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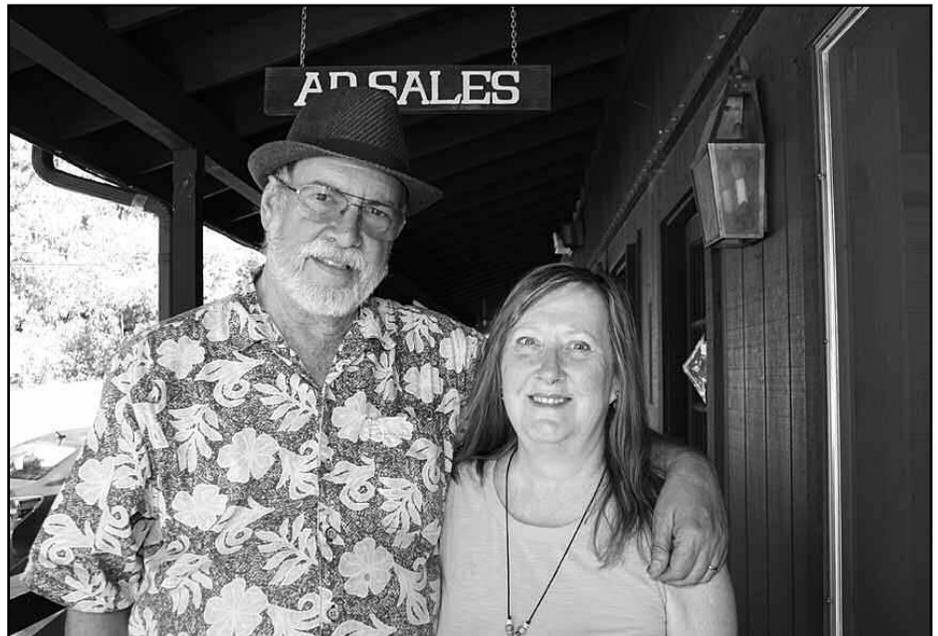
A membership-supported, for-profit model?

By Jack and Becky Clark
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Idyllwild Town Crier
Idyllwild, California

After more than four years of trying everything to attract advertisers for our small-town weekly paper – even a last-resort, full-market coverage, free newspaper – it became clear to us that the traditional advertising-supported community newspaper model would no longer work in our extended community of about 5,000.

So, we turned to our readers and left it up to them whether our community would continue to have a newspaper. In a lengthy article in our paper, we showed them the myriad enticements we'd tried unsuccessfully with advertisers. We leveled with them completely that the paper hadn't made money during the past 8-1/2 years and that we, its mom-and-pop-type owners, had been working solely as unpaid volunteers. We showed them that when we retire (Jack is 72), the paper would retire with us, since nobody would want to acquire a paper that could break even only if its publisher-editor, proofreader, distribution man, handyman and occasional lawyer all were willing to work for free.

We emphasized that we had nine local government bodies that were monitored by nobody but our paper and that within the past 16 months, there were several (five)



instances in which our investigative reporting had revealed important information that had been misrepresented or concealed by them.

We announced that we were creating a five-tiered membership model: Angels (unlimited, greater than \$1,000 annually); Heroes (\$1,000 annually); Patrons (\$500 annually), Sponsors (\$500 annually) and Sustaining Readers (\$100 annually), whichever they felt they could afford to keep a real newspaper in our community – all

members to get the same ink-on-paper subscriptions our readers want as well as online subscriptions, the same "Town Crier Member" car-window decals and each member to be recognized at their membership level in each issue of the newspaper.

But the membership benefit we pointedly emphasized at all levels was the pleasure and satisfaction of knowing they were doing their best to do their part in saving and supporting the town's newspaper.

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