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Newspaper chain moving to Monroe

Author: Rand, Ben

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Abstract:

Ben Rand Staff writer A community newspaper chain based in the Midwest has chosen Monroe County for its new corporate home in connection with two major acquisitions announced this week. The move to Rochester is part of an effort to develop an expanded, centralized corporate office that will provide a range of shared "back-office" functions and services to individual newspapers, GateHouse Chief Executive Officer Michael Reed said.

Full text:

Ben Rand

Staff writer

A community newspaper chain based in the Midwest has chosen Monroe County for its new corporate home in connection with two major acquisitions announced this week.

GateHouse Media Inc., formerly known as Liberty Group Publishing, is relocating its headquarters from the Chicago area to Perinton.

The move, to be completed by June, will add a handful of white-collar jobs to the region's economy.

GateHouse is fast becoming a major player in the consolidation of the community newspaper industry, which focuses on smaller markets and neighborhood news.

Upon closing its latest transactions, the company will own 77 daily newspapers, 271 nondaily papers and 136 shoppers and other publications in 17 states.

Circulation for its daily papers would top 464,000; that's 10,000 less than the daily circulation of the <i>Boston Globe alone.

GateHouse is shifting its home base in conjunction with an expansion in the New England market.

The company this week agreed to purchase substantially all the assets of CP Media Inc. and Enterprise NewsMedia Holding LLC in separate deals for a reported \$400 million.

CP Media and Enterprise together operate six daily, 103 nondaily and 25 other specialty publications in and around Boston, including the 55,000-circulation <i>Patriot Ledger newspaper, which would be its largest.

The company is not currently pursuing acquisitions in greater Rochester, officials said.

However, the area is close to several company holdings.

GateHouse owns daily newspapers in Corning and Hornell in Steuben County, Herkimer and Little Falls in Herkimer County, Oswego, Oswego County, and Wellsville, Allegany County.

GateHouse also owns weeklies in Hornell, Penn Yan, Yates County, and other upstate areas.

The move to Rochester is part of an effort to develop an expanded, centralized corporate office that will provide a range of shared "back-office" functions and services to individual newspapers, GateHouse Chief Executive Officer Michael Reed said.

GateHouse will occupy about 15,000 square feet in the Willowbrook Office Park in Perinton, said Bob Lucchesi, principal with Ardent Commercial Real Estate.

"Rochester is a big city, but it has a small city feel to it," said Reed, a native of Elmira, who in the 1970s worked as a newspaper carrier for the <i>Elmira Star-Gazette, owned by Gannett Co. Inc.

"It's a great place to raise a family. We think we can recruit some of the best talent in the newspaper industry to live there," Reed said. "It's a great place to attract a diverse work force."

The jobs picture

Reed said the company would probably bring about five to 10 employees to the area to start, but that number could ramp up to 50 to 100 depending on the course of the company's acquisition strategy.

GateHouse remains in the market to buy other papers that are focused on local news over national and international news, Reed said.

The company's model calls for pursuing newspapers where "90 percent or more of the news is local," he said.

The Massachusetts-based deals, Reed says, reflect his company's bullishness about local newspapers.

Local newspapers "are the leading provider of news and information in the communities in which they participate," Reed said. "And that space is so valuable."

Reed previously served as CEO of Community Newspaper Holdings Inc., which now operates nearly 90 daily newspapers.

The newspaper industry is in the process of consolidating as companies pursue strategies for coping with the exodus of readers and advertisers to the Internet.

Earlier this year, for instance, Knight Ridder Co. agreed to sell its chain of newspapers to The McClatchy Co. of California. McClatchy is in the process of re-selling 12 newspapers in that chain to other companies.

The consolidation trend is likely to continue as the industry adjusts to new economic realities, said David Rubin, dean of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

GateHouse Media's approach to focus on local news in smaller communities is a very valid strategy considering the struggles of newspapers in the biggest cities, Rubin said.

"Those newspapers have to figure out their futures," he said, citing Philadelphia as a hypothetical example.

The question, is, "How do they make the transitions to cover Philadelphia and all the wealthy suburbs around Philadelphia?" The new owners, he said, "can come in and don't have to worry about Philadelphia."

Even though Reed indicated GateHouse isn't pursuing a Rochester-area acquisition, a local communications professor said he wouldn't rule it out.

"Rochester is a great media town. It has a lot of solid performers and great outlets in a range of media," said Tom Proietti, professor of communications at Monroe Community College.

GateHouse may pursue an initial public offering later this year, Reed said.

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GateHouse Media

Some of the larger newspapers either in or soon-to-be part of GateHouse Media, which is moving its headquarters to Perinton, include:

*<i>The Patriot Ledger, Quincy, Mass.; circulation 55,000

*<i>The Enterprise, Brockton, Mass.; circulation 34,000

*<i>Adrian Daily Telegram, Adrian, Mich.; circulation 16,500

*<i>The Leader, Corning; circulation 14,600

*<i>The Journal Standard, Freeport, Ill.; circulation 13,295

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