

LISTENING IN/*George Vukelich*

Wisconsin Trailmaster

'We're a magazine about Wisconsin that stresses the positive aspects. We don't deal in crisis or conflict.'

Born in Madison in 1932, Howard Mead graduated from West High and earned an English degree from UW-Madison. He worked for the University of Wisconsin Press for three years before purchasing *Wisconsin Tales & Trails Magazine* in spring 1961 from LeRoy Gore, who had founded it the year before. Now renamed *Wisconsin Trails*, the magazine has been a Mead family operation for 24 of its 25 years. Howard is editor-publisher, and Nancy, his wife and partner, is co-publisher. Their children—Jennifer, 25; Andrew, 21; and Rebecca, 18—have all shared in the “discovery of Wisconsin” to which the magazine is dedicated.

“We really bought the magazine as an adventure. We just thought, 24 years ago, that it would be fun to do something together.

“After all, it had something to do with art and writing, and I’ve always been attracted to writing. I’ve written three unpublished novels and uncounted,

unpublished short stories. My dream was always to write fiction, novels, but when I look back now, the magazine is really better than I dreamed, because the magazine has been our lifestyle. We do all the things that are in the magazine. We go to all the places in Wisconsin. We have literally lived the magazine.

“I think the basic thing that’s changed about the magazine is that it now has advertising. In the beginning, we put it out without advertising, and we did it that way for almost 22 years.

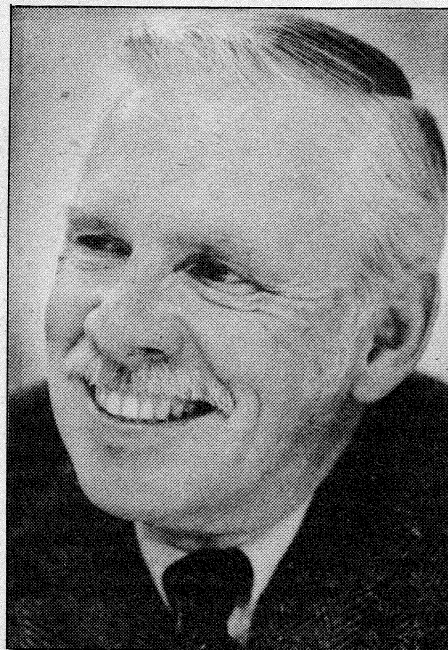
“Looking back on it without advertising is a revelation, because we really didn’t have a magazine. We had a kind of book.

“Each of our issues was 44 pages long. It was all articles and pictures, so with our four issues every year, we had a 176-page book.

“Something happened when we put in advertising—for the first time in our history—three years ago. That made Wisconsin Trails into a real magazine.

“Of course, one of the criticisms we get now about the magazine is that it has too much advertising, and that’s very interesting, too. Most magazines put their advertising levels at something like 50%—that is, 50% of their pages for advertising, the other 50% for editorial material. Some magazines set it at 65% editorial, 35% advertising.

“Well, our magazine runs around 22% or 21% advertising, so actually, we have way less advertising than most magazines. Another thing: We don’t get thicker or thinner depending on the



BRENT NICASTRO

Howard Mead.

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amount of advertising in the issue. If we plan for 60 pages of editorial—whether we sell enough advertising or not—we’ll publish the 60 pages of editorial.

“An interesting footnote is that when we published four times a year, that was 176 pages with no advertising. Now, with advertising, we publish six times a year and have 360 pages of editorial. The advertising has brought our readers almost another 200 pages of editorial space.

“The magazine is 25 years old, and we’ve never stopped tinkering with it. Sure, I think we’ve found our focus. We’re a magazine about Wisconsin that stresses the positive aspects of living here. We don’t deal in crisis or conflict. But that focus isn’t just Nancy’s and mine—our editors bring a fresh viewpoint to the state.

“After 25 years, you discover that your insights are different. As parents with active young kids, we explored the state in one way: paddling, skiing, backpacking. We also got into ruts doing our favorite things: whitewater rivers and long ski races. Now we’re changing, discovering new things about ourselves and our environment.

“Our children are all away in college now, but we have young editors like Sue Pigorsch and Petey O’Donnell. Petey is from North Carolina, and she discovered Door County last year—“this paradise on earth!”—and she has caused all of us to reexamine Door County. If we have a ‘recipe,’ that’s it: We keep exploring, re-examining this beautiful Wisconsin and the people who live here.” ■