



**OVIEDO  
COMMUNITY  
NEWS**

# **The Bird's Eye**

**An overview of  
our impact in 2025**

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*“It’s a great enterprise. Part of what makes Oviedo/Winter Springs unique. Community journalism has been dying for 20 years and residents here don’t know how lucky they are to still have local watchdogs.” —David D., reader and donor*



# Empowerment, Public Service, and Solutions

Think about what it was like before Oviedo Community News launched in 2021. The two newspapers serving the Greater Oviedo and Winter Springs for decades closed within the same week in 2014, leaving the area a news desert. Facebook was identified as the top information source in the community at the time, according to our surveys and interviews.

We made an impact immediately, giving you down-the-middle, critical information based on your expressed needs so you know about decisions being made on your behalf by your elected leaders before they were made, empowering you to shape your community.

But as the community swelled around us and our capacity has grown, we've been able to seriously move the impact needle, helping you to make tangible change in your community.

As an unbiased source of information, we never advocate for specific changes but rather just provide information you need to make decisions and those decisions this year have resulted in action. No matter what the action was, it was done based on trustworthy information.

The fact is that we're all very busy in our lives and the public has historically relied on a trusted news source to help them gather information. The hours we spend doing research, pulling public records, parsing through documents, attending local government meetings and writing easy-to-read reports saves you an exorbitant amount of time but it also results in less government spending, increased public participation in local decision-making and deeper community connection.

Last year, because of input we got from you, our readers, our focus was to include more investi-

gations, more guides and participating in more events. In this report you'll see that we were able to do all of that and more!

In early 2026 we'll have our annual reader survey which will direct our newsroom's focus for the year. I can tell you that we've heard from many people how important our voting and election work has been to them over the years and that will be one focus in 2026 in our newsroom and with the News Collaborative of Central Florida, a group of local news organizations that have come together to serve the community better in partnership, cofounded by Oviedo Community News in 2024.

Thank you for your support,

Megan Stokes  
Editor-in-chief and co-founder  
Oviedo Community News



*"I appreciate clarity of the functioning of our local government because it's hard to come by and difficult to understand. I learned more in that one article than I've understood in the last couple years about our city commission. I also loved learning more about a couple members of our neighborhood and their concerns about our local wildlife."*

— Patricia G., reader and donor

# Moving the Needle on Community Engagement



*“Independent, unbiased journalism unaffected by corporate dollars has become a rarity in our country. OCN is a breath of fresh, independent air and local journalism should be lauded and supported at every opportunity.” —Scott D., reader and donor*



OCN’s investigations sparked policy changes and civic engagement from readers this year. In the beginning of the year, OCN Reporter Eric Orvieto discovered that Oviedo City Council members and the general public were not made aware that, due to system failures, the city’s water had not been fluoridated in about a year, even though city residents had voted to fluoridate the water in the past. After OCN’s fluoride investigation was published, **the city changed its protocol** around what types of information, including water treatment, need to be shared from staff to leadership in order to adequately inform the public.

While working on a Free Little Library Guide for OCN, Reporter Makayla Gray became curious about a little library in front of a school. Why was it there if the school had its own library inside? Gray asked

the principal and she told her the little library was meant to increase access to books after the school reduced its library staff resulting in closures. Gray asked Seminole County Public Schools how many schools had also reduced library staff and found that of the 58 county schools, only 17 had any paid staff working in them and only one had a full-time, certified media specialist. The reason: budget cuts. Gray also discovered that community members had started volunteering in the schools to keep them open. In response to OCN’s investigation, **a number of readers said they planned to start volunteering** in local schools to help fill the gaps. A number of readers told us that they contacted their local elected leaders about the decline.



Because of a complex and long-ago land swap arrangement, the potential sale of park land fronting the Cross Seminole Trail in Winter Springs might have never come to light. Because of records requests by OCN Reporter Abe Aboraya, he was able to dig into what had happened that made the county decide on the land swap and possibly sell. Many readers responded to our report and **a petition to stop the possible sale was started**. The petition now has nearly 800 signatures.



Without OCN's reporting, the public would not have known about an important vote being taken by the Legislative Delegation for Seminole County earlier this year that could change Winter Springs' charter and give more power to the mayor ahead of next year's election. OCN's investigation found data in the bill that shows it may have been written by a rumored candidate to fill the mayor's seat. **Readers reached out to us with questions and said that they cited our investigative work in letters to their elected leaders about this issue.** Abe Aboraya has written five follow-up articles, keeping people in the loop as their city considers major structural changes.



## OCN Launches New Programs

We launched a **public announcements page** for community members and businesses to communicate important things to their fellow residents and have published nearly 50 announcements this year. People have used it to ask their neighbors to look for a lost cat, sell used cars, announce new community programs and scholarships and wish happy milestone birthdays.

To deepen trust, connectivity and sense of place in the community we started publishing a historical column called **Rooster Tracks** that so far has explored the story behind a local historical home, the profile of one man's work desegregating a local school and the story of how a local lake got its name.



*"That's why I enjoy Oviedo Community News - Just the facts about what's happening in our area. The best informed community is the one that functions properly. Do whatever you can to support their fact finding."*

*—Gary B., OCN Community Advisory Board member*





## **Strengthening Partnerships to Serve the Community Better**

After Oviedo Community News cofounded the News Collaborative of Central Florida, a partnership with more than a dozen news organizations across the region, the members **published more than 100 articles** digging into the local impact of Florida's new Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping bill (House Bill 1365) in 2025. Among those articles was Abe Aboraya's investigation into the increasing number of homeless students in Seminole County. Pictured at left is a local mother who shared with Abe what it was like for her and her son to be homeless.

Now the Collaborative will **focus on issues surrounding voting and the midterm elections in 2026**. Oviedo Community News has created a voter guide every year since its founding in 2021 - even in years when there was no election because no challengers to incumbents came forward. We believe providing unbiased, nonpartisan information that helps people go to the polls informed is critical to our mission. Now we'll be able to amplify this work because of our aligned partners. Forming the Collaborative has helped OCN serve the community better.

OCN also deepened its partnership with local high school journalism programs. We now work closely with editors at Hagerty High School and they have started sharing OCN's content on their website, helping their audience benefit from our reporting.

Partnering with the University of Central Florida, **OCN has trained more than 20 emerging journalists**. Like our work in the community, our internship program is grounded in listening. We form custom curricula that fill information gaps in the community as well as gaps in the students' education and experience.

Weekly meetings consist of story pitch and assignment reviews, progress reports, story edits, writing, sourcing and interviewing coaching, and general check-ins.

Learning is paramount. We don't rewrite student articles when they're not fit for publication but instead take the time to provide guidance and coaching until it meets our standards. We believe this is a critical public service.



# OCN Recognized Nationally and Statewide

1

OCN won the **national award for Operational Resilience** from [Local Independent Online News \(LION\) Publishers](#). The award “recognizes a LION member that has made significant progress toward strengthening its operational resilience by establishing processes, policies, and a people-centered company culture designed to support staff, manage growth, and promote sustainability.” OCN got the award because we, knowing 2025 would be a critical growth year for the organization, implemented policies and practices to create an efficient, meaningful and effective onboarding process for both new board of directors members and new staff members.

2

OCN Editor-in-Chief Megan Stokes was listed alongside Central Florida Public Media President and General Manager Judith Smelser in **Scott Maxwell’s “10 People Who Make Orlando a Better Place to Live”** list in 2025. The two were on the list for co-founding the News Collaborative of Central Florida, which is a group of 15 news organizations that began partnering after realizing that together they could do more to serve the community. Creating the partnership will not only strengthen journalism in the region but in the Greater Oviedo and Winter Springs community as well since the group will focus on ways to create sustainability for all of its members.

3

OCN staff won **first place in Local Government Reporting from the Florida Press Association**, which judged our election reporting, comprehensive voter guides and deep dives into critical government issues.

4

The Florida Press Association recognized OCN, Central Florida Public Media, The Florida Trident and WGPU Public Media with **first place in Agricultural and Environmental Reporting** for the collaborative investigation exploring [the impacts of growth and development on the Florida Wildlife Corridor](#), which published in 2024.

5

Oviedo Community News, Central Florida Public Media, The Florida Trident and WGPU Public Media won **first place for environmental reporting** from the Florida Association of Broadcast Journalists for the [Florida Wildlife Corridor investigation](#).

6

Oviedo Community News was named alongside its publishing partners in [an Edward R. Murrow Award](#) for feature reporting for the [Florida Wildlife Corridor investigation](#) in 2024.

# OCN's 2025 By the Numbers



**122K**

Total estimated audience

*41% increase*



**4**

Years since OCN's launch



**3**

New reporters hired



**1,355**

Hours of local government meetings covered in OCN history

*+420 hours this year*



**3,000**

Local events published in weekly listing



**12**

Community events in which we participated



**27%**

Newsletter subscriber growth (10K to 12.7K)



**7**

Student interns mentored

*40% increase*



**1,044**

Articles published in OCN history



**5.7K**

OCN Facebook followers

*35% increase*



**12**

Publishing partners added to bring more content

*300% increase*



**4**

Published guides, including a summer camp guide and voter guide

# OCN Article Audit

A look back at the articles OCN published by category

50	Articles about elected leaders' decisions that impact your <b>finances</b>	▲ from 36 in 2024	
43	Articles related to the <b>local services</b> that you rely on	▲ from 16 in 2024	
33	Articles concerning <b>public safety</b>	▲ from 5 in 2024	
24	Articles on <b>local impacts of state-level decisions</b>	*new topic measured	
24	Articles pertaining to <b>local business</b>	▲ from 11 in 2024	
24	<b>Environment-related</b> articles	▲ from 17 in 2024	
21	<b>Education</b> articles	▲ from 15 in 2024	
20	Articles about <b>development</b> in the community	▼ from 36 in 2024	
17	<b>Transportation or traffic-related</b> articles	▲ from 9 in 2024	
15	Articles about <b>housing</b>	▼ from 16 in 2024	
13	<b>Election-related</b> articles	▼ from 19 in 2024	
10	<b>History-related</b> articles	*new topic measured	

# Local News You Loved in 2025

## Most Read



Seminole County schools suing family over nurse requirement [READ](#)

## Other Top-Read Articles

Seminole County schools targeted for private Schools of Hope, including Oviedo and Winter Springs [READ](#)

What's next for Winter Springs Wawa after vote to deny project [READ](#)

In quick vote, Oviedo names new connector road after bank [READ](#)

'We're into the ridiculous now' – crosswalk controversy arrives in Seminole County [READ](#)

Space cats and flying pigs: The eccentric strength of Del Seaman's Artistic Hand [READ](#)

Facing \$35M deficit, Seminole County to vote on increasing property taxes [READ](#)



# Mission, Purpose, and Problem Solving

## Mission

To create a better-informed and connected community through independent, public-service journalism that focuses on issues that residents told us matter to them.

## Purpose

To strengthen democracy by providing an independent, local news source that's accessible, fills information gaps, holds the powerful accountable, serves communities that have been historically marginalized and improves civic engagement.

## The Problem We Solve

People lead busy lives. They don't have time to attend local government meetings, let alone research the complicated issues and topics discussed. Oviedo Community News launched in 2021 in Greater Oviedo and Winter Springs, which at the time was a news desert, meaning no independent news organizations were routinely covering issues in the area.

Our reporters attend hundreds of hours of government meetings every year and write 3-5 minute articles breaking down those complicated issues and informing people on easy ways to become civically engaged.

OCN addresses critical information gaps by asking our audience what they want to know about and focusing our reporting on those topics as well as the issues that directly impact people's lives. We've built transparency into our business model, publishing our newsroom policies and regularly explaining why we cover what we cover.

More than 3,300 news outlets have closed since 2005 nationwide. About 1,800 communities that used to have local news sources have lost them. Research shows that local news is a unifier – an answer to the polarization national news can cause. Communities that have local news have greater voter turnout and more candidates run for local office. Local news helps to reduce government spending and waste because of the additional accountability reporters provide.

We live in a time of rapid change and uncertainty, where the decisions that elected leaders are making have a deep impact on folks' lives. Giving busy people an easy way to get involved and get connected can help them have more control over the fate of their community and their circumstances.



**OCN was created by journalists who used to work for the now shuttered Seminole Chronicle and Seminole Voice newspapers.**

# Thank You to Our Partners!

## Sponsors

**AspenDental**



## Grantors

- DUDA Company
- Report for America
- Local Independent Online News Publishers (LION)
- Institute for Nonprofit News (INN)
- Indiegraf
- Google News Initiative (GNI)
- Miami Foundation
- Fund for Investigative Journalism

## Members

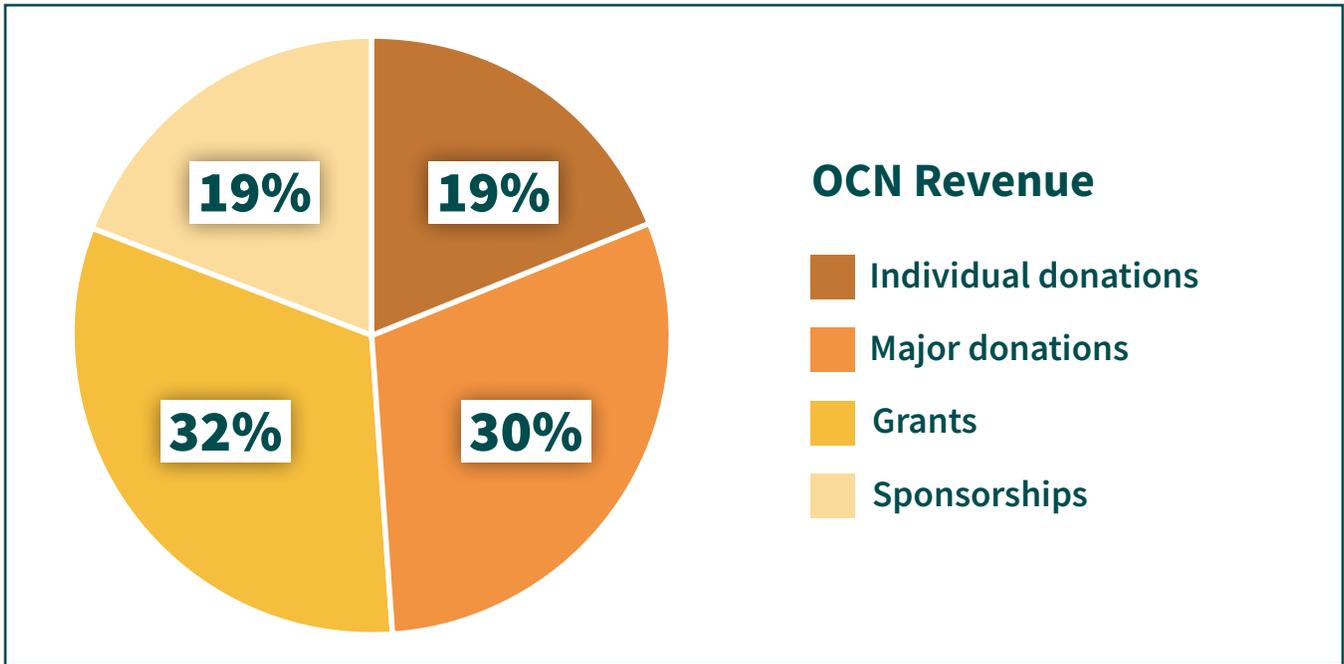
### Thank you to our members!

- Stephen McKenney Steck Legacy League  
\$5,000/year - 4 members
- Master Crowing Club  
\$3,000/year - 2 member
- Golden Rooster Society  
\$1,200-year - 4 members
- Sustaining members  
128 members
- One-time donors  
165 members

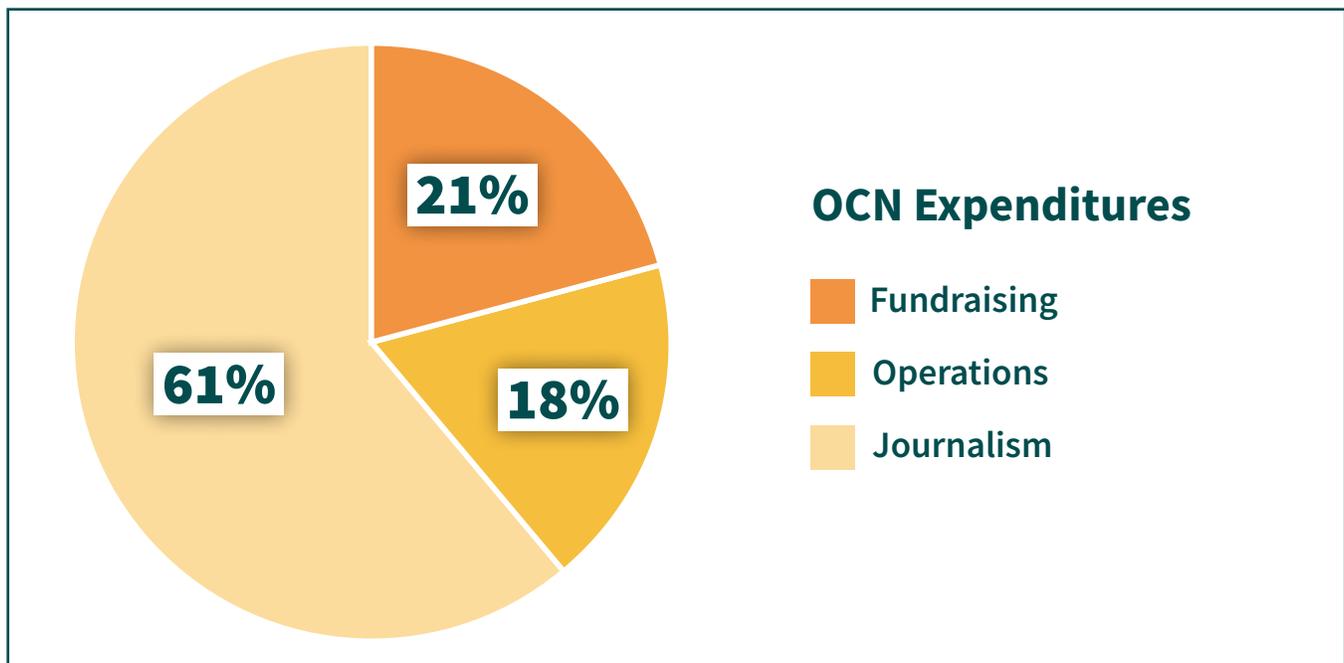
# Funding

Where it comes from and where it goes

## Where does it come from?



## Where does it go?



# Help Us Make an Even *Bigger* Impact

## Become a major donor

Major donors not only make a huge impact in helping OCN provide public service journalism to the community, they're also able to designate a local nonprofit to receive free advertisement on OCN's platforms.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Become a donor

OCN does not have a paywall because we believe local information should be available to all. Local news helps keep people informed and connected and to us, that's a right, not a privilege. But producing professional journalism is expensive. If you regularly consume our content and are able, please consider a donation.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Leave a legacy gift

Keep your passion for an informed and connected community alive by including OCN in your estate plans.

- Include us in your will
- Give a gift of stock
- Find OCN's profile through the Central Florida Foundation and give through donor-advised funds.
- Give through IRA distributions
- Ask your employer to donate or match your donation.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Volunteer

Want to help OCN's mission? Consider joining a board!

- OCN is seeking folks with the following skill sets for its Board of Directors: finance, marketing, legal, fundraising, community engagement.
- OCN is seeking Community Advisory Board members. If you have a heart for the community and for local news, this is a great board to join.

[LEARN MORE](#)

We're a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization so your gifts are tax deductible. Please consider contributing to support our work by contacting Megan Stokes at [contact@oviedocommunitynews.org](mailto:contact@oviedocommunitynews.org). Thanks!

# Contact Us

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Oviedo Community News informs and connects Greater Oviedo and Winter Springs through independent, public-service journalism. As your nonprofit newsroom, we focus on issues that you tell us matter to you. Oviedo Community News was incorporated as Central Florida Community News Inc to build toward a larger goal of finding solutions for as many local news deserts as possible.