

## THE MEDIA BUSINESS

# San Diego Newspaper Adjusts To Merger

Special to The New York Times

SAN DIEGO, Feb. 23 — After the walls separating the news rooms of the competing San Diego Union and Tribune recently came down, literally, the staffs of the papers stared across the expanse at one another.

"It was as if we were afraid of moving to the other side, like a border guard might shoot us," said Elizabeth Douglass, a Tribune financial writer.

The two papers, competitors for more than 60 years under the same ownership, were merged on Feb. 2 into the new Union-Tribune, a morning paper with afternoon editions.

The new paper has more pages of business, sports, entertainment, opinion and comics than either of its predecessors.

It has a circulation of about 390,000, compared with 271,000 for the morning Union last year and 117,000 for the afternoon Tribune.

It also has one editorial voice — The Union's — where there once were two.

### New Paper's Rivals

"And, in a way, the combined paper might be more vulnerable to competition than its two predecessors were.

Competition for The Tribune's readers began soon after the merger announcement in September. The Los Angeles Times, which publishes a San Diego County edition, is advertising on San Diego radio and television for the first time. Its circulation totals about 74,000 in the county.

"We sampled some Tribune readers in November and decided to ratchet up our visibility," said Phyllis Pfeiffer, general manager of The Times's San Diego edition. "But face it, no one has the bucks to flaunt around like they did in the 80's."

Herb Klein, editor in chief of Copley Press Inc., parent of The Union-Tribune, said he welcomed competition. But, he added, "I'm not worried about The L.A. Times succeeding."



Alan Decker for The New York Times

The Union's voice dominates the new San Diego Union-Tribune. The editor, Gerald L. Warren, left, and the executive editor, Karin Winner, ran The Union, while the associate editor, Neil Morgan, ran The Tribune.

Indeed, the biggest competition may come from local weeklies. The San Diego Community Newspaper Group, for example, has three weekly newspapers in three communities in the city, with a combined circulation of 65,000.

John Gregory, editor in chief of the group, said that The Union-Tribune might be strong for now, but that "within a few months we will probably expand and profit from their problems of covering a city this large with one paper."

Despite their common ownership, The Union and The Tribune differed on their approaches to news and editorial policy. The Tribune was considered more aggressive in its news coverage and was more politically independent than the conservative Union. Indeed, The Tribune won a Pulitzer Prize in 1979 for its coverage of a midair collision and another in 1987 for its editorials on immigration.

The Union-Tribune offers a broader range of political commentary than its predecessors. But in the new combined paper, "the editorial policy of The Union hasn't changed," Mr. Klein said.

The former editors of the two papers, Gerald L. Warren of The Union

## One editorial voice where there were once two.

and Neil Morgan of The Tribune, had battled each other for more than 10 years over news coverage, subscribers and the favor of their publisher, Helen K. Copley.

Now, Mr. Warren is editor of the combined paper. Meanwhile, Mr. Morgan is the associate editor and writes a daily column on local issues. Karin Winner, managing editor of The Union, is the executive editor, in charge of the day-to-day operations.

Before the merger, The Tribune, like many afternoon newspapers, had watched its circulation fall for years. Indeed, the paper's circulation dropped even further after the merger was announced, slipping below 100,000. "It was clear that the decline would continue," Mr. Klein said.

In addition, advertising in both papers was down, as it is throughout the industry because of the recession.

The two papers lost about 8.5 percent of their advertising last year, compared with 1990, with most in the very profitable category of classified ads.

The Union and Tribune had employed a total of about 450 people in their news rooms. But as a result of the merger, the news staff was reduced to about 310, with most people accepting buyouts to leave.

The newspaper said less than 30 jobs were lost in other departments. It now employs slightly more than 1,700 people.

### Readers' Reaction

So far, The Union-Tribune has received somewhat mixed reviews from its readers.

For example, Mike McKinney, a lawyer and former Union reader, seemed pleased with the new paper, noting the opinion pages were more balanced. "You can actually find some liberals," he said, adding, "Now, they even have 'Doonesbury.'"

But Bill Hobbs, a mathematics professor at Point Loma College in San Diego and former Tribune reader, was disappointed. "For all the falderal, I can't tell that the paper has changed a bit," he said.