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Hendersonian founder traveled the world to find himself back home, providing news



Vince Tweddell

The newspaper's first ever fundraising campaign starts Nov. 1

It took a lot of wandering before Vince Tweddell found his way back to his hometown.

And it took a lot of job changes before he settled in as a journalist and created the Hendersonian newspaper.

Tweddell was born in Henderson in 1975, the son of Steve Tweddell, a high school football coach who went on to own a State Farm Insurance agency here, and his wife, Pattye, a teacher at Holy Name School.

Vince Tweddell understandably inherited his father's love of football.

His love of writing came more gradually.

"I got in trouble in my high school government class," he said. "I was staring out the window, not paying attention" and as punishment his teacher assigned him to write an essay "about what I was looking at out there."

Tweddell wrote the essay but balked at reading it aloud to the class; a classmate offered to read it for him. As the classmate did, the teacher, "who was mad at me, chuckled."

It gave young Tweddell an inkling that he might have a gift for writing.

Later, for a communications class at the University of Evansville, he wrote an article about the University of Kentucky basketball team being like a bourbon and Coke, saying coach "Rick Pitino was the straw that stirred it."

"The professor loved it," Tweddell said. "I thought, maybe I ought to be a writer."

Late in his sophomore year, "I decided journalism would be a good track to go into," so he declared his major to be communication with an emphasis on journalism.

He was also playing wide receiver for UE ("I ran a 4.5" second 40-yard dash, which is fast) in the last year the Aces competed in football. With a year of eligibility left, he transferred to and played for Austin Peay University before graduating from UE.

He spent a couple of summers in Germany, playing semi-pro American football, including one year with the Schwabisch Hall Unicorns. "I was paid 500 Deutschmarks a month (equal at the time to about $250), so I can call myself a professional football player," he said.

"It was wonderful," Tweddell said. He lived in a small town with churches 500 and 600 years old, and houses that were 800 years old.

After his second season in Germany, “I thought I’d settle down and get a real job.” He returned to Henderson and spent six or seven months working for Ohio Valley Marine Service, cleaning barges.

For his first newspaper job, he hired on in 2002 at The Madisonville Messenger, writing police reports and general assignment stories — standard rookie fare — before graduating to the city government beat. He stayed there a year and four months.

“I was still young and wandering,” Tweddell said. “So I took off and wandered,” spending four months with a buddy in Alaska, where he did some freelance writing for the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner.

From there, he made his way to Louisville and started work for a service that monitored television news programs for any mentions of a client on the air (“One of mine was Purina dog food.”)

“I hated it,” he said.

Then he spent two years at the Frankfort State Journal. “It was a great place to work and a great place to learn,” Tweddell said. “It was a good place to get thrown into the fire,” covering beats ranging from police to city government, including a little coverage of state government and a lot of time on courts (“I covered the indictment of Ernie Fletcher,” the then-governor who was ensnared in a controversy over whether his administration’s hiring practices violated the state’s merit system).

While there, he also earned a master’s in creative writing from Murray State University.

Wanderlust hit again, so Tweddell — an outdoorsman at heart — struck off for Oregon, where he got a part-time job at Rogue Community College in Grants Pass, teaching English 101 and 201 and serving as faculty advisor to the student newspaper. He supplemented his income freelancing for a newspaper and a magazine, though money was tight and he ran up credit card debt.

In his free time, he could fly-fish for salmon in the Rogue River. He was also within a couple of hours of the Pacific Coast and a few hours from where he could go cross-

country skiing in winter. There were also ample opportunities to camp, hike and do a little hunting.

As he reached his late 30s, his love of wandering was still intact, though he felt the years advancing. “At 38, there were not many chances to go overseas to live abroad,” Tweddell said. He decided it was time. He moved to Shanghai, China, where he taught English as a second language to students anxious to use it as the lingua franca — a shared language — in the international business world.

“I thought I’d go for one year, get out of debt and come back to Oregon,” he said.

He ended up spending two years in Shanghai, then moved to the sprawling city of Chengdu, where he met his future wife, a Chinese native named Sally. They married and had two daughters.

“One year ended up being six years in China,” he said.

But in 2019, one of their daughters became ill, and Tweddell wasn’t impressed with the quality of health care available to her.

He decided, at long last, that it was time to come home to Henderson, where he could be near his parents and even buy his grandmother’s home, where he mowed the grass as a youngster.

Tweddell found work in academia, teaching as an adjunct at the University of Southern Indiana, then working in academic advising at Henderson Community College.

But writing remained in his blood. “In early 2023, I said to myself, I think I’m going to tell my wife I’m going to start a magazine. I always wanted to do that.”

He envisioned a glossy magazine that would publish long-form journalism as well as fiction — “a New Yorker for Kentucky.”

But community members told him they wanted traditional news. With The Gleaner no longer employing reporters (or anyone) else, and publishing little local news, Henderson folks were eager for a new local newspaper.

“That’s what became the Hendersonian,” Tweddell said.

In May 2023, he produced a 16-page tabloid-sized newspaper that he distributed for free at news racks all over town. At locations such as the YMCA, copies often vanished within days, and Tweddell would have to restock copies.

Soon, he began engaging with freelance writers — some of them former Gleaner reporters — to supplement what he personally could write.

His job at HCC came to an end, so he went full-time with the Hendersonian in August 2023.

“Just listening to the people, in the beginning I got a whole lot of compliments,” he said. “They wanted a news source back in town” — a trusted news source that published researched stories and identified its sources of information.

“They wanted more of a daily, old-school Gleaner-style” publication, Tweddell said. “The Gleaner was one of the best papers in Kentucky for so long” until the business model for community daily newspapers largely collapsed.

“I can’t do six days a week like The Gleaner did,” he said.

But he also decided that his monthly newspaper — while popular and appreciated — wasn’t enough. In late 2023, he launched a paid e-newsletter that subscribers receive via email every Wednesday and Sunday morning. That could, among other things, provide next-day coverage of city commission and county fiscal court meetings as well as other timely news ranging from obituaries to local high school sports updates.

Like many startup newspapers, he found that operating in the traditional business model wasn’t feasible. So like them, he in 2024 incorporated a non-profit parent

organization, West Kentucky Public Service Journalism Inc., that is guided by a board of diverse, community-minded local citizens.

He continues to seek guidance from experienced local foundations and others regarding matters ranging from proper nonprofit governance to finding a path toward long-term financial sustainability — which includes a current fundraising drive.

In September 2025, Tweddell hired his first full-time employee: Nate Boyett, the son of longtime Gleaner reporter and history columnist Frank Boyett. Nate Boyett sells advertising, writes grant applications and manages the Hendersonian's social media presence.

In early October, the Hendersonian occupied a storefront office at 111 N. Main St. "I think a lot of it is a signal that we're here," Tweddell said. "It allows people to know that we're serious about it.

"It also allows people to come in, talk news, talk about what they want. They can come in and tell us we're doing a bad job, criticize us — and it allows them to say we're doing a good job."

In the Hendersonian's early days, "We were like a cute little brother; people would pat us on the head and say, 'You're doing a good job.'"

Now that the Hendersonian has waded into issues such as controversies concerning industrial-scale solar and wind renewable energy as well as some contested upcoming elections, Tweddell said he recognizes that the paper may fall under criticism.

He said that if he hears criticism from both sides of divisive issues, it could be a signal that the Hendersonian is doing a good job of reporting both sides — including viewpoints that partisans don't want to hear from the other side.

What the Hendersonian publisher-editor especially wants to hear is, "What do they want from their community newspaper? That's why we're nonprofit. We're going to ask people to donate to their community paper. And with that, we're going to ask what they want in their community newspaper" — not in terms of parroting their personal

viewpoints (though the Hendersonian does publish letters to the editor), but in what kind of news and features interests them.

“It builds credibility,” Tweddell said.

The job of launching and sustaining a local news source — producing a twice-weekly e-newsletter, creating an advertising-supported monthly printed newspaper, making payroll and covering expenses for office space and much more — is, in two words: a lot.

“Right now, I’m overwhelmed,” Tweddell said. “If I knew it was this much work, I might not have done it.”

If the Hendersonian can secure adequate funding, he intends to hire an assistant editor/reporter — to provide both “broader news coverage and a better work-life balance for all involved.”

“I feel it’s a gift I’m giving to my hometown. I’m going to see it through,” Tweddell said.

“But it’s a lot of work.”