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330 words by Patrick Oehlinger

Journalism quality in times of job cuts and layoff

Knight Ridder Inc. "would not hear the warning" Jay Harris wrote down before he resigned as a year-long publisher of the San Jose Mercury News in March. He is afraid that the cuttings required to achieve near-term savings could affect "the quality and aspirations of the Mercury News as a journalistic endeavor or its ability to fulfill its responsibilities to the community."

John Miller, Executive Editor in another daughter company of Knight Ridder, writes, "no," you are not getting less quality journalism from the Tallahassee Democrat or less investigative reporting even if the times are tough and there is pressure from investors to improve profits that are already the envy of most industries.

Knight Ridder CEO Tony Ridder, who knows Jay Harris well and worked closely with him for years, illustrates, "Times are a lot harder in 2001 in the newspaper industry

(actually, in all media supported by advertising), than they have been for a long time." This could be the reason for this year's 9% cut in his 22,000-strong workforce: to save \$100 million.

The new economy downturn of Silicon Valley, the nation's high-tech heartland, which is also the home of the Knight Ridder's headquarters and the Mercury News, stopped placing help-wanted ads for employees in the news. "It's that simple," continues Tony Ridder before he leads to "nobody knows how long a downturn will last. Nor, in the early stages, how severe it will be. So you trim the sails to be ready for whatever rough weather may come your way."

Maybe Jay Harris thought about the trimming of the sails when he wrote his letter of resignation, in which he asked his colleagues at Knight Ridder to reconsider "the deep and ill-advised staff and expense reductions their profit goals would necessitate, and cuts that would affect the quality and reputation of the newspaper and the perception of the company as a place good people want to work."



Note: The graphic would need some editing to clearly connect the IXIC line with Nasdaq Stock Market and the KRJ with Knight Ridder.

Where is the connection of the new economy downturn represented by the Nasdaq Stock Market and Knight Ridders Stocks?