Storming in emergency exit doors of Aurora movie theater, wearing head to toe black armor and a gas mask, holding three guns and gas canisters, James Holmes killed 12 people and shot 71. In 2 minutes Holmes turned an ordinary movie theater experience into a bloody, chaotic, and unforgettable one for the innocent victims who attended the July 20, 2012 midnight showing of the new Batman movie. The Denver Post won The 2013 Pulitzer Prize in breaking news reporting, their fourth Pulitzer in four years. Promptly and authentically the Denver Post reported on the movie theater massacre, in Aurora, Colorado. Kevin Dale, The Post’s news director, stated that although the staff was honored and enthusiastic about winning the prize, they were still affected admitting they preferred that the tragedy didn’t occur. To understand the total catastrophe, two leading reporters, Kevin Dale and Tim Rasmussen, experiences will be explored.

Kevin Dale, the current executive editor of Cronkite News at Arizona PBS, is known for transforming The Post to be one of the most digitally engaged newspapers. Although now his job is for nations most favored media platforms, he didn’t start with such an influential role. His 20 years of senior-level leadership was established when he started covering stories for unfamiliar newspapers in California and Kansas. Improving his positions he then became the managing editor for three more established companies,
and also was the deputy sports editor. Dale’s interest in reporting was significant even in his college days at Kansas State University, having a bachelors degree in journalism and mass communications.

In 2000, when Dales started at The Post, he was responsible for the ninth-largest Sunday newspaper in the nation and for covering reporting other projects, which led him to report on the presidential campaign in 2008. The Post’s editor Greg Moor expressed Dales immense impact quoting, “Kevin…collaborated with and mentored our department heads, was a key strategist as we navigated transformation and led our digital operation to stellar heights,” The Post's editor Greg Moore said (Top Denver Post). Dale introduced the web, mobile devices, and social media to the newspaper, which is why The Post is in the top 10 newspapers on Facebook and has over 200 thousand, twitter followers. Denver Post TV, a video strategy that broadcasts news updates and other videos on the web, won more than 30 awards in the past 6 years. Dale, the successful second-ranking newsroom executive for The Post, won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize on the Aurora shooting and worked with two projects that were Pulitzer finalists on the use of marijuana in the treatment of children with seizures and the 2012 Colorado wildfire.

The other main contributor is Tim Rasmussen. Rasmussen was the assistant managing editor for photography and multimedia, who dedicated hours and days to support The Post in becoming one of the most respected photo departments in the nation. Earning his title by pushing people to do their absolute best, he also set high expectations for them and himself, even before The Post. Starting in 1988 Rasmussen accepted one of ten honorable awards that were handed out at the first Eddie Adams Workshop. In 1989, he worked as an independent photographer and his work got published in newspapers and
magazines, including the cover of the New York Times Sunday Magazine. In 1997 he made the esteemed Eddie Adams dislike him when he refused to allow a picture to be cropped during his first job as a photographer. (Tim: Northern Short) His particular decisions helped him understand his calling for being a photographer. Rasmussen earned an assertive reputation from acts similar to that, where Andrew Innerarity, a former staff photographer at the South Florida Sun Sentinel said that “If you are a weak person he is going to eat you up”. (Photo Director Takes) That is what he did, he strived for excellence and didn’t give people an option when it came to working to their full potential. After working as the Director of Photography at the South Florida Sun-Sentinel in Fort Lauderdale, Florida from 2002 to 2006, he became the Assistant Managing Editor for Photography and Multimedia for The Denver Post.

Tom Rasmussen working at The Denver Post not only transformed his life and The Post staffs life but revolutionized The Post’s reputation significantly. Starting in 2006, Rasmussen knew he had a lot of work ahead of him due to the fact that the discouraged staff showed zero enthusiasm towards their work. Before Rasmussen was hired, the photographers at The Post staff was indirectly encouraged to replicate other photographers work. Although the staff was anything but ambitious, Rasmussen knew that there was hope for the newspaper and that they were all talented workers, they just were not working to their full capacity. He supportively said, “I started caring about their photography so they started caring about their photography.” Rasmussen challenged the 26 photographers, videographers, and photo editors he was in charge of managing, to work to their full potential. Mike Stocker, a Sun-Sentinel photographer, presented a project that he worked endlessly on to Rasmussen, which got turned down instantly and
sent back for improvement. Stocker’s revised project was approved, which was later nominated for a Pulitzer. His clear-cut and tough judgments were always valuable. His vigorous techniques led to The Post being honored with three Pulitzers, for feature photography and for breaking news reporting. After working at The Denver Post for almost 9 years, Rasmussen left to become ESPN’s digital photo editor in 2015.

The Denver Posts objectives are to be the leading source for the nation and provide multiple different platforms for readers. Being one of the most digitally forward newspapers, The Post remarkably created an interactive timeline to keep readers updated on progress of the shooting, in less than 11 hours after the massacre occurring. Along with that, within 4 days there were over a thousand informational posts on Twitter and Facebook from The Post staff. The Pulitzer Prize was awarded in the category of breaking news, admired for working "as quickly as possible, captures events accurately as they occur, and, as time passes, illuminates, provides context and expands upon the initial coverage." (Denver Post Wins..)

With Kevin Dale and Tim Rasmussen’s impact The Post became the leading source for the legitimate story of the shooting and for accurate and constant updates of the event. They were the preferred source because of the significance Dale and Rasmussen had on the staff. Recognizing that the social media team would not be the same with out Kevin Dale; they were efficient and original, updating all of the digital platforms religiously. Also, acknowledging the fact that Tim Rasmussen initiated the photographers to thrive while working rather than feeling dull and confused, led the staff to successfully spread the images of the event universally. Although the staff worked on coping with the tragic event, they knew they had a job to do and that people were relying
on them. "The only thing worse than having to cover a story like this would be to not step up for your community," Post news director Kevin Dale said. " (The Denver Post…)

Taking advantage of the favored idea of interactive elements with photos and videos and the fact that twitter and Facebook is so prominent, The Post decided to have 24/7 coverage and to only post what they could confirm. Remarkably posting 36 times within the first 18 hours of the shooting, The Post staff impressed the nation. They broadcasted videos of the workers at the movie theater as well as of the public that was involved at the scene, soon after had a live blog of journalists and of people in that community, and even evaluated and published audio records of the police and fire radio traffic. The Facebook pages provided comfort for the community where people offered condolences and sympathized with sharing experiences of the Columbine school shooting. (Staff of The Denver Post)

Rasmussen commented on what he thought was essential for the first few days of reporting admitting, “We moved quickly and accurately telling the story as it unfolded, keeping our readers up to date while making sure the information was factual.” (Q&A: Kevin Dale..) Even on the second day of reporting, the staff was extremely active, they were broadcasting live at the exact scene where James Holmes apartment was getting raided. Some staff were assigned to focus on profiling the 12 victims and some were responsible for reporting on the people who committed fearless acts to save someone else.

There was a complete Aurora media craze after the first four days of the shooting occurring. At such high demands for information on the shooting it was common for newspapers to publish false material, even on such vital information such as, the death
count and details of the shooter. Although it was ordinary for papers to be misleading, The Post was never guilty of publishing false information. Acknowledging that some of the most important factors of being successful in the newsroom are to have practice, encouragement, and a motive. Due to the fact that The Post worked so profoundly with their digital elements so quickly it resulted in having the main story from Saturday’s newspaper, a story acknowledging the poor feedback of the ambulance workers, a story concentrating on the rapid jump in gun sales, PDFs of The Posts daily newspaper coverage, PDFs of The Posts home page on its website as it proceeded through the weekend, PDFs and features from the section Heroes Among Us, and a video from Heroes Among Us. (Staff of The Denver Post: Cover Letter for Entry).

The staff was responsible for documenting on this fatal event that painfully impacted the lives of the absolutely everyone in the community. Wanting to respect the neighborhoods space and privacy in an unfortunate situation like this but also remembering a journalists goal to inform the public of all events, the staff at The Post worked with intention. Rasmussen made that clear when he said “Our goal was to tell the story in a compelling way that helped millions understand what was happening, but to do that we have to do things that are hard, like take a photograph of a grieving father.” (Top Denver Post)

The authentic idea to have a variety of variety of media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, benefited The Denver Post significantly. The Denver Post was recognized winning a highly respected award and the highest honor in journalism. The Pulitzer Prize, what some people consider the “Oscars for journalism”, was awarded in 2012 for breaking news reporting to The Denver Post covering the mass shooting in Aurora,
Colorado in July 2012. The Posts authentic execution of this coverage won them $10,000, granted by Columbia University. The Post was also nominated in the same breaking news reporting category for reporting on the Waldo Canyon fire, that also used digital tools to express the event, which involved a disastrous wildfire that burned down more than 300 homes. In total, The Denver Post remarkably won 10 Pulitzer Prizes.

The development of The Post was undoubtedly encouraged by two extraordinary men. Prior to Kevin Dale working at The Post, The Post was just any other newspaper company and would not even consider that it would soon be recognized as a top 10 newspaper on Facebook. Having more than 20 years of leadership experience he thoroughly revamped The Denver Posts digital operations. And before Tim Rasmussen The Denver Posts photographers were being led by numerous unsupportive editors. These photographers were an uninteresting group of people who desperately needed inspiration and encouragement. Rasmussen’s challenging style made people wonder if higher expectations were the secret to award-winning photography. (Photo Director Takes)

Although Dale and Rasmussen influenced The Post significantly, all of the credit cannot just be given to them two. The Post staff worked tirelessly to provide around-the-clock coverage for the community. Rasmussen raved about The Post stating, “The award simply means that every member of our staff worked together to report this difficult story, using the best journalist tools we have. Each staff member rising to the occasion and pausing their lives while creating a news report that informed our readers and online audience at the very highest level.” (Top Denver Post)

The powerful effect of social media on the role in news reporting is becoming evident. The Pulitzer Prize made an agreement in 2011 to focus on targeting real-time
reporting. Although for some it’s difficult to fathom the idea of a world where technology and social media is so essential. Today, breaking news stories are broadcasted within seconds of being informed of the situation. Where breaking news stories would be shared the day after in the paper, which would not be tolerable today. The Denver Post plays an imperative role with media, updating its digital platforms 36 times within the first 18 hours as well as reporting on over thousands of stories digitally. Another example of the importance of social media on breaking news stories is when The Tuscaloosa News won a Pulitzer Prize. Providing screenshots from its Twitter feed during its submission process, the Pulitzer was awarded for using the modern style of social media but also for continuing to value traditional reporting techniques as well. (T Person, and Anthony: Tech Crunch)

Being the fourth Pulitzer Prize for The Denver Post to win, consecutively, provides people with a profound, committed, and sophisticated impression. The Pulitzer Prize is recognizably known, "as quickly as possible, captures events accurately as they occur, and, as time passes, illuminates, provides context and expands upon the initial coverage." (Denver Post Wins..) Although The Denver Posts staff was enthusiastic about winning the highest honor in journalism, the disastrous event that The Post endured as well as what the community suffered through was still preferred to have never occurred, not only by the Aurora neighborhood but by The Denver Post staff as well.
References

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"Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication." Kevin Dale,


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