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One of the interesting things about alternative weekly papers is that, no matter how old they get, they still carry the spirits, interests, and concerns of their founders. The River Cities' Reader celebrates its 300th issue this week, and although I've only been around for 20 or so issues, it's evident that the paper is an accurate reflection of Publisher Todd McGreevy and Editor Kathleen McCarthy, who started it more than seven years ago.

On the one hand, the Reader stands for accountability, honesty, and openness in government, all things hammered home by McCarthy week after week. The paper also strives to nurture a vibrant arts community, something championed by McGreevy (an artist himself).

These are traits that come from the paper's founders, and they manifest themselves in insightful reporting, thoughtful criticism, and the selection of stories. These things will always be part of the Reader.

But as we reflect on where this paper has been for 300 issues, it's also important to look forward, see opportunities, and set goals.

In the broadest sense, we're always striving to make the Reader and the Quad Cities better. Unlike media outlets owned by large corporations, alternative weeklies such as the Reader keep and value their independence and their commitment to the community.

In more specific terms, over the next few months we plan to add regular media and arts columns, in the style of our popular City Shorts feature, to make our coverage even better.

The Quad Cities are fortunate to have plenty of media options, in print, broadcast, and online. That glut, though, can make it difficult to evaluate your best sources of information. Our media column will praise media outlets when they do good jobs and point out when they do their communities a disservice. The Reader has always been a watchdog, and we feel that we owe it to our audience to keep an eye on the local media as well.

While media coverage will be an addition to our content, an arts column will be more of a complement. The Reader has always had the most comprehensive arts coverage in the community, and this feature will improve it further, helping keep readers abreast of new shows and what's happening with their favorite venues and artists.

We're trying to broaden our scope in other ways, as well. Being a small paper with a small staff, we have limited resources, and at times our focus can be too narrow. The challenge, of course, is to give important issues and stories the space they deserve while mixing things up more for our readers.

The most important thing we can do in the future, though, is continue building on the foundation laid by the people who've contributed to the success of the Reader for 300 issues.

In other words, we'll continue to give you stories that other media ignore, and articles that tell you more than you'll find in other newspapers or television broadcasts. We put stories in context and bring a fresh perspective, but we allow readers to make up their own minds about the people and issues in our stories. Our commitment to in-depth reporting and clear, incisive writing will not waver.