

New Times CEO moves quickly to name leadership team, set path to profitability - Beasley aims to transform print edition, improve newspaper's digital-first publishing

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Larry Beasley

Larry Beasley, The Washington Times' new chief executive officer, moved quickly Tuesday to name his own leadership team and set the 30-year-old newspaper on an unambiguous path toward profitability.

On his second day on the job, Mr. Beasley sent an email to all Times employees announcing an "ambitious new strategy to reach profitability by transforming The Washington Times daily print edition in the nation's capital, expanding our digital-first publishing capabilities, and growing our audience nationwide in all mediums.

"Becoming a digital-first, profitable media company with a flagship print edition in the nation's capital will be an exciting and rewarding opportunity for all who seize the day," he added.

Mr. Beasley formed a new five-person senior leadership team that will run the day-to-day operations of the newspaper, which has more than 100,000 daily and weekly print subscribers nationwide and about 6 million monthly readers online. He also announced that the paper's current editor, Ed Kelley, is stepping down to pursue other opportunities. Mr. Kelley has served 18 months in the top editor's position.

Mr. Beasley said the new leadership team will include three executives who have played a key role in the paper's operations during the last two years:

- John Martin, an operations and technology executive who has held senior level positions at MCI, Ernst & Young and Jones Lang LaSalle, to serve in the role of Chief Operating Officer overseeing all technology, logistics and operations of the company. Mr. Martin joined the company a year ago as a consultant and has focused on operational efficiency and revenue.
- Keith Cooperrider, a longtime Times' executive to serve as Chief Financial Officer, responsible

for managing the day-to-day finances of the company.

- Thomas Culligan, a longtime media executive who has worked in senior positions at the Chicago Tribune, the Los Angeles Daily News and the Minneapolis Star-Tribune as the Chief Revenue and Marketing Officer.

A search is under way for a new executive editor, and, in the interim, the newsroom will report to Managing Editor Christopher Dolan. Brett Decker, who currently manages the newspaper's opinion products, will join the senior leadership team as will the new executive editor.

"News and opinion are the double-barreled engines that drive our audience each day," Mr. Beasley explained.

Mr. Beasley's announcement is the latest in a series of moves that have occurred inside The Times since the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, the leader of the Unification Church that has helped fund the newspaper since its inception in 1982, passed away at the age of 92 in September.

Rev. Moon's longtime confidant, Douglas Joo, stepped down as chairman of The Times earlier this month to return to South Korea and help oversee the church's broader operations worldwide. Thomas P. McDevitt, who has served as The Times' president from 2007-09 and again since 2010, has been named to replace Mr. Joo as chairman.

Mr. Beasley, who has a successful record of helping media companies transform themselves to meet the financial and technological demands of the 21st century, was named Friday to replace Mr. McDevitt, the first time in the company's history that a non-church member has held the position.

"Larry is a news professional with an impeccable sense of what makes a media company profitable, and he is exactly what the Board was looking for. He is well equipped to lead the company to profitability and sustainability, which is what the ownership has long wanted," Mr. McDevitt said.

Mr. Beasley met with senior leaders on Monday and made clear that he is committed to keeping The Times as a five-day-a-week print publication in Washington, D.C., even as other newspapers in places like Detroit and New Orleans have scaled back their print publishing schedules.

But he also made clear the key to reaching profitability was aggressively aligning exclusive content to the needs of The Times' audience and changing the mentality of the company to seamless, digital-first publishing.

Mr. Beasley's appointment was cheered by some of The Washington Times' fans in the marketplace, including Jim Dinegar, the longtime chairman of the Washington, D.C., Board of Trade.

"The team at The Washington Times makes the real effort to become involved in the business community," Mr. Dinegar said. "This region grows and adjustments must be made to accommodate that growth. The Washington Times is growing, too, and these changes signal how active this organization will be in adjusting to the new dynamics of their business and their readership."

Former Times' news executives said the current transition appears to have been part of long-planned preparation for Mr. Moon's eventual passing, which has clearly focused in recent years on the goal of making the newspaper financially sustainable.

"The Times long ago established the credibility of its news product with enterprising reporting and

thoughtful, influential opinion pages that set it apart from other publications. But it also has clearly understood and appreciated — at least since the time I worked there in 2008 — that a newspaper derives its ultimately credibility when it makes products that pay for themselves. And much of what they have done in recent years has been aimed at focusing the newspaper on reaching that sustainability,” said Jeff Birnbaum, who was the paper’s managing editor-digital in 2008 and 2009.

Said Wesley Pruden, who was the editor in chief of The Times for two decades and remains one of its most widely read political columnists: “The good news for The Times is that its audience has never left it and is rooting for it through these turbulent economic times for all newspapers. That loyalty combined with the experience of a newspaperman like Larry Beasley should give The Times a fighting chance to reach its long-sought goal of profitability over the next few years.”