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The great Anoka County newspaper war of 2015

By Peter Gove, Minnesota Public Radio News | Jan. 12, 2015 | 0 | 0 | 0

Anoka County residents will have a choice of two weekly newspapers for the first time in more than a decade in a great media adventure in the Twin Cities "suburb of suburbs" beginning next month.

Starting in February, the Anoka County Union will be competing with a new publication, the Anoka County Sun, for readers and advertisers in the county's 12 cities and townships. The Union is owned by Minneapolis-based Star Publications, which also publishes the Minnesota Daily and the Minnesota Jewish Post and Opinion. The Sun is being launched by a group of former Star employees who left the company last year and have formed Sun Publications.

Both papers will be delivered free to about 35,000 homes and businesses each week, which is the target of each publication's ad sales staff.

Bob Lindberg is a former Star Tribune reporter who now is a freelance writer and a longtime resident of Anoka County. He says the county has been underserved by its newspapers for years.

"The Anoka County Union is a very, very small paper," he said. "It's very, very thin. It doesn't have much in it. It doesn't have much coverage of the county."

Lindberg said he hopes the new paper will be a good one, with more coverage of the county's 12 cities and townships and more in-depth reporting on issues affecting the county's residents. He said he hopes the Sun will be a good one, too, because competition between the two papers will be healthy for the county.

"I'm a big fan of having two or three papers in a county," he said. "I think it makes the papers better, it makes them more competitive, it makes them more responsive to their readers."

Sun Publications is a family-owned business that has been in the newspaper business since 1960. The company publishes 15 weekly newspapers in Minnesota and Wisconsin, including the Stillwater Gazette, the Hudson Star Observer and the Times in the Twin Cities. Sun also publishes a number of "shopper" publications, including the Shopper's Guide in Anoka County.

Sun Publications President Mike Lee said the company has been looking at the Anoka County market for some time. The company's decision to start the Sun was based on its belief that there is room for two papers in the county, he said.

"We think there's room for two papers," said Lee. "We think that's a good thing for the community, we think it's a good thing for our business, we think it's a good thing for our readers and our advertisers."

Lee said the Sun will be a "community-oriented" paper, with a staff of about 20 people, including sales and production staff. The paper will have a staff of about 10 people, including two reporters, two photographers and a sports reporter.

Lee said the Sun will be delivered free, distributed in racks and sold at newsstands for 50 cents. The paper will be published on Wednesday, and will have a "very, very, very, very" small circulation in its first few weeks, he said.

Lee said the Sun will be