



The Frontier Reporter

Summer  Edition 2026

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What to know about Lee’s artificial intelligence policy

By Trey Wydysh – In recent months, the use of artificial intelligence and its impact on the newsroom has become a frequent topic of discussion among Guild members. From community news feeds to the use of ChatGPT to help reporters generate digital editorial content, AI’s presence at The Buffalo News is nearly unavoidable.

But how, exactly, is Lee’s use of AI affecting the members of the Buffalo Newspaper Guild? In addition to Lee’s artificial intelligence policy, implemented Jan. 1, the Guild has negotiated its own guidelines regarding the effects of AI on Guild members.

Here are some key things to know about Lee’s policy and the contract’s language regarding AI.

Job security

The Guild will be given three months’ notice prior to the introduction of new equipment or new processes when such introduction would result in the reduction of the staff. Any such reduction would be accomplished by a buyout offer.

Bargaining

At least 45 days prior to the introduction of any artificial intelligence policy, the Guild and The News will meet to negotiate the effects, if any, of its implementation at The Buffalo News. This is meant to ensure that there is meaningful human involvement and supervision in the use of AI. The Guild and management entered effects bargaining before the implementation of Lee’s policy and must do so again before any further policy is enacted.



Artificial intelligence has been in the headlines, and the Guild has negotiated guidelines.

Editorial use of AI

AI is permitted for use in generating “stories, headlines, summaries, social media copy, and SEO metadata from original journalistic work for human review before publication.”

It may also be used for editing assistance, research, data analysis, ideation, and in partner and sponsored content.

Any AI-generated content must be clearly marked as being produced by artificial intelligence.

A list of permitted tools can be found at editorialmatters.lee.net.

Lee Enterprises Chairman David Hoffmann visits Buffalo, but questions remain about his commitment to local news

By William Perkins – David Hoffmann, chairman of Lee Enterprises’ board of directors, visited Buffalo on June 16 to speak with local business and community officials at the Buffalo Niagara Partnership. Lee Enterprises executives, including CEO Nathan Bekke and Chief Content Officer Jason Adrians, were in attendance for the meeting, as were Buffalo News Publisher Sean Jacobsen and Editor in Chief Margaret Kenny.

The stop in Buffalo was part of Hoffmann’s tour of Lee markets. Buffalo News reporters were not permitted to attend the meeting.

The Buffalo visit was mentioned in a profile of Hoffmann that appeared in all Lee papers on the July 4 weekend. In three stories comprising thousands of words, Lee Enterprises “senior reporter” David McCumber chronicled Hoffmann’s childhood and business career and [wrote](#) that the billionaire “believes in the power of local news to strengthen communities and the country, and he’s backed that conviction with tens of millions of dollars.”

“Here is what has been most refreshing for Lee’s newsrooms: The company, since Hoffmann’s investment, has modestly reinvested in key local news reporting jobs,” McCumber wrote.

But despite that – and [Hoffmann previously calling layoffs a “bad word”](#) – layoffs and buyouts were made in August at a number of Lee newsrooms,

including one buyout in The Buffalo News newsroom. That raises questions about Hoffmann’s previous [assertion to Forbes](#) that he was “going to save newspapers in America.”

Days before McCumber’s three stories on Hoffmann were published, an [article in Poynter](#) documented how the package came together and noted that journalists had concerns about editorial independence.

“The stories in the package portray Hoffmann in an entirely positive light while shedding little new insight into his plans for Lee’s papers,” the Poynter piece said.

[In a statement](#), the Unions of Lee Enterprises, which includes the Buffalo Newspaper Guild, said that it supports Hoffmann’s “publicly stated commitment to hiring more journalists, avoiding layoffs and returning resources to local news organizations.” But it expressed concerns “that the three stories lack the journalistic integrity that would be demanded of other stories that would get this level of display and prominence.”

The Buffalo News posted openings for Guild-covered positions in the days before and weeks after Hoffmann’s visit. The three openings are for a Buffalo Bills reporter, a high school sports reporter and a philanthropy and cultural reporter, though that last beat may be modified. Those positions currently remain unfilled.



The Guild hosted a “Meet the Journalists” event on June 17 at Britesmith Brewing.

Major Guild happenings since the spring edition

- **June** – The Guild hosts a “Meet the Journalists” event at Britesmith Brewing in Buffalo. It includes a panel featuring Francesca Bond, Mike Harrington and Justin Sondel. It’s moderated by Elizabeth Licata. The event gives the public a chance to learn more about what journalists do and how the Guild is working to protect local journalism.

- **July** – The Guild arranges free informational and general advice sessions for members online regarding pension termination from Aon, the pension termination administrator, and the Guild’s financial adviser, Level Financial Advisors. David Hoffmann’s canned profile package runs in The Buffalo News and all other Lee papers.
- **August** – Pension-eligible Guild members make selections on how to receive their benefits by the Aug. 20 deadline. This is part of the pension termination plan that was previously agreed to. Follow-up reminders and resources provided to members.

Comings & Goings from The Buffalo News/Hamburg Sun

Comings:
None

Goings:
Samantha Christmann, Editorial
Emma Kresge, Editorial, intern
Colin Richey, Editorial, intern
Matthew Trunfio, Editorial, intern

Upcoming meetings

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

The next general membership meeting is currently scheduled for Nov. 18. For the most up-to-date meeting schedule, visit: buffaloguild.org

Meeting minutes

These approved meeting minutes in the Frontier Reporter are slightly edited and abridged. To view full minutes, visit buffaloguild.org, select “Meeting Minutes” tab and enter the password. If you need the password, email santan716@gmail.com

Executive Committee meeting minutes: June 8, 2026

Attendance: Aaron Besecker, Francesca Bond, Eric Bridenbaker, Jon Harris, Mike Harrington, Jason Kremblas, Kim Leiser, Rachel Lenzi, Dave Robinson, Sandy Tan, Steve Watson, Rick Wiorkowski, Trey Wydysh, special guest from Level Financial - Steve Elwell.

Absent: None

Excused: None

Call to order 5:03 p.m.

Approval of minutes: April Executive Committee Harris approved. Tan seconded. Minutes approved. May general membership meeting minutes. Approved with changes about adding job description for DM discussion. Tan approved. Harris seconded. Minutes approved.

President’s report - Harris

Lee’s \$2 million net loss is better than \$12 million net loss from the same quarter a year ago. Hoffmann is visiting various Lee markets to address gaps in local news coverage. Hoffmann will be in Buffalo next week. Anticipate he may add a couple of positions as he has in other communities.

Mobilization Report - Tan

Pride Parade over the weekend. About a dozen attendees. Great weather. Handed out postcards and chanted “Protect free press!”

“Meet the Journalists” event coming up from 6 to 8 p.m. June 17 at Britesmith Brewing with Bond, Harrington and Justin Sondel. Keeping with plans to communicate with the public year-round. \$500 fee to reserve room plus food. Would also like to spend \$50 on social media promotion. Estimating event will cost \$800. Also discussing plans for more formal

discussion event in fall. Tan motions to spend \$800. Wydysh seconded. Approved.

Inviting Hoffmann to come to event over email. Also plan to post something on our social media accounts recognizing that he’s coming to town and welcoming him to Buffalo.

Grievance report - Wydysh

Wydysh going to talk to Margaret Kenny to clarify everyone’s understanding of contract re: Gusto. Both management and Guild interpreting contract differently. The Guild contends that just because something is considered a Gusto story doesn’t mean it can run in any print section. Also going to talk about the AI stories, which are flagged with “provided” flag. Based on our contract language and Lee’s AI policy, the company should be providing human oversight for AI community page. Going to have follow-up conversation.

New business - Harris

Had meeting with Astrid Garcia, Tammy Turnbull and pension administrator to set up meetings and give people an overview. Harris writing something on pensions for Frontier Reporter and to send to members.

Summer picnic – based on low prior turnout, discussion about whether we want to continue the summer picnic or replace it with other events/activities.

Discussing ideas: Darien Lake picnic, Bisons game, or regular picnic. Could put out feelers. Can look into them both, Darien Lake and Bisons game. Buffalo Bills preseason game or open “red and blue” practices.

Other discussion

Tan says spring edition of Frontier Reporter is coming out soon.

District manager stewards provided latest update on the lack of carriers willing to deliver the paper starting July because of Lee's directive that managers all add Lee as car insurance cosigner or buy commercial insurance. The 30-day extension expires at the end of June. Gave extension but routes still difficult. Having difficulty with routes taking a long time, not being able to get them done in time. Don't have the resources for existing DMs to do it. Everyone is working at the max. Leaving papers with the company because people can't stay. Committee members discuss if Guild should issue a public statement about the issue. Can't get the same amount of work done in less time. Overtaxing members. Doing more with fewer resources. Stewards drafting bullet points on what has happened, a summary of major concerns and need for the company to take action to create a public statement. Hurting members and subscribers.

Meeting adjourned at 5:50 p.m.

Executive Committee meeting minutes: July 13, 2026

Attendance: Francesca Bond, Jon Harris, Mike Harrington, Kim Leiser, Dave Robinson, Sandy Tan, Steve Watson, Rick Wiorkowski and Trey Wydysh.

Absent: Eric Bridenbaker and Jason Kremblas.

Excused: Aaron Besecker and Rachel Lenzi.

Call to order 5:05 p.m.

Approval of Minutes: June Executive Committee minutes. Tan motioned to approve. Harris seconded. Minutes approved.

President's report - Harris

Buffalo Bills beat reporter position is posted. Soon, a high school sports reporter position should be posted and the job description for a business reporter (philanthropy and cultural) should come to Harris soon. Bills reporter is doing more news so we can have more "Only in The Buffalo News" Bills stories from the whole Bills staff. Only two reporters will travel to each Bills away game.

Mobilization report - Tan

The spring edition of Frontier Reporter is out.

"Meet the Journalists" event happened June 17. It wasn't as well attended as we hoped, despite spending \$50 on social media promotion. It could have benefitted from more lead time. But the event went well. Britesmith waived the \$500 room fee for the event. We liked the venue and would like it for our holiday party, but it may be out of our price range. We liked the format and want to do another "Meet the Journalists" event in the fall.

We issued a statement on the circulation catastrophe and it got a lot of attention. Dave Gerber from WIVB reached out to see if Guild had more to say on the matter, but we're waiting to see how the company responds. The community cares about the issue and it was good to inform the community and let the managers know that we're concerned about what is happening.

Grievance report - Wydysh

The Erik Brady column continues to be an issue. We should continue to object when we see it because otherwise we will lose all jurisdiction. Gene Kershner, the horse writing writer, went to Toronto three times to cover the World Cup, when no staff reporter was asked to cover the games. They could have sent a high school or college sports reporter who covers soccer to cover it.

We need to keep our eye on the puzzle/quizmaking tool that Lee sent around. We need to make sure all the AI disclaimers are on it whenever it is published. We want to make sure the tool and its usage is in line with our AI agreement.

For delivery issues, there are still extensions on the insurance, but the drivers are still working really hard and running around. We need to wait until the insurance extensions are done to see what the full effects are. A lot of carriers haven't gotten the insurance, and we have a lot of down routes. Papers are being delivered late. Customers are complaining. Jon Harris and Kim Leiser met with Jordan and Jen, who said around 70% of carriers have already transitioned to the new insurance, and that they don't think they will be able to hire more people until the extensions end, and who are doing their best under the difficult circumstances. Rick Wiorkowski wishes there was more transparency and communication. The Guild can ask for more regular updates to district managers so they know what steps are being taken to resolve the matter.

New business - Harris

Pension termination: Last week, we had meetings with Aon representatives to discuss pension termination. Around 45 people participated. Level Financial, our financial adviser, said they could do a virtual group meeting for free. One on one meetings would cost a minimum of \$1,400 plus \$250 beyond that, which is how much it has cost in the past. The election window closes Aug. 20. We should send a flyer this week to members with updated information, Level Financial meeting, the deadline and the link to the workshop. We need to make sure it doesn't get sent to retirees because they do not have the option to take the lump sum.

Summer picnic: Getting into the Bills stadium for a group tour or a preseason game is a possibility, but the Bills are being inundated with requests and the tickets are expensive. Mike Petro asked the Buffalo Bills if they would accommodate our group – maybe 50 people – for a tour. We probably won't do a summer picnic, as there were only a dozen attendees last year, so it's safe to say we'll do something like this, maybe a Buffalo Bisons game, which is reasonably priced and much less effort. If we can get the Buffalo Bills game nailed down, that's great, otherwise we could go to a Bisons game or rent a kayak or go on the Miss Buffalo cruise ship. We normally spend around \$500 on the summer picnic. The Buffalo Bisons tickets were only \$300 last year. Trey Wydysh said it would be around \$1,000 to rent one of the boats at Canalside. Miss Buffalo cruises are \$27 a person and more in our price range.

Retro approval for \$100 donation to American Cancer Society in remembrance of Libby's mom, Lorna March - Harris motions to approve. Tan seconds. Motion approved.

Hoffmann: A profile written by a Lee news reporter about David Hoffmann ran recently in our paper and other Lee papers. The Unions of Lee Enterprises posted a statement and supplied it to Poynter for the news story they wrote on the situation. Stakeholders in the Lee meetings complained about the lack of investment, local printing and a growing distrust, but they came out of the meetings feeling much more hopeful. The Unions of Lee statement said that we support Hoffmann's investment but did not like the editorial takeover. That got a lot of attention.

Meeting adjourned at 6:07 p.m.