

# Loudoun's blogosphere

By Todd Fielding

All Hines needs is wireless access for his computer, a hot cup of java and a burning issue on land-use development in the county. His views can be found at a blog site called [www.bigloudoun.com](http://www.bigloudoun.com), which he says has the support of many who frequent the information superhighway.

"I have gotten calls from elected officials who say, 'Keep up the good work,' " said Hines, 64. "I think a community should not be afraid of public discourse."

**How about you?**

**The Loudoun Times-Mirror wants to know who is blogging and what our readers are reading. We also want to invite readers to participate as "citizen journalists."**

**Do you have a blog? Tell us.**

**Does a local friend or business blog? Tell us.**

**What blogs do you read? Tell us.**

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Writing new entries is a passion for Hines, also a professional photographer. He usually churns out electronic copy from his Aldie home or from coffee shops in Leesburg.

"It's worthwhile because I get to say what I feel like saying," Hines said.

Residents turn to blogs - also known as web logs -- as a potential forum to discuss news, hobbies or sports. Blog sites specific to Loudoun range from government issues at [www.leesburgtalk.com](http://www.leesburgtalk.com) to gay rights at [www.equalityloudoun.org](http://www.equalityloudoun.org).

## Blogging 101

A blog is a user-generated Web site. Blog entries are made in journal style and displayed in reverse chronological order, according to bloggers interviewed.

Blogs often provide commentary, news, or even serve as personal journal entries. The sites can show text, images and links to other blogs, Web pages and other media related to its topic. People can also comment back to bloggers, creating an interactive environment.

Rob Yunich, 31, is a Fairfax journalist/writer who trains fellow reporters in the Washington, D.C., area to develop blog sites. He is the director of communications for the National Small Business Association of Washington, D.C. Yunich started blogging in May (<http://randomrealitythoughts.blogspot.com>) and says people blog for a variety of reasons.

"During one conversation with my wife, she said that I should start a blog so she didn't have to listen to me talk in detail about the many topics that are discussed in my blog -- mostly sports and TV," said Yunich. "It's not that she doesn't care, but she didn't want to hear it in as much detail as I was providing."

He instructs his students to use the Web site [www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) to set up a site. Yunich said the secret to a widely read blog is an appealing focus.

"Many people will tell you that a good blog focuses on a narrow topic," he said. "I disagree. Your blog can focus on many topics, but each post must be narrowly focused. For example, I post a few times a day, and each post focuses on a specific topic."

"This time of year, I have nearly a daily post on the National Hockey League's Washington Capitals and usually a recap of a television show. I also have regular posts on baseball's Baltimore Orioles and whatever else fits my fancy that day."

He said blogging has increasingly become more important for residents in places such as Loudoun.

"Blogging gives me a forum to cover topics that interest me without worry about a word count or deadlines," said Yunich.

The price

Ashburn's Daniel Sousa, 44, has launched Web sites and blogs. His site, [www.loudounprepsports.com](http://www.loudounprepsports.com), had 50,000 page views in January.

Sousa said Loudoun teens and their parents check out his site. "They like the information we provide."

The site posts information about Loudoun's high school sports teams along with profiles of area athletes and where they plan to attend college.

Sousa said the main investment in starting up a Web site is time. He has not made the Web site his sole source of income yet, but added that advertising and site visits have dramatically increased since he started the site last fall.

"It could be a viable business," he said. "Loudoun is [one of] the fastest-growing count[ies] in the U.S. The question is -- how does the regular [business] model work? How do you make money from it and is it enough to do it?"

Bloggers interviewed for this story said costs can range from \$7 to \$250 for a blog site launch. Bloggers said they often rely on site administrators to run the blog, who, the bloggers said, can be quite inexpensive.

Making bucks with a blog?

Brian Chavis, chairman of the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, said blogging can be profitable for businesses. His Leesburg-based ARGroup is an information technology firm that provides technology support to 100 companies in the Washington, D.C., area.

He has also offered blogging classes to Loudoun County residents for two years. Chavis said interest in blogging has increased greatly since he first offered the classes.

"No one knew what it was," Chavis said. "The people who knew what it was were generally in the political stream. Every time I do a seminar, someone goes home, creates a blog and makes money."

Pre-sold advertising is provided at [blogger.com](http://blogger.com) by Google. Google splits advertising dollars with bloggers through this service. Popular blogs can also seek outside advertising dollars.

Sousa, who runs the high school sports site, has recently added a part-time employee who seeks online advertising

for his site.

Chavis added that trade associations, nonprofit groups and professional associations particularly benefit from blogging.

"Associations that get it make sure they are blogging," Chavis said.

Bloggers' passion

Dezel Quillen, 35, of Alexandria, began a site last fall for wine lovers in Loudoun and elsewhere. He has profiled 13 Loudoun-based wineries at his site: [vinespot.blogspot.com](http://vinespot.blogspot.com).

He said his site focuses on the educational aspect of the wine industry. Many may not appreciate the variety of fine wines grown in Loudoun and Virginia, he said.

"There is so much to learn about grapes and soil," Quillen said. "[The hobby] has sucked me in, but it is kind of nice."

Quillen said he dedicates up to 12 hours a week visiting wineries.

He recently profiled Purcellville's Hillsborough Vineyards. "When I go [to western Loudoun], it's the small-world environment," Quillen said. "When you put in the wineries, bed and breakfasts and rolling hills, it's really nice."

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