

Website subscription model will provide sustainability

If you've been around Oregon very long, you know we have been, too.

The history of our newspaper goes back more than a century, making sure that you stay up to date on important information about your neighbors, that you know what community events are happening and that someone is keeping an eye on your local governments.

We strive to produce quality journalism that you can view anywhere – in your weekly subscription, or on our website where you can take our reporting on the go.

But, as anyone in the business world might tell you, that journalism – whether it's being done on the sidelines of a football game, at a local government meeting or at a community festival – is not free.

Over the past decade, there's been a massive shift in how people access this news. Some prefer to read on paper, while others like prefer their phones or computers, and the Internet and smartphones have changed everything.

That includes the business model newspaper staffs need to adopt in order to survive, and it means most news can no longer be provided on the Internet for free.

So in the coming weeks, the three websites for our weekly community newspapers will institute a paywall. This means aside from some important breaking news, submitted items and stories that are being

covered regionally, readers will need a subscription.

Print subscribers will get access to the websites with their \$48 annual subscription, but for everyone else, the online subscription will cost \$5 per month for access to all three of our weekly publications – the Verona Press, Oregon Observer and Stoughton Courier Hub. We'll have more information about the timing of this and other details in an announcement in the next few weeks.

While you might be able to get some news about your area free on other sites, media organizations with larger coverage areas lack the time and resources to dive deep into many stories important to your community.

The news we bring you is all local. Our reporters don't cover anything at the state, national or international level unless we have a local connection as an angle. All of our stories have a direct impact on the Oregon area.

We are often the only public voice in your village board and school board meetings. We tell the stories of your neighbor, your community's businesses, your child's scout troop. Those community stories matter as much to the fabric of Oregon as anything.

Over the coming weeks, you can expect to see improvements to our coverage on the Internet, most notably the posting of stories before they are in print.

Online subscribers will enjoy additional content, including

opinion columns, police reports, weekly upcoming event listings and history. There will be more daily content available, and online subscribers will have access to our e-edition – a PDF version of the weekly paper – before it hits the newsstands.

For decades, there was only one way to bring news to people in small communities. We connected people by putting information into print and distributing it through carriers or the mail.

But the job of a newspaper staff isn't really about putting words on a printed page, it's about keeping the community engaged. Now there are many ways people prefer to get their news, and the subscriber model will help keep bringing it to them how they want it in the long term.

A monthly membership will cost less than two gallons of milk, about the same as a half-dozen donuts and a little more than a Happy Meal at McDonald's.

Today, many of us listen to music online by paying for Spotify Premium or Apple Music. Catching up on your favorite TV show often means a subscription to Netflix or Hulu.

We as a society pay for all of those services because we realize they have value in our lives. It's the same for your local newspaper.

That's the price for being engaged citizens who know and care about what happens to and in their community. For \$5 a month, that's not bad.