

The political pulse

After 50 years, it's time to enjoy an easier life

By BEN J. PLASTINO

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After 50 years of fulltime newspaper writing, mostly on the political scene, the time has come to look forward to a more leisurely way of life starting today.

It has been a rich, rewarding career to personally meet virtually all of the leading politicians and figures in the state and nation the past half century.

Still in excellent health, I now will have more time to do the many things I've always wanted to do during a life of retirement, or at least, semi-retirement.

This will include more foreign and nationwide travel, the many little long delayed jobs around the house, bowling, fishing, hunting and other such pastimes, and if you please, "a delightful bunch of nothing."

It won't exactly be goodbye as I still plan to keep a hand in part-time Post-Register writing periodically on background political and community stories and features of the past and present personalities, based on 50 years of experience. But there will be the daily grind no more.

It was in 1933 that I first accepted a fulltime reporting job with the Lewiston Tribune after graduating with a journalism bachelor of arts degree from the University of Idaho a year earlier. It was in the midst of a depression and I was fortunate of the dozen graduates to land the first job.

There were 70- and 80-hour weeks, not the 40 hours of today. I stayed there nine years, and exactly 41 years ago to the day, Oct. 29, 1942, came back to my native Bonnevile County to take a reporting position with The Post-Register.

It was a year later that I then



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began serving with the U.S. Army during World War II for some three years, leaving with the rank of infantry first sergeant.

Then came six years as city editor, 16 years as managing editor, and the last 14 years as political and executive editor.

Political highlights include an invitation from President Jimmy Carter for a newspaper seminar with some 30 other newspaper editors to the White House in November 1977, and interviews with the Idaho congressional delegation and then Secretary of Interior Cecil C. Andrus at the nation's capital.

I have personally interviewed every president dating back to President Harry Truman except President Ike Eisenhower; most of the presidential contenders, and many leading national political figures who came to Idaho or nearby states. President Truman was by far my favorite as he had none of the regal air carried by other presidents.

I have attended numerous Western conferences, a national governor conference, state party conventions, and many other major political events.

Included has been the personal coverage of the Idaho Legislature for the last 25 years at Boise.

Despite my often critical legislative stories, the 1983 Idaho Legislature passed a memorial without a dissenting vote honoring me for my "contributions to a vigorous free press."

On the city level I received the coveted Liberty Bell award in 1975 for contributions to community service and patriotism.

There have been a number of major non-political stories that can be remembered. These have included being in the first foot party to view the destruction of the Yellowstone earthquake at Madison Valley in Montana in August 1959, and also on the scene in the water-buffed Upper Snake River Valley the day after the Teton Dam flood in June, 1976.

But of immense satisfaction has been the chronicling of the daily events of the city, region and state which after all are the lifeblood of journalism. I've covered city, county state, federal and other daily beats. They are less spectacular but ever so important.

I have had the deep satisfaction of serving on numerous local boards and committees, such as United Way, Chamber of Commerce, Idaho Heart Association, Commission on Elected State Officials, Department of Health and Welfare and many, many others.

Meeting people has been rewarding. Those who serve in public office are generally an unselfish special breed. They are the ones with a certain brand of ego but who want to serve their fellow men, often at financial loss to themselves.

I also am proud that despite many highly controversial stories, there has never been a serious libelous or slanderous charge leveled against me or the paper.

After all these years, I can say that I probably have known all of the decision-makers of Idaho personally.

And now to enjoy the future good life of relaxation and fun.