

A West Texas weekly has come up with creative ideas for localizing public notice ads. Tiffany Waddell, the co-owner and one-woman staff of The Western Observer in Anson, started her own public notice campaign early this year, drawing from recent events affecting Jones County residents.

Her first ad — ”They Just Sold Your Cattle. Or Didn’t You Know?” — was published after local ranchers expressed frustration in finding out the county had sold loose livestock without publishing notices in the newspaper that estrays had been found. The Jones County sheriff’s office had posted the information on its website instead.

“We own cattle, and when you own 100 head you don’t always know that one’s missing, so you don’t think, ‘Okay, I need to go look online,’ but you see the notice when you read the newspaper,” Waddell said.

Waddell has published three more public notice ads since that time, each one emphasizing important public information that was not readily made public or published in the Observer, the largest paper by circulation in the county.

Waddell and her husband, K.T., purchased the paper six years ago when she was 23 years old. She’s been shaking up the county with questions, records requests and dogged investigative reporting ever since.

“We’re fighting this because we want Jones County residents to have the information and not be left in the dark, like a mushroom,” she said.

“We’re definitely not in it to make money, and the money we do make we put back into the community.”

Losing public notices from the county would not be a big financial loss for the the Observer, she said, but added that they would take a big hit if the state were to stop publishing legal notices in newspapers.