Culture
News



Tom Blackburn, is pictured, back row, left, next to James Andrews, Art Winter and Robert Olmstead, behind NCR editor Robert Hoyt and publisher Donald Thorman (NCR file photo)



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Thomas Blackburn, who joined NCR as assistant news editor in 1965 — just a year after the paper was started — and remained a regular columnist and contributor into the 1990s, died in Florida on Jan. 2 from complications of COVID-19. He was 86.

NCR Publisher Bill Mitchell remembers Blackburn as "a demanding and kind editor" who supervised his work as NCR's campus correspondent at the University of Notre Dame from 1967 to 1971. "I always looked forward to calling Tom with a story idea because he was the kind of curious editor who was clearly interested in what was happening on campus in those days," Mitchell said in an email. "And I knew the story would end up better in print than it was when I filed it."

Throughout his years with NCR, Blackburn wrote on such diverse topics as the Catholic charismatic movement (in 1978), the politics surrounding abortion (1979), the ordination of women priests (1986), and euthanasia.

"With sun gods and centaurs and trial by fire, our remote ancestors sure had some odd ideas. You wonder what our descendants will smile at when they think of us. I propose that it will be the quest to conquer mortality," he wrote in a 1994 column on Clinton-era healthcare reform attempts.

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After leaving NCR, Blackburn wrote for New Jersey's Trenton Times, followed by the Miami News and finally The Palm Beach Post, according to his obituary in the latter publication.

Originally from Evanston, Illinois, Blackburn received his graduate degree in journalism from Marquette University, Milwaukee. According to the Palm Beach Post, his family suggests that donations be made in his name either to Marquette University or to the St. Lawrence Seminary in Mount Cavalry, Wisconsin.

Blackburn is survived by his wife of 64 years, Marilyn; his five children Lise (now Sr. Elizabeth Ann), Christopher, Monica, Michael and Stephen; eight grandchildren and five great grandchildren.