

A friend, mentor – and class act – heads west



Editor's Notebook

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Editor

The Yankees are coming off the wall.

That's right. By the time Frank eases into his green Ford Taurus this Friday afternoon, Derek Jeter, Roger Clemens and any other newspaper clipping showing members of the New York Yankees waving their gaudy World Series rings at us are coming down from the wall above his cubicle.

Frank is Frank Keane and he is retiring – again — this Friday.

Frank entered my office the other day and closed the door behind him.

"That time has come," he said.

I knew what he meant. After nearly 50 years here in Rhode Island, the proud native of the Bronx, N.Y., has decided to move to California to be with family.

Frank is our copy editor. He reads every story, every item that appears in this paper. After he reads them once, he reads them again. He pulls out the dictionary to check the spelling of a word, or the phone book to check the spelling of a name.

A copy editor does the dirty work of a newspaper.

Is it effect, or is it affect? Is it who, or is it whom? Should the word Internet be capitalized? There are headlines to write for every story – and captions to write under every photograph. Someone has to call the person who wrote the letter to the editor, to confirm that they in fact wrote the letter to the editor.

Frank has done all of that.

He retired several years ago after a distinguished career at the Providence Journal. But he's a real journalist and so when he saw an ad for a copy editor here, he put retirement on hold, dusted off his dictionary and returned to a newsroom, where he belonged.

We worked along side one another for three years. Then, a little over a year ago, I became Frank's boss. I remember feeling a little silly at first. Frank had a few more years' experience in this business. I considered him a mentor, not a subordinate.

True to form, Frank never snickered when the new editor was having a bad day. There has never been a single moment of awkwardness. He has helped me to grow into this job. He has offered advice in that quiet, unassuming way of his.

Professionally, Frank has made our paper better. He is an old-school journalist and there isn't a

newsroom in America right now that couldn't use a few more of those.

Frank has shortened sentences, resurrected buried leads and pointed out when an obvious piece of information seemed to be missing from a story. We have tapped into his institutional memory on countless occasions. That in itself has been an invaluable tool in our newsroom. Frank has helped so many of our young reporters, subtly pointing out nuances in their writing.

On a personal level, I am going to miss Frank's very presence here. He is good company.

Frank can discuss baseball, movies, politics and world history with equal expertise. On mornings when I don't think I can make it to lunch (most mornings), I can look up and find more often than not that Frank has arrived with muffins or a coffee cake. Frank has that steadying influence that helps to convince you that no problem is ever too big.

And when Frank asks me about Terri and the kids, he's not doing so to be polite. He really cares. I'm going to miss sharing with him stories about my family's weekend exploits, or the inability of the basketball team I coach to put points on the board.

When I reflect on our time together, one memory of Frank that will stand out with me is not a story that he edited, but one that he wrote.

When Don Abood, a mutual friend of ours, was dying of lung cancer a couple of years ago, he reached out to Frank to do him a very special, very personal favor. Don wanted his friend and former colleague to write his obituary.

I remember watching Frank work on it. He was determined to do it right – to do Don justice. He visited Don. Talked to him on the phone. It wasn't easy. Don fought long and hard. But he ultimately succumbed to the brutal disease.

Talk about pressure. Frank called friends of Don. He did a lot of listening. He painstakingly tapped away at the computer.

And when he was done, he hand-delivered the obituary – not leaving anything to chance.

The obituary appeared just as Frank had written it. It was a beautiful tribute, capturing Don's spirit and carefully chronicling his career. So many people who knew Don commented on what a nice write-up it was, few of them knowing who had written it.

That's Frank.

Serious. Dependable. Unassuming.

I remember thinking that Don knew what he was doing when he tapped Frank for that favor.

So the Yankees are coming down. Just in time for baseball season. Though if it meant that Frank wasn't leaving this Friday, and as much as it would pain this Red Sox fan, I'd prefer they stay right where they are.

If your company has a Frank Keane, you are fortunate. We're going to miss ours.