

Points of Light: Capital Sun finds niche in nonprofit world

(originally published June 13, 2026)

Clark Corbin, a veteran reporter with the Idaho Capital Sun who has covered 15 legislative sessions, could work at any number of media outlets in Idaho.

But he's not looking to move on anytime soon. He relishes working with editor Christina Lords, a longtime friend and colleague. He also enjoys the freedom that goes with a nonprofit news agency – which earlier this year celebrated five years of operation.

"We've had success because of Christina and her leadership, but being a nonprofit means not having to deal with advertising ... not selling anything or having paywalls ... not having to worry about page views or digital clicks," he said. "Before coming here, I worked with Idaho Education News, a nonprofit that has been around for more than 10 years. I like working with a nonprofit and I'm happy to be a part of that movement."

It's a movement that is not confined to the Capital Sun, or Idaho Education News. The Salt Lake Tribune is one of a growing list of metropolitan newspapers that have gone the nonprofit route. The Capital Sun's parent organization is States Newsroom, which Lords describes as a team of old-school journalists who are trying to salvage journalistic traditions in a world of seeing shrinking newsrooms.

"When I interviewed for this job, I was asked what was going uncovered in Idaho," Lords said. "It's education, health care and the environment. There are so many coverage gaps, and newspaper staffs continue to shrink."

Lords, known for her staunch advocacy to her staff, apparently presented a convincing case. States Newsroom hired her as editor and greenlit the hiring of top-flight reporters who are familiar, and trusted names, to readers and sources. Today's reporting staff consists of Lords, Corbin, Laura Guido and Kyle Pfannenstiel – reporters with institutional knowledge and plenty of versatility.

The Capital Sun does not have an "education" reporter, because that topic is well covered by Idaho Education News.

"I want reporters to work on things that matter to them," Lords says. "There are negative vibes about being a journalist in 2026, with talk about 'fake news' and 'enemy of the people.' Journalism is a hard industry, and there's a lot of uncertainty. But working with these journalists is not hard. I've surrounded myself with smart, hard-working and energetic people who care about Idaho."

The staff wins its share of Idaho Press Club awards, but Lords says that is not the measure of success with the Capital Sun. Lords is more interested in the outlets

picking up the Capital Sun's stories — which are offered free of charge — and she tracks where those stories appear. A good number of stories have received national exposure.

"Nearly every Idaho newspaper picks up our work," Lords says. "People in my hometown (Pocatello) have the same access to what's happening at the Capitol as people who read the Idaho Press or Idaho Statesman. A growing number of TV stations are using our material."

Nonprofits, of course, don't survive on wishful thinking. The States Newsroom has 39 outlets, including Idaho, and more than 1,000 contributors nationwide.

"We've had an impact over the last five years and I'm fortunate to be a part of it," Corbin says. "But it's not replacing what was lost. We're seeing newsrooms shrinking, laying off reporters and some positions going dark. Five years ago, there were people who had the good sense to realize that something like this (Capital Sun) was needed in Idaho."

For Corbin, helping people understand public policy during legislative sessions "gives me a lot of purpose and sense of duty to get through it. I don't know what the future holds for the Capital Sun or me, but the Idaho Capital Sun is a great place for me."

And it is an example of the impact that nonprofits have in Idaho.

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