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News, far off the beaten path

By Mark Jurkowitz, Globe Staff, 7/10/2003

Michael Ruppert hasn't had much use for the mainstream media. Until now.

The former Los Angeles narcotics investigator made his first big splash at a heated public meeting in L. A. in 1996, when he confronted CIA director John Deutch with charges that the CIA had engaged in drug trafficking. Today, he is gaining attention as publisher of a newsletter called "From the Wilderness" and as a leading proponent of the theory that the Bush administration "had full foreknowledge of the 9/11 attacks and did nothing to prevent them."

Ruppert, 52, holds other unconventional views, too. He wonders if Minnesota senator Paul Wellstone's death in a plane crash was actually a murder and thinks SARS may have been a man-made bioweapon.

"I've been called a right-wing conspiracy nut. I've been called anti-Semitic and a Mossad disinformation agent in the same breath," he says. "People have painted me as a Communist wearing a white sheet. . . . I learned that politics is inherently self-limiting in what it can discuss."

Views this far outside the conventional boundaries of public debate don't usually get an airing in the mainstream media. "Primarily because of their corporate financial structure and their need not to rock their own financial boat," Ruppert says, "they leave out some key stories."

But Ruppert says his lonely voice will soon be magnified through the megaphone of some of America's largest and most prestigious newspapers in a nationwide ad campaign that he hopes will make "From The Wilderness" a household word and galvanize public opinion around his extremely controversial ideas.

He's already had one very eye-catching success.

On May 16, Washington Post readers learned about "From The Wilderness" in a dramatic full-page ad. It was headlined: "Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain . . ." and illustrated with a drawing of the "Wizard of Oz" characters. It informed citizens that if they read the newsletter, they would learn the

following: The war against terror is a war for oil and will spread to places such as West Africa, the US economy is bolstered by drug money being laundered on Wall Street, and the US government is very culpable in the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

Ruppert says the Washington Post ad, paid for by one generous and anonymous benefactor, tripled the number of visitors to his website, www.fromthewilderness.com. He was then able to raise almost \$114,000 to follow up with an ad blitz in major newspapers throughout the nation's top markets. According to Ken Levine, the owner of More Than News Productions who is helping to place the ads, the spots may well run in the Globe, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The Arizona Republic, and The Miami Herald in the next two weeks.

Levine also says there are plans to purchase ads in papers ranging from The Hartford Courant to The San Diego Union-Tribune, and possibly The New York Times and USA Today.

Levine, a former TV news director, supports Ruppert's mission, saying "I think he's trying to open up people's eyes and at least hear another side of the story."

Levine says he secured the ad space at a discounted "standby rate," which means the spots could be bumped for other ads.

Officials at the Republic, Globe, and Journal-Constitution say they could not locate such an ad in their pipeline, and the Herald declined to comment.

But Levine says the "standby" ads "will only pop up in the system when the ad is about to run," and he asserts that "we have signed contracts . . . for the Globe, Republic, Miami Herald, and Journal-Constitution."

Ruppert, who began publishing "From The Wilderness" in 1998, has a staff of three full-time employees and generates about \$400,000 a year from a variety of sources, including subscriptions -- he claims about 10,000 subscribers -- and sales of videos such as "The Truth and Lies of 9/11." He also has hit the lecture circuit in recent years.

Ruppert's website includes a lengthy timeline in which he attempts to make the case for what he calls the government's "criminal complicity" in the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Its pithy title: "Oh Lucy! -- You Gotta Lotta 'Splainin To Do."

The man whose colorful past includes a stint as a press spokesman for the 1992 Ross Perot presidential campaign and, by his own account, a romantic relationship with a female CIA agent, says "the mainstream media never connect the dots." But even among well-known alternative journalists who share his concerns about the myopic mainstream press, Ruppert wins mixed reviews at best.

Al Giordano, publisher of the crusading Narco News Bulletin, which covers the drug war, is laudatory, saying, "Ruppert speaks for a growing constituency of people. . . . My informational neighborhood is safer from official propaganda because Officer Ruppert is patrolling the beat."

Gary Webb, whose explosive 1996 "Dark Alliance" series in the San Jose Mercury News alleged CIA complicity in the Los Angeles crack epidemic, says, "Mike is a real conundrum. I think he's a sincere guy, concerned about the right things, and he was quite supportive of my efforts to expose the interplay between the CIA and drug traffickers. But he's also written stories expounding a theory about the genesis of my Mercury News series that were, quite frankly, ridiculous."

Steve Rendall, senior analyst for the liberal media watchdog group Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting, says, "accurate information is the oxygen of democracy, and when someone is circulating unsupported conspiracy theories, it detracts from the debate."

Ruppert says the conspiracy-buff charge is "intended to detract from the evidence I present. . . . If that's the only argument they can muster to me, that tells me in a war of intellects, they are basically unarmed."

Soon, millions of newspaper readers across the country may get the chance to see what's in Ruppert's arsenal.

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