

# 50 years of a Chicago weekly

The history of the independent weekly *Chicago Reader* reflects the larger history of newspaper publishing in the United States. This timeline traces the *Reader's* changing fortunes over the course of a half-century.

1971

**First issue** of 16 pages publishes on October 1. The *Reader* will be just eight pages for much of the first year. In the early years, the “offices” are in apartments in the Kenwood and Rogers Park neighborhoods.

1973

The *Reader's* popular **Straight Dope** column debuts, bylined by the fictional Cecil Adams (actually Mike Lenehan, then Dave Kehr, then Ed Zotti).

1977

The *Reader* publishes **Mike Lenehan's 20,012-word story about beekeeping**, an example of the newspaper's determination to publish long, literary reads even if they're not pulled out of today's news. The story wins the prestigious AAAS Westinghouse Science Journalism Award.

1977

Revenue **quadruples in two years**, from \$300,000 in 1975 to \$1.3 million.

1976

Offices move to 12 E. Grand.

Late 1974-early '75

The *Reader* moves into its **first real offices**, at 70 W. Hubbard.

1978

The *Reader* expands to **Los Angeles with the LA Reader**, run by publisher Jane Levine. But the *LA Reader* runs into stiff competition from *LA Weekly*. The *LA Reader* was first to publish *Life in Hell* by Matt Groening, later of *Simpsons* fame.

1979

The *Reader* debuts **Lynda Barry's comic Ernie Pook's Comeek**, which is syndicated and runs until 2008.

1982

The *Reader* invests in *Washington City Paper* and later takes control.

1983

Offices move to 11 E. Illinois.

1987

Revenue is \$8.3 million, a sixfold increase from a decade earlier.

1994

Founders step back on actual production of the paper. **Jane Levine named CEO and publisher. Alison True named editor in chief.**

1990

**John Conroy's "House of Screams"** story in the *Reader* reveals police torture by Commander Jon Burge and his underlings. The story is the first of a **groundbreaking 17-year series of reports on police misconduct.**

1989

The *Reader* sells off all but a small stake of its *LA Reader* to a local group.

1988

In a **conflict over business practices**, the *Reader* board removes Rehwaldt as an officer and employee, but he remains owner of nearly one-fifth of the *Reader*. Rehwaldt sues, and the lawsuit is eventually settled with him remaining as an owner.

1987

New York's *Village Voice* attempts to acquire the *Reader* and comes close to succeeding. The *Reader* turns down the offer after co-owner Tom Rehwaldt objects.

1996

*Reader* begins publishing a special edition for Chicago's suburbs, *The Reader's Guide to Arts & Entertainment*.

1996

The *Reader* celebrates its **25th anniversary** with a party at Metro featuring a concert by the Waco Brothers.

1997

Revenue is \$19 million, more than double what it was a decade earlier.

2002

Highest revenue year: \$22.6 million.

2012

**Michael Ferro's Wrapports purchases the Reader**, which becomes a sister paper of the *Chicago Sun-Times*. The offices move to the former Apparel Center.

2010

Editor in chief Alison True is fired.

2009

Creative Loafing's biggest creditor, Atalaya Capital Management of New York, takes control of the *Reader*.

2008

Creative Loafing files for **bankruptcy**.

2007

**The Reader is sold to Creative Loafing.** Layoffs of key staffers, such as John Conroy and Steve Bogira, soon follow. The *Reader's* format changes from quarterfold to standard flat tabloid. The suburban edition is discontinued.

2015

Mara Shalhoup resigns after four years as *Reader* editor to become editor of *LA Weekly*. Jake Malooley is named editor.

2017

A consortium that includes the Chicago Federation of Labor buys the *Reader* and the *Sun-Times*.

2018

**Chaos reigns at the Reader** as Jake Malooley is fired by telephone upon returning from his honeymoon, and executive editor Mark Konkol is fired after 17 days on the job because of a cover illustration widely viewed as racist.

2018

The *Reader* is **acquired by developer Elzie Higginbottom and lawyer Leonard C. Goodman and becomes an L3C (low-profit limited liability company), with Tracy Baim as publisher.** Offices move to 2930 S. Michigan Avenue.

2021

The *Reader* marks **50th anniversary**. Full nonprofit conversion is expected by the end of the year, as the L3C winds down operations. New website launches as the *Reader* plans for an increasingly digital future.

2020

Buffeted by financial pressures from the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Reader* goes to an **every-two-weeks print schedule**. The IRS approves **501(c)(3) nonprofit status**. Tracy Baim and Karen Hawkins agree to share the co-publisher title, with Hawkins remaining as co-editor in chief.

2019

The *Reader* **promotes Karen Hawkins and Sujay Kumar to co-editors in chief**, the first people of color named as top editors. The *Reader* launches the **Chicago Independent Media Alliance** to build collaboration and support for independent media.