

FROM THE EDITOR

A day to remember



Ten years ago, on April 20, 1999, Columbine changed everything.

Just its mention brings images to your mind. I can only imagine what those images must be for those who were there.

This month's cover story, by Managing Editor Kathleen Vail, does an excellent job of putting you into the shoes of the leaders—the principal, the superintendent, the communications director, a school counselor, and a school board member—who were in Littleton, Colo., that day. In an oral recounting of the events, they tell you the story as they remember it.

Their stories, rarely told in such depth, are riveting. Their stories are of people like you and me, people who work in schools and districts every day and who now live with the threat that this could happen—anywhere.

When we started discussing how to handle the 10th anniversary of Columbine, Kathleen and I debated how she should approach the story. I remembered a presentation I heard Rick Kaufman give at a National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) meeting just three months after the tragedy. His “just the facts” retelling kept everyone on the edge of their seats, even though we knew what had occurred.

Rick's presentation always has stuck with me, partly because of the story and partly because we had met two years before at an NSPRA conference. At the time, I was new to school communica-

tions and fortunate to be able to hang around some of the people I considered to be the best in the business.

Six months after that meeting, on March 20, 1998, I dealt with my first major crisis. A tornado with winds of 150 to 200 miles per hour ripped through two small towns, missing four of our schools by less than 150 yards. One of our teachers was killed and her mother, an assistant in the library, was seriously injured.

For a week, as the community of Stoneville, N.C., sifted through the rubble, the converted K-12 school that had become Stoneville Elementary served as the command center for the National Guard and the emergency officials who descended on our shocked community. As a one-person communications department, I handled the local, state, and even national media. By the end of the week, as classes resumed, everyone connected to the tragedy was spent.

There were two months left in the school year, and we all felt like zombies. I can't imagine how so many people in Columbine have done it, how people like Frank DeAngelis have persevered and remain where they are today.

I think of Stoneville now only occasionally. The students who were in kindergarten that day graduate this year.

It's amazing to think of how life, even in the face of tragedy, still goes on. The school leaders in Jefferson County, Colo., are proof that it can be done.

Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief