

HOLLIS R. TOWNS

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Vice President for Local News & Regional Editor | USA Today Network | 2020-present
Editor, Storyteller and Champion for Diversity & Inclusion

Leadership

- After the merger of Gannett and Gatehouse to create the world's largest newspaper company, I was named top editor to oversee the organization's largest cluster of daily newspapers and digital operations, including 37 large- to mid-sized dailies, 100+ weeklies and five glossy magazines in the New York DMA. This successful integration led to a 2020 promotion with oversight of five regions and elevation to the #2 news post in Gannett.
- Created best-in-class digital and print hubs that achieved operational efficiencies leading to dramatic growth in page views and digital subscriptions. Modest growth in print subscriptions achieved.
- Partnered with marketing to promote content through social media and print campaigns for broader audience awareness of news and top journalists.
- Collaborated with advertising colleagues to create "friendly adjacencies" to monetize features/news content. In 2018, effort resulted in nearly \$1.5M in revenue.
- Piloted an artificial intelligence initiative that creates news stories uses databases for home listings.
- Led pilot team for Gannett's hybrid subscription model to accelerated growth of reader subscriptions.
- Implemented regional structure that aligned resources with similar properties, eliminated duplications, and resulted in more than \$3M in cost savings without adversely affecting the product. Structure was replicated across the company.
- Led best-in-class events strategy using branded newsroom expertise, including: Luxe Luncheons, Storytellers Project, APP Sports Awards, and more. Attracted top business leaders and millennials from around the region and generated incremental revenue and new leads for advertising.

Award-winning work

- Led projects and coverage that landed first place awards in nearly all categories of the 2019 New Jersey Press Association (NJPA) contests. In the large paper category, *The Record of North Jersey* had 17 first place awards followed by nine first place awards for the *Asbury Park Press*, including Public Service, Best Investigation, Newswriting and Breaking News.
- Oversaw two projects that won regional Emmy awards, including reporting for "The Family Secret" (2017), and for a public forum and partnership with WJLP focused on the heroin crisis (2014).
- Pulitzer Prize Finalist in Public Service for "Tax Crush" (2010).
- In recent years, I directed hard-hitting projects and investigations that resulted in national awards and most importantly, public policy changes. A few examples:

[Crack vs. Heroin](#)

Led the Asbury Park Press investigation into the racial disparities hard-wired into national drug laws and the criminal justice system since the crack epidemic.

Best of Gannett winner, 2020

NABJ Public Service winner, 2020

[Protecting The Shield](#)

Investigation into police misconduct statewide, 2018

USA TODAY Network, Public Service Award, Finalist

[Conviction: One Man's Fight to Clear His Name](#)

NJPA Best video documentary, 2018

The story of Dion Harrell, who was convicted of raping a teenage girl nearly 30 years ago. In a four-part documentary, journalists recounted his claims of innocence and his journey to redemption.

[Renter Hell](#)

A look at slumlords and poor living conditions, 2017

American Society of News Editors,

Local Accountability, finalist

Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting, finalist

Investigative Reporters and Editor, Print/Online

National Association of Black Journalists,

Investigative Reporting

NYC Deadline Club Award, Best Newspaper Story and

Work history

Asbury Park Press (2008-2019)

Executive Editor, VP News

Led the transformation of one of Gannett's largest dailies. Assembled diverse leadership team that remains intact. Oversaw award-winning investigative unit that is recognized nationwide.

Cincinnati Enquirer (2004-2008)

Managing Editor; Executive Editor

Managed daily editorial operations for the *Enquirer* and Cincinnati.com. Provided strategic leadership for main news office and regional bureaus. Expanded suburban readership engagement; launched GetPublished, an innovative publishing tool for community journalists; and led staffing/content development for six suburban editions along with 22 community weeklies.

Kalamazoo Gazette (2000-2004)

Managing Editor

Managed news operations, including two daily editions, 12 weekly supplements, and early web operations for Newhouse/Advance Media.

Atlanta Journal-Constitution (1987-2000)

Reporter, Bureau Chief

Hired as beat reporter immediately after college, with responsibility for public safety and local coverage in Gwinnett County. Covered civil rights, the Waco/Branch Davidian siege; the 1996 Summer Olympics (including the Olympic Park bombing). Interviewed luminaries including President Jimmy Carter, Louis Farrakhan, KKK Grand Dragon Danny Carver, South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Coretta Scott King, and Andrew Young, among others.

Community Leadership

Fort Valley State University

Foundation (2020-present)

Children's Theater of Cincinnati (2005-2008)

Education

Fort Valley State University, B.A.

Center for Creative Leadership Fellow (2006)

Completed CCL's prestigious Leadership Development Program, considered one of the longest running of its kind worldwide.

Diversity & Inclusion Leadership

CUNY (2018-present)

Member, Senior Advisory Panel for Diversity Leadership, City University of New York

Maynard 200 Mentor, USC-Annenberg

(2018-Present)

Mentored the inaugural class; Maynard 200 represents a mini-movement to train 200 new minority journalists in five years.

ASNE Board of Directors (2016-2019)

American Society of Newspaper Editors
Co-chair, Diversity Committee

On Point Diversity Leadership (2017)

Finalist for Gannett award recognizing leadership in retention, recruitment and promotions for underrepresented groups.

McGruder Award-Diversity Leadership (2016)

National honor, awarded jointly by APME and the ASNE, for career commitment to inclusiveness and diversity in minority employment.

Industry Leadership

New Jersey Press Association (2020-present)

Pulitzer Prize Juror

Local News (2018, 2009)
Public Service Journalism (2008)

Associated Press Media Editors

President (2011-12)

As president of the nation's oldest journalism advocacy group, repositioned APME for growth. Served as board member for 10 years.

APME Foundation Chairman (2013-2014)

Led fund-raising efforts for annual conference, diversity leadership award and NewsTrain professional development program.

As a leading news editor, I have been quoted numerous times on issues facing the media industry. Examples include: [Columbia Journalism Review](#), [APME Magazine](#), [NABJ Journal](#), Harvard University's [Nieman Reports](#), and [FVSU Magazine](#). Also selected as a **Poynter Institute Ethics Fellow** (2008), where I joined leading innovators in the world of journalism.