

PRESS SITE UNDER CONSTRUCTION

## For press vet, move to new quarters means transformation

By Alan Rindlisbacher

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Walk through the door of John Littlefair's office and history, nostalgia and change resonate as strongly as the smell of ink in the pressroom.

Littlefair, press supervisor at Newspaper Agency Corp., the entity that produces The Salt Lake Tribune and the Morning Deseret News, is overseeing the press hall transition that will soon see Littlefair and his crew at NAC's \$84 million production plant now under construction.

In the process, press operators will leave their half-century-old facility in downtown Salt Lake to one of the industry's showplace production buildings.

"The move will be challenging for the press department," said Littlefair, a 34-year NAC veteran. "Until we complete the move, we will be printing at two facilities simultaneously. We will start gradually printing one of the two daily papers at the new facility. The move will take a lot of effort from a lot of people."

### Time capsule

Littlefair's desk is a literal time capsule reflecting NAC's printing history. A 35-pound lead plate features a long-since defunct appliance store advertisement hawking \$199 dishwashers and \$399 refrigerators. Littlefair reminisced about the transition from lead plates to acid-etched plates to polymer plates to lithography.

Littlefair used the lead plate to emphasize how much printing has evolved, but the plate also comes in handy when he has to remind an employee about hard work.

"I have them heft that old plate — to see the difference between the old lead plates and today's aluminum plates that weigh just ounces," Littlefair said.

Littlefair joined NAC in 1971 as an apprentice pressman. At the time, NAC produced the papers with two letterpress machines, a technology it embraced until 1978, when it added its first offset press, a Goss Metro.

For the next 12 years, NAC relied on a combined letterpress and offset foundation, until it replaced the letterpress machines with two Goss Headliner Offset presses in 1990. Today, two of the presses are dedicated to printing The Tribune while the third produces the Morning News.

### Diversified crew

Littlefair oversees a department of 60 journeymen operators, eight apprentices apprentices-trainees. Press operators begin their workday at 6:30 p.m. and then set up to print features and classified sections of The Tribune and Morning News. By 10:30 p.m., the advance work is completed, and after a lunch break, the presses run again to produce the papers for morning delivery. The shift ends at 2:40 a.m., and the process begins again the next evening.

Will Littlefair miss the surroundings of the well-worn facilities? Will he miss the smells of paper, inks and solvents that permeate the walls, nooks and crannies?



Landscaped entrance of NAC's new production plant. Press operators are looking forward to the move.

For a veteran press operator like Littlefair, the question is almost foreign, as he had to force himself to think about the odors of a press facility so common to the workers.

The break-in period at the new facility will be short, Littlefair said. "Most guys are well-trained in offset lithography and we look forward to having the team make the move together."

The move to new facilities 11 miles from NAC's downtown plant, meantime, will also force workers to alter their commutes, a fact they'll deal with, Littlefair said. "I will double my commute mileage and time, but for others, they will now live just down the street."

### Promise of change

From old press technology to a packaging conveyor system described by Littlefair "as probably the last one like it in the country," NAC's new facility will hold the promise of significant technological change.

The plant will now be able to print upwards of 200,000 copies per hour on three TKS presses. And the papers will boast three times as much color.

Thanks to FMC Technologie's AGVs and new roll-handling technology, NAC will move from 42-inch reels to 50-inch reels, requiring less frequent roll changes.

"I'm a third-generation newspaper man. When I was a kid, I didn't want to have anything to do with (newspapers). Now, here I am, (a press operator)," Littlefair said.

After 34 years on the job, and with a major move pending from old facilities to a new state-of-the-art press facility, John Littlefair will be instrumental in setting the stage for NAC's next half-century of newspaper production. ■