

Principal Recommendations to CRPCA Board

As revised 2-March-2023

Newsletter Committee

(B. Brown, M. Johnson, S. Kilcrease, J. Price, D. Seefus, D. Violet, M. Vittorio)

Problem:

The cost of printing and USPS distribution of Tobacco Roads consumes a significant portion of the Region's annual revenue. Since these funds could be reallocated to support other member events and activities, it is questionable as to whether continuation of the current model is in the best interests of our membership.

"Facts":

- Monthly issues of the Tobacco Roads newsletter have rightfully become an important component of the Carolina's Region PCA membership experience. Nothing in this document should be construed as a proposal to discontinue publication of the newsletter. Rather, the intent is to explore whether our current methods of publication and distribution are an efficient use of Club funds.
- TR production is the CRPCA's single largest annual unfunded expense. Though supported in part by advertising revenue, the net cost of publishing TR in 2021 was \$15109 and in 2022 it was \$25506.
- Despite attempts to control these costs, they continue to rise and will likely do so in the future
- CRPCA Board has for some years questioned the value derived from printing and USPS mailing our monthly TR newsletter.
- Some Board members have expressed the opinion that "more advertising" is the solution to our TR printing cost dilemma. However, this solution can be carried only so far. At some point (and we may well be approaching this point) advertising will exceed content. At this juncture readership is likely to decline.
- Many on the Board have been steadfastly opposed to the proposition that we discontinue hard copy publication and distribution. As best can be determined, this opposition is based primarily on the BELIEF that there MAY be a group of members who will be negatively impacted in some unspecified way by no longer receiving a printed version of our newsletter.
- We have no evidence that there is a large (or even small) group of members who will insist that they continue to receive (let alone pay for) a hard copy version of our newsletter.
- We have no clear understanding of the relative value our Member's place on a printed version of TR versus using those funds for alternative purposes. Perhaps some small indication can be found in the results of an informal survey conducted by the Director of one of our larger Areas. Though based on a small sample size, 96% of respondents indicated a preference for an electronic vs printed version of TR.
- Likewise, we have no clear understanding of the relative value our advertisers place on a printed version of TR versus an electronic version – especially in regards to add placement.
- Carolinas Region PCA is one of the very few Regions still paying for the publication of a printed monthly newsletter. Our sister Zone 3 Regions publish and distribute

their newsletters primarily via electronic means. One of these Regions, however, does publish a quarterly printed edition as a special supplement to their other means of communicating with members.

- An electronic version of TR provides capabilities that a printed version does not. E.g., hyperlinks embedded in an electronic version can take readers directly to event registration web sites and those of our advertisers.
- We have some anecdotal data from sister Regions that have transitioned to electronic versions. None of what we have been told supports the concern that doing so will have a deleterious effect on either membership or involvement. In fact, it has been stated that members of other Regions readily accepted this change when they came to understand the cost (both monetarily and in terms of diminished funding available for other activities) of print copy.
- Preliminary discussion with our largest advertiser/sponsor suggests that they would have no objection if a decision was made to discontinue distribution of printed newsletters. In fact, it has been noted by one dealership that they see the newsletter as more of an advertisement for PCA than for their business.
- There is clearly a risk that discontinuation of printed copy may create short term angst for some members. However, the greater risk may be the negative reaction resulting from asking members to pay for something they have heretofore gotten for “free”. What’s more, this negative reaction may not be confined to those who have expressed a desire to continue receiving hard copy. Even those who are content with an electronic version may well feel their fellow members are being somehow treated unfairly.

Possible solutions (*as considered by committee*):

- Continue the current model wherein we print and mail monthly newsletters to those who want them and email an electronic version to those who do not. Efforts will be made to offset costs through additional advertising revenue.
- Continue the current model but reduce costs by decreasing the frequency (to quarterly? Bi-monthly?) and/or format (number pages; color vs B&W).
- Continue the current model but require Members who want a printed and mailed copy to subscribe to this service annually and to their pay for it themselves.
- Discontinue printed and mailed newsletters in favor of electronic publication and distribution.

Principal recommendations:

The following recommendations are made by unanimous vote of the Committee:

1. Beginning with the July, 2023 edition of Tobacco Roads (and until such time that the Board adopts an alternate strategy) the newsletter will be published and distributed digitally. The CRPCA will no longer fund production of hard copy versions of the newsletter for distribution to Members or advertisers/sponsors. Alternatively, a .pdf file and/or link to an electronic version of Tobacco Roads will be emailed to all Members (Primary and Associate).

2. Multiple avenues of communication will be utilized over time to provide all CRPCA Members with a clear and accurate understanding of why CRPCA is transitioning to digital production/ distribution of its newsletter, how and when this transition will take place and how said transition will ultimately benefit its' Members.

It is recommended that such a communication plan include (at minimum) the following:

- a. April – a “blast” email from the President to ALL Members.
 - b. May – President addresses the issue as part of his “From the Driver’s Seat” feature in this month’s issue of Tobacco Roads.
 - c. June – A further reminder is published in this month’s issue of the newsletter reminding Members that this will be the last hard copy edition of TR, reiterating why, noting that money previously spent on hard copy publication/distribution will be reallocated to enhance/offer other Member activities, and how to access the electronic version.
3. All current advertisers/ sponsors will be notified that they will no longer receive printed newsletters. This notification will be made by the primary contact (Area Director, Advertising Chair, etc) for each advertiser/ sponsor and will coincide with the time line set forth above.
4. Advertising Chair will submit for Board approval a revised plan that specifies advertising opportunities, costs, features and benefits in accordance with capabilities available through the new CRPCA website and digital newsletter platform. Communication and implementation of this plan must coincide with the July implementation of the all-digital newsletter.
5. Any monetary savings resulting from cessation of printed newsletters will be reallocated to fund activities - at both the Regional and Area level - that benefit our members.

It is suggested that such a reallocation plan might include the following:

- a. An increase in the fixed amount annual stipend allocated equally to each Area
 - b. An additional stipend budgeted for each Area at the beginning of the year. To access these funds, a proposal and budget can be submitted to the Board for approval at any time during the fiscal year - dependent, of course, on the availability of funds.
6. Though these recommendations deal solely with a transition from printed to electronic copy of our monthly newsletter, the board is encouraged to initiate - at a future date - a review of all available communication tools so as to assure the CRPCA takes full advantage of every opportunity to enhance communications with our members.