

IN BUSINESS



Chris Maynard for The New York Times

Mary Ann Liebert, Westchester Wag publisher, with Emily Liebert, her editor and daughter-in-law, in Larchmont offices.

Local Reading, for the Rich

By JEFF GROSSMAN

IN the autumn of 2002, Grace Bennett had an idea and the experience to put it into action. A magazine editor, Ms. Bennett had taken time off to raise her children, but had become restless. She began knocking on merchants' doors along King Street and South Greeley Avenue in her native Chappaqua, asking if they would be interested in advertising in a new magazine just for local residents.

"I got a little more serious about it, because I was getting really great positive feedback," said Ms. Bennett, who had held jobs at *Woman's Day*, *McCall's* and *Sesame Street Parents*. "I had set up a budget, basically. I had gotten estimates from printers. I understood what it would take to mail. I wasn't going to launch it if I wasn't going to break even." After an initial outlay of about \$500 for stationery, cards and a prototype cover, the premier edition of *Inside Chappaqua* rolled off the presses in April 2003.

Today, the magazine, of which Ms. Bennett is editor and publisher, is mailed to 6,300 homes in and around North Castle six times a year. The current issue has 100 advertisers. Although it is sold for a cover price of \$3.95 at the Second Story bookshop in Chappaqua and the Drug Mart in Millwood, subscriptions are free and automatic with local home ownership.

Printing was originally only in blue and black inks, but full-color pages are now being phased in. Every page should be in color by this September, Ms. Bennett said, and each issue averages about 50 pages. "One issue really does continue to pay for the next," she said. "That's getting better, there is a buildup now, and I'm not worried that I can't get out my next issue if my bills don't get paid." Besides herself, Ms. Bennett has a part-time designer and one primary advertising representative.

Inside Chappaqua and other similar magazines covering Westchester are sharing in flush times for hometown magazines across the country, experts say. The key to these magazines' survival is that they appeal to local residents who tend to go to the same restaurants and shop in the same stores, and they are most likely to attract affluent readers whom local advertisers covet, according to those who publish them. Business has been flourishing nationally for the last six years, said Jim Dowden, executive director of the City and Regional Magazine



Association, based in Los Angeles. In 1993, during "the last big advertising recession," the association had 36 member publications, he said. There are now 100 magazines on the group's roster.

A strong consumer economy with plenty of ready advertisers means that magazines will be viable in smaller markets, Mr. Dowden said. The number of businesses in the area willing to come on board determines how narrowly a magazine can tailor its geographic focus. "A lot depends on the community and the business skills of the people running the enterprise," he said. "What you need is enough mass to support the kind of advertisers that will in turn support the magazine."

Other local general-interest magazines, of which there are five in the county, include

Bedford — which besides Bedford covers the surrounding communities from Armonk to North Salem. Scheduled to come out six times a year, Bedford had its first issue on Thanksgiving Day. Another local magazine is *Westchester*, which with 244 pages in the April issue, is the thickest in the magazine's five-year history, according to its publisher, Ralph Martinelli.

Bedford is the sister publication of *Ridgefield*, which was started in Fairfield County in late 2002. Bedford has a local office at the village green, and its editor is Christopher West Davis of Bedford. The two magazines share a business staff, including their advertising sales team.

Bedford reaches out to neighboring towns as well. "It's a distinct region," said Geoffrey James Morris, publisher. "You're not going to waste a story on somebody because it's not relevant to them. Bedford, Armonk, Pound Ridge, Katonah, the Salems — it's sort of like an extended family almost. They have the same concerns, they go to the same restaurants, they shop in a lot of the same stores."

The goal is to have 5,000 to 6,000 paid subscribers and a newsstand circulation of 1,500 by the end of the year, Mr. Morris said. The cover price is \$3.95, and the subscription rate is \$15 a year. Two advertising representatives make up the magazine's only business staff, and all the writers are freelance.

Not coincidentally, most of the county's local magazine coverage is clustered around its wealthier neighborhoods.

"Our readers tend to be more affluent, we have more people in Scarsdale and in Rye that are reading the magazine than in Yonkers," said Mr. Martinelli, who grew up in Yonkers and whose father, Angelo, was the city's mayor for 12 years. The magazine's readers have a mean household income of about \$350,000, he said. *Westchester* has a circulation of about 70,000, according to Mr. Martinelli, and 60,000 magazines are mailed out to subscribers, 6,000 to newsstands and 2,000 to hotel rooms. The cover price is \$3.95, and the subscription rate is \$18 a year. The magazine has about 40 people in its Elmsford office.

There is another office in Poughkeepsie with 20 people, but that is for Hudson Valley magazine, a general interest magazine that Mr. Martinelli also publishes. It covers the entire region, but focuses primarily on the mid-valley area, and only 20 percent of its

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circulation comes from Westchester, he said.

Nationwide, local-magazine readers tend to be wealthier than the average readers of mass media, Mr. Dowden said. "City magazines, their advertising base, their reader base are people who have the resources to enjoy all that a region has to offer in terms of dining, vacation, lifestyle. The kind of advertisers attracted to such an audience obviously are those that are selling to the high-end demographic."

Mary Ann Liebert, publisher of the monthly Westchester Wag, which just moved its offices to New Rochelle from Larchmont, keeps tight wraps on her circulation numbers and the content of her distribution list. She is forthright, though, in her mission for the paper to be read by the county's richest and most famous residents.

Her magazine's regular content includes columns by Susan Weber Soros, founder and director of the Bard Graduate Center in the Decorative Arts in Manhattan and wife of George Soros, the financier, and Seema Boesky, the former wife of Ivan Boesky. The magazine's cover articles have featured Hillary Rodham Clinton and Ari Fleischer. In an interview with Senator Clinton, Ms. Liebert asked whether she keeps her own checkbook. (She does not.) The Wag has three dedicated staffers who are all on the editorial side. The business side is shared with Ms. Liebert's other publications: as head of Mary Ann Liebert Inc., which publishes more than 70 medical and scientific journals, she has about 100 employees in total, she said.

Ms. Liebert also looked for affluent readership when she put together a list of people who would be sent the magazine. She wanted, she said, people "with money to spend, who were living the good life, and were giving the parties and the kinds of things other people wanted to emulate."

Because the readership of the county's magazines can overlap, she said, it's essential that the editors all "stick to their own knitting."

That kind of niche thinking is reflected in articles in Bedford, which uses the town as a starting point, Mr. Davis said, but then aims for a broader slice of life. The current issue has a gardening theme, but also includes an interview with Ian Baker, who grew up in Bedford and is a professional mountain climber who discovered an elusive waterfall in the Himalayan wilderness.

Another local magazine, Westchester Parent, focuses on a subject dear to the county's heart. It has a circulation of 70,000 copies and is part of the Family Communications chain, headquartered in Manhattan. The company also produces magazines in Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. There are four people in the North White Plains office, including two advertising representatives.

Covering the whole county "makes the magazine more interesting," said Renee Cho, editor. "It's good for people who live in wealthy towns to realize that just over the border of the town there's a completely different perspective. You really can't shut yourself out from that."