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THE TWO RIVER TIMES™



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Claudia Ansorge

A VISION AND A MISSION

GOOGLE THE WORDS, “Two River” and you’ll see a slew of businesses by that name: Two River Computer, Two River Realty, Two River Theater and, of course: Two River Times – to name just a few.

But like a modern Brigadoon, the Two Rivers didn’t fully come into being as a community until it came alive in the imagination of a woman named Claudia Ansorge.

Ansorge is the founder and past publisher of The Two River Times.

By the time she published the first issue of this newspaper in 1990, Ansorge had already achieved an impressive track record working in New York as an editor for Doubleday in the boom years of trade publishing, and going on, in New Jersey, to partner with Nadine Goldsmith, to create Goldsmith & Ansorge, one of the first full-service advertising agencies in Monmouth County.

But perhaps nothing Ansorge has accomplished in her professional life has had the impact of The Two River Times.

Looking back on her TRT years from a distance of some two decades, Ansorge considers her role in founding the newspaper as more of a calling than an idea; more mission than ambition.

Ansorge and her former husband, Norman Ansorge (now deceased), bought a home on Hubbard Park in Red Bank in the early 1970s and settled in to raise their two children, Amanda and Adam. The first stirring of her entrepreneurial energies in 1980 resulted in Goldsmith & Ansorge. The ad agency had grown to be the seventh largest women-owned business in the state by 1989 when its creative director began to think about a new challenge. The only area hometown paper, The Daily Register, had ceased publication in 1989 after 100 years.

“The need for a quality community newspaper was there,” she said. “With my editorial and advertising background, stepping into community journalism felt like a natural extension of myself. The initial capital needed for it came from family funds that included money from my parents and the mortgage on my house.”

Sitting at her desk one afternoon, she looked up at a map on her wall and saw, for the first time, what she’d hardly noticed in the past: the way the waters of the Navesink and the Shrewsbury rivers embraced the communities that surrounded it. And so her newspaper was named.

With the creation of The Two River Times, Claudia aimed to embrace those communities, too.

To help her accomplish that, she chose a mix of newsroom veterans, advertising pros, authors and dreamers, artsy eccentrics and special subject writers who brought their own distinctive voices to the pages of the paper: Among them were



editor Ben Van Vliet, feature writer Cort Smith, movie critic Phil Ellis, theater critic Phil Dorian, children’s author Grace Chetwin, and sports editor Jim Hintelmann. Friend, neighbor and CPA, Tracy Lockhart, anchored the business office and secured financial operations.

The Two River Times – originally a seven-column broadsheet – appeared on newsstands with a wingspread so wide it seemed poised to take flight.

And take flight it did – leaping into the public consciousness as “the newspaper that’s all about us.”

“The design was unique,” Ansorge says, reflecting on its elegance, its art, its content from the heart, created by a staff that came early and stayed late, and believed, as Ansorge did, that the TRT was more than a paper; more than a business,

more than a product.

“It was doing first-rate reporting on all kinds of levels,” she said. “But it was also a love letter about what it meant to everyone to be living in this area as a place to build their families and their businesses and their lives here.”

The first issue featured a front page photo of a face familiar to almost everyone in the newly named Two River area: Bob Sickles, owner of what was then Sickles Farm Market in Little Silver, whose roots in the region date back to the 1600s, as well as a feature on newly elected Mayor Edward J. McKenna Jr. who would have an enduring influence on Red Bank during 16 years in office.

Like Brigadoon after a century’s sleep, Red Bank was reawakening and the The Two River Times was there, not only to tell the story, but to play a

role in the renaissance.

“These were the things that lifted this community, to turn it into a top national destination,” Ansorge said. “It was different people stepping up with different facets of what was needed.”

The TRT sponsored and promoted a creative array of community events, from the Columbus Day parade down Broad Street with Macy’s-style balloons to the Navesink River Swim, in which the mayors of Red Bank and Sea Bright – and a new resident celebrity named Geraldo Rivera – lead a 1-mile swim in the Navesink.

Ansorge met Rivera through a mutual friend when she was seeking investors for her paper in 1990. “I was looking for eight silent partners, and I found one highly vocal majority partner,” she says now.

“He came in on a Saturday

and wrote me the largest check I had ever seen to secure the continuation of the paper I had started. Investigative journalism had established Geraldo’s reputation in broadcast television and he brought the best of what he had to the pages of the paper. He had intelligence, determination and guts – and he went after big stories.”

In 1996, six years after she’d founded and grounded The Two River Times, Ansorge was ready to move on.

She continued to invest her formidable talents in new media ventures, creating place-based marketing plans for other communities statewide while maintaining a publishing presence locally. Her company, Red Hot Community Publishing based in Red Bank, is celebrating the 12th anniversary of its Red Hot Magazine this month, along

with the start-up of its social media network, Red Hot Real.

“My personal path in life has taken me on adventures I never dreamed of,” she said. A few years ago, Ansorge traveled to a still Buddhist-influenced Tibet “in search of an understanding of something greater than myself.”

There, she witnessed a way of being in the world that valued a detachment from the ego, the transitory nature of existence, and the interconnectedness of all things.

“For me, my experience with the Two River Times is like the creation of a Buddhist sand mandala – an effort to capture an intricate cosmology and then, importantly, to let it go. And I love that mandalas are released into flowing waters to travel on.”

By Eileen Moon
Former TRT Managing Editor