



# Timesland

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## NEWS GUILD

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### **For Immediate Release: March 17, 2020**

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### **Journalists of The Roanoke Times to form a union**

ROANOKE, Va. — Journalists and staff at The Roanoke Times on Tuesday announced plans to unionize as the Timesland News Guild.

More than 75 percent of the newsroom — reporters, photographers, graphic artists, copy and online editors, designers and support staff — has signed cards authorizing union representation by The NewsGuild, a sector of the Communications Workers of America (CWA).

Unionization among news media workers has surged in recent years. Yet the Timesland News Guild is the first to seek to form a union under Lee Enterprises since the company announced in January that it would take over 30 daily papers from Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway Media Group. The deal closed Monday. Lee had been managing BH Media's papers since July 2018.

Reliable local news is more vital now than ever. As manager, Lee has already shrunk the size of The Roanoke Times print edition and converted full-time copy editing jobs to part-time, depriving employees of benefits and hurting the quality of our journalism. Prior to the sale this week, BH Media reduced sports and crime coverage, and eliminated or reduced beats dedicated to technology, arts and food. Overall, these far-off corporations have slashed our newsroom by about half over the past six years. Corporate decision-making has hamstrung our circulation colleagues, leading to issues with deliveries, canceled subscriptions and declining revenues.

The Timesland News Guild is asking Lee to voluntarily recognize the guild and begin bargaining. If Lee does not, the guild will file for an election with the National Labor Relations Board. Elections typically take up to four weeks. The Timesland News Guild seeks to become a unit of the Washington-Baltimore News Guild Local 32035.

"We're taking this step to give our newsrooms a seat at the table with our new owners," said Tonia Moxley, a reporter at The Roanoke Times since 2000. "Their questionable business decisions have led to delivery issues, poor customer service and less local coverage. Six years

ago, more than 90,000 print subscribers alone read our work. Today, about 30,000 subscribers remain. To them, I want to say thank you. And to those who have canceled out of frustration, know that we are unionizing to make changes to win you back."

"We all know we're in a struggling industry," said Laurence Hammack, a reporter at The Roanoke Times since 1985. "But newspapers are vital to our communities, and this is perhaps our last chance to preserve that role."

In her six years at The Roanoke Times, state politics reporter Amy Friedenberger has learned invaluable lessons from colleagues. But she's seen coworkers struggling to do more with less.

"I've watched talented folks take new jobs in fear of how corporate decisions will steer their futures. Some have left journalism completely, void of hope for stability in this industry," Friedenberger said. "Forming a union means having a say, and that's a small step in ensuring a better future."

The Timesland News Guild derives its name from a term coined by The Roanoke Times sports department in the 1950s to describe the areas across Southwest Virginia that depend on our coverage. Our union seeks to work with local management to strengthen The Roanoke Times. A union can hold company leaders accountable to the high journalistic standards readers deserve, advocate for the restoration of jobs and beats that serve the community, and negotiate for fair pay and employment practices.

A copy of the Timesland News Guild's letter to management and mission statement are attached, along with a logo that can be used for publication. For more information, visit [www.timeslandnewsguild.com](http://www.timeslandnewsguild.com).

**Reporters involved in the Timesland News Guild will hold a media availability at 3 p.m. today outside The Roanoke Times at 201 Campbell Ave. SW in Roanoke.**

### About The NewsGuild-Communications Workers of America: The NewsGuild-CWA represents more than 24,000 journalists and other media workers in the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico, including The Charlottesville Daily Progress, The Virginian-Pilot, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Reuters, The Los Angeles Times and The Chicago Tribune.

### About The Roanoke Times: Serving Roanoke and Southwest Virginia since its founding in 1886 by M.H. Claytor, The Roanoke Times publishes a daily print and online newspaper to about 30,000 print subscribers and more than 40,000 daily digital readers. Widely recognized for hard-hitting investigative stories on subprime lending, urban renewal, segregation, poverty, immigration and government corruption, the paper has been a Pulitzer Prize finalist three times. In the mid-2000s, The Roanoke Times was ranked as the best-read newspaper of its size in the country, according to market research firm Scarborough. It remains the largest professional news outlet in Southwest Virginia, employing roughly 50 journalists.