Digital First Media puts in bid for five Louisiana newspapers

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With the fear of a struggling industry getting worse, it could get smaller with MNG Enterprises putting in a bid for Gannett.

MNG Enterprises, better known as Digital First Media, put a bid in for Gannett valued at $1.36 billion and its goal is to take over the struggling newspapers while also slashing jobs, according to The Advocate.

In a letter to Gannett, MNG Enterprises said since the start of its company two years ago, it has lost 41 percent of its value.

"During this period, Gannett suffered from a series of value-destroying decisions made by an unfocused leadership team — overpaying for a string of non-core aspirational digital deals," the letter said.

Holly Duchmann, former reporter for the now-Gannett-owned paper The Daily World, said she isn't surprised by the talks of Gannett potentially being bought out by MNG Enterprises.

"Gannett and USA Today, as a company, they have been making decisions, really, to drive their profit for years now," Duchmann said.

Duchmann, a current reporter at The Business Report in Baton Rouge, said it's hard to get behind a company that has so many layoffs over the years.

When you're part of the company like Gannett, the management is pushing optimism but it's hard to buy on to that message that everything is great in the company when there are mass layoffs every few months," Duchmann said.

A former University of Louisiana at Lafayette student and editor-in-chief at The Vermilion in 2016, Duchmann said because Gannett struggles to earn a positive profit, hiring has been hard recently.

"Even when you look at how many new reporters were hired by the Daily Advertiser since they hired me in June of 2016, they haven't hired many more reporters at The Daily Advertiser," Duchmann said.

Duchmann local papers are becoming harder and harder to work for.

"You see a lot of local media companies and they are not locally- or family-owned anymore, it's more of a corporate thing," Duchmann said.

The layoffs that I've noticed from USA Today and Gannett, they were never because the specific paper itself or the specific market was struggling, it was because the company as a whole was suffering," Duchmann said.

Like Duchmann, MNG Enterprises said something should change.

The letter added Gannett shareholders cannot sit by and watch further value erode while the Board casts about for a strategy and a leader, especially when there is an opportunity to maximize value right now.

"Frankly, the team leading Gannett has not demonstrated that it's capable of effectively running this enterprise as a public company," according to the letter, adding, "We believe Gannett shareholders deserve better."

Though smaller papers may seem grim, Duchmann said there is still a chance.

"The biggest hope the industry has is our reporters, because even though The Daily Advertiser doesn't have that many people on staff, they still have remarkable journalists," Duchmann said.

Duchmann said she thinks the people entering the industry of journalism are starting to realize that it's not something that is best if you are going to pay your bills, but added there is hope for the future.

"But you see little other newspapers have the same, I think, and there is this rush of whole new talent entering the industry right now," Duchmann said. "It's really gotta be something you're passionate about it."

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UL holds first Brown Bag Lunch series, allows guests to connect to state history

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The University of Louisiana at Lafayette, along with the Center for Louisiana Studies, began the Brown Bag Lunch series Friday, Jan. 18 at Dupré Library, giving students a new perspective in Louisiana's history.

The goal of the Brown Bag Lunch series, according to Jennifer Ritter Guidry, assistant director for programming and special projects at the Center of Louisiana Studies, is to engage the general public with research that is relevant to the community that may shed light to a subject that does not get a lot of attention.

"We also want to give a forum for graduate students to present their research to their fellow students, the public and faculty members," Guidry said.

Doctoral student Jessica Dauterive was the first to present with her research on "'Fais Do-Do Instant Mix': Mass Culture and Cajun Identity in Louisiana, 1930-1970."

Completing her master's degree at the University of New Orleans and now pursuing her doctoral degree in History at George Mason University, Dauterive began her work on Cajun history.

With Dauterive having roots in Lafayette, she had a deep connection to the history and culture from her upbringing.

"A lot of this has been exploring how Cajun identity gets formed in different ways, and because I'm from here, it's a lot about self-discovery as well, which is what has kept the project going," Dauterive said.

During the series, Dauterive said her inspiration came from a small recording
company named Swallow Records located in Ville Platte, which is where she started studying how Cajun people use records, television, radio and tourism to create their culture.

"I am really working on 1955-1974 so I am starting with the Acadiana bicentennial celebration and I'm ending with the first tribute to Cajun music, which actually Festival Acadian becomes that," Dauterive said.

Students and faculty from UL Lafayette, as well as the public, were in attendance to hear Dauterive's dissertation and ask her questions about her research. "This way you can sit and listen to older studentstalk about theirown research and hopefully help you with your own research," said Rachel Blonquist, a public history graduate student at UL Lafayette. "It certainly brings up questions of where things came from, and it brings a lot of the backstory of why we do things."

Dauterive said she hopes her research will inspire UL Lafayette students to dig deeper into the Dupré Library’s archives that are available to them and learn more about Lafayette and surrounding areas.

These events are free and open to the public and the series is supported by the Jamie Guilbeau and Thelma Guilbeau UL Lafayette Collections Research Grant.

Some of the Brown Bag series’ future topics will be focused on topics such as the relationship between Canada & the British Empire, the healing ans. Acadiana traditions, fashion history and much more.

The Brown Bag series will be held every third Friday of each month for the spring and fall semesters at 12:30 p.m. in Dupré Library 221 or H.L. Griffin Hall 315.