere to them. Leiser said she would follow up with Turnbull to acquire more information.

### **Sandy Tan – Mobilization**

Pride Parade June 7

June 17 – Meet the Journalists at Britesmith on Niagara St. – as part of support local journalism efforts.

### **Harris – President's report**

Lee second-quarter results through March 29, 2026: \$2 million net loss, better than last year's \$12 million loss in same quarter. Operating expenses much lower, \$5 million in insurance recoveries from cyberattack. Digital-only revenue down \$1.5 million from same quarter last year, digital ad revenue dropped.

David Hoffmann visited various Lee markets, where he spoke with advertisers, readers and community stakeholders.

Have already been addressing gaps in local news coverage.

Looking for opportunities to expand Lee, maybe acquiring other newspapers in future.

Lee is now managing Hoffmann Media.

Lee is in much better shape with cash and finances since Hoffmann coming in.

### **Pension overview – Lee terminating pension**

Lee is arranging for meetings with financial advisers with participants.

Participants will need to decide whether to take lump sum or roll it into 401(k).

People need to check pension termination letters for errors.

Regarding AI use, it's important to check the community page for stories that we would cover or have covered. Worried about insidious creep that could happen.

Kia is in charge of helping reporters get more digital assets out of their stories. Will also hop on digital desk as needed. Strategizing ways to get more mileage out of stories.