

# ABCs of Publicity

## **Introduction**

You've got a great Elks volunteer project.

Your volunteers are super, and every week you're amazed by your project's wonderful accomplishments. Management is sound, spirits are high, so who needs publicity?

You do.

In the volunteer world of Elksdom, to stand still is to slip behind, and to slow up is to give away any chance to really move forward. You have to work hard just to maintain your current level of volunteers and public support. You have to work harder for them to grow.

The right kind of publicity can make your work a lot easier, and with a quick review of some basic tips, we hope we can make getting that kind of publicity a snap for you.

What can publicity do?

- Recruit volunteers
- Build public support
- Inspire donations and participation
- Publicize your services and potential
- Provide recognition for volunteers

Every Elk likes to know that the work they do is recognized and appreciated, and no one deserves that sort of acknowledgment, that reward, more than our Elk volunteers.

Fine, you may say, we agree that good publicity is a boon, but the budget sure doesn't allow for hiring a public relations whiz, and with all we have to do, who has time to advertise and promote?

We think you will find that you do have the time if you just take a few moments to run through this quick review, keeping in mind that getting good publicity requires little more than what most of you do every day. All it takes is doing it with the right people, in the right way.

The information contained in this online manual is applicable to Elk publications as well as commercial media contacts and publications.

## **What Is News?**

The standard answer to the question "What is news?" is that news is whatever the editor decides is news. News is what the editor thinks will interest people today. News must meet the criteria of timeliness and interest in order to be "news."

There are two kinds of news: voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary news is what you can create -- the announcement of a volunteer recruiting drive is an example. Involuntary news is unplanned -- involuntary news can be managed after its initial release. A prepared statement for the news media about the circumstances leading to the event and standing policies on release of names can help you manage such involuntary news.

Our news stories must be timely and include one or more of the following:

- Novelty
- Human Interest
- Elk Member Interest
- Proximity
- Public Interest
- Money/Donations
- Tragedy Support
- Irony
- Humor

If it has occurred to you that the more elements a story has, the better that story will be, then you are beginning to think like an editor.

See if you can find the news elements in this scenario:

A local Lodge volunteer saved the life of a drowning boy today at Lake Whatchamacallit. The Lodge member later revealed that he wanted to be a lifeguard when he was younger, but had twice failed the Red Cross Lifesaving Test.

The Lodge member is from the local area, so assuming the lake is nearby, the story has proximity. It happened today, so the news is timely. There is certainly human interest in the prevention of a drowning, and there is some irony in the fact that the Lodge member had failed the swimming test. This would be a pretty good story.

Take a good look at the story you want to tell. Have you looked at it from every angle that these elements offer? Which of the elements in your story is the strongest? Now you're really thinking like an editor.

### **Creating News Events**

You can literally make news by staging events that attract news coverage, especially on slow news days. Presenting service awards to notable public figures and officials who have helped your cause is a good way to get recognition. For instance, local Lodges can present annual Achievement or Recognition Awards to city officials, employees, or to outstanding private sector supporters. You can call a news conference or stage a brief reception and presentation program. Local media will almost always turn out for such occasions, or you can make black and white photos of recipients and distribute them with captions to area press.

### **What Is Publicity, and What Do I Have to Do?**

Publicity is simply letting people know through the media what you are doing, why you are doing it, and what it means to them.

You spend most of your day talking to people, communicating. What are you doing through that talk? You are:

- Recruiting volunteers
- Inspiring donations
- Motivating volunteers
- Researching sites
- Rewarding volunteers
- Educating
- Asking for help

- Persuading

Why not let someone do a little of that work for you? Write a letter, and you reach one or two people. Write a news release, and you'll reach thousands.

Make a phone call, and you let one person know. Tape a message, and radio can carry your message to thousands.

Visit a friend or official, and you've made an impression on an individual or two. Appear on a local talk show or make a videotape, and you touch hundreds of thousands.

In other words, you don't really need to do anything new ... you just need to do what you do a little differently and include a few folks who can help you.

## **Buzzwords**

**Broadcast:** refers to the electronic media -- radio and television.

**Media:** all of the conduits an organization can use to tell its story to our members and to the public, such as Lodge bulletins, Elk and commercial newspapers, radio, television, magazines, billboards, posters, and direct mail. Even hand bills on bulletin boards.

**Print:** refers to newspapers (daily or weekly) and magazines - not only commercial publications but also in-house publications of local industry, business, labor, non-profit organizations, civic groups, clubs, churches, etc.

**Publicity:** supplying information to our members by Lodge bulletins and to the public through media not controlled by our organization. News releases and public service announcements are publicity devices.

**Promotion:** like publicity, promotion seeks to inform, but you are in control of the message. Advertising, for example, is a promotion tool. So are your Lodge bulletins.

**Public Relations:** the art of telling the Elks' story, keeping the public aware of our work and how and why your Elks' Lodge is of benefit to the community. It includes the use of publicity and promotion. Public Service

**Announcements:** announcements aired by radio and television stations on behalf of non-profit organizations are often referred to as PSA's.

## **Working with the Commercial Media**

There is one hard and fast fact of life when you try to interest the media in your voluntary news: You've got a lot of competition. There's more than one worthwhile organization with a story to tell. Newspapers have limited space in which to print articles, and radio/TV stations allot limited amounts of air time for news and public service programming. What you need is a competitive edge. You can give yourself that edge with a media plan.

A sound media plan will always have a goal and each aspect of your plan will be written with your goal in mind. Remember, there is beauty in simplicity; the less complicated a plan, the better it will work. Your plan will address three basic questions:

- What do I want to accomplish?

- How do I accomplish it?
- When do I accomplish it?

For example, your Lodge wants to take on a community project, but your volunteers need some expert assistance (community leaders, carpenters, electricians, etc.) and materials to get the job done.

The Goal -- To recruit temporary services of skilled labor and generate donations of paint, plaster and other materials.

The Plan -- The audience (your members and within the community tradespeople, building contractors and supply sources) is rather narrow. You can best reach this audience through newsletters and local trade publications. Broadcast ads would reach too wide an audience. You can, however, ask the local paper to run an eye-catching ad spelling out your needs.

The Timetable -- You'll need at least six to eight weeks to plan and place ads, measure the response, and organize the volunteer work.

## **Tools of the Trade**

The most common written tools of the publicist are news advisories, news releases and public service announcements.

Usually, only small circulation newspapers will reprint publicity materials verbatim. However, editors do read properly styled news releases for story leads, and community or public service program directors do use public service announcements on the air.

It is best to keep your release or advisory to a single page, especially if you are announcing a speech, award, grant, or forthcoming policy statement -- any event for which you are seeking coverage. If, however, you have a powerful story with hard news or strong human interest value, you can prepare a full account, lengthy enough to cover all newsworthy details.

Newsreleases often have a way of getting lost in the shuffle of the journalism business. Whenever possible, follow up your mailings to editors with a call. Ask for the appropriate editor (the top working editor for major news, the city editor for local interest stories, particular feature-section editors -- business, sports or "show" pages -- for special focus or human interest material). Explain briefly that you have a story that will interest them and you want to be sure they have received your release or advisory. If an editor hasn't heard of it, give major details and send your material addressed personally to him or her.

With widely distributed news materials, and in certain instances, you won't have time or the ability to contact print personnel. You will have to depend solely on the effectiveness of your material. You should follow the prescribed, relatively simple procedures when preparing material for print editors.

The next section explains how to write news releases and advisories.

## **The News Release**

A well-prepared news release follows a standard format which helps an editor to know as quickly as possible why you are writing, what you want done, and when.

This format is known as the "inverted pyramid." It allows you to get the important facts of your story into the first few lines, and then if an editor doesn't have space for the entire release, it can be cut from the bottom where less important information is given.

At the top of the pyramid, the first paragraph, is the "lead." It is usually one sentence long, never more than two, and generally tells the "who, what, where, when, why and how" (the "five W's and H" of your story).

Here is an example of a lead that carries a great deal of information:

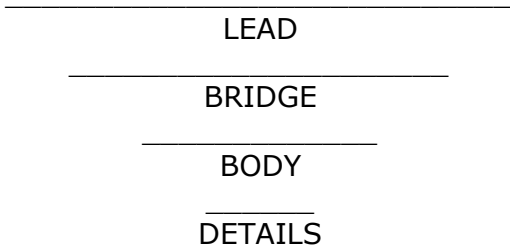
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
CONTACT: (Applicable Name)  
Phone Number

**River City Elks Lodge Honors Police Chief**

RIVER CITY -- Police Chief John Mikel of the River City Police Department accepted and award from River City Elks Lodge in recognition of his 25 years of outstanding leadership in law enforcement in the community. The award was presented at a recognition banquet at the Elks Lodge on July 1.

-30-

**NEWS RELEASE:**



The second paragraph is called the "bridge." A bridge is a means of transition from the summary information of the lead to the detailed information of the rest of the release. One of the functions of the bridge is to explain any "WHYS" or "HOWs" not included in the lead. For example, it may not have been practical or desirable to explain the WHY in your lead, but the WHY logically could be given in the bridge.

Here is an example of a "bridge" paragraph of a news release. Note how the bridge explains why the donor made the grant to the volunteer project:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
CONTACT: George Bailey  
123/456-7890

**Pilot In-Home Senior Volunteer Project Gains Funding Support**

**Lead**

SEATTLE - Seattle's elderly, largely overlooked as community service providers until their discovery last year by a pilot in-home senior volunteer project, will be extending their efforts into other King County areas in 1986 - thanks to a timely \$15,000 grant from the Fred Myer Charitable Trust.

**Bridge**

In naming the King County Retired Senior Volunteer Program as a funding recipient, the Portland-based grant maker under scored its goal to help prolong independent living among the Northwest's growing senior citizen population. The additional funds, according to RSVP Director Linda Goldman-Thal, are destined to assist her program's in-home project development in other parts of the county. RSVP's model project is described by Goldman-Thal as the first of its kind nationally to involve homebound or institutionalized people over 60 in community service volunteering. She envisions the concept as eventually reaching communities and volunteers nationwide.

The bridge also can be used to provide "attribution," or to give the source of the information in the lead. Still another possible use of the bridge is to bring out information that is not part of the lead, but which complements it.

Here is an example of a "bridge" paragraph that provides attribution and contains personal information about the Grand Exalted Ruler that is not contained in the lead:

NEWS ADVISORY  
CONTACT: George Jetson  
987/654-3210

**National Elks Leader to Visit River City Lodge**

**Lead**

RIVER CITY -- John Johnson, national president of the BPO Elks of the USA, will visit River City Elks Lodge for a banquet at 8 p.m. July 27. The Lodge is located at 1234 East Main Street.

**Bridge**

A resident of Anytown, Ind., Johnson will be visting River City Lodge as part of his nationwide tour of Lodges and state Elks associations following his election as Grand Exalted Ruler on July 15 at the Elks National Convention in Las Vegas. He will be presenting the Lodge an award for its support of the Elks National Foundation, the charitable arm of the 1.3 million-member organization. River City Lodge donated \$77 per capita to the Foundation last year, helping the Foundation distribute a record \$11.3 million in support of youth athletic and drug education programs, aid for people with disabilities, cancer and transplantation research, veterans service, college scholarships, and other philanthropic programs. The Elks National Foundation has always held a special place in Johnson's heart. As a youth, he received a Foundation scholarship that helped him attend Indiana University.

The third and last part of the pyramid is the "body." The primary function of the body

7

is to explain the information given in the lead. In other words, the body "fleshes out" the facts of the lead with interesting and significant details. Remember, the facts in the body are presented in diminishing order of importance.

The sample news releases illustrate the layout of a release. If you don't have a news release form, use your organization's letterhead stationery for the release. Your letterhead or a news release form reinforces your credibility. Mention your position in the Lodge to further reinforce your credentials.

Always type your release, using double (or triple) spacing, and type on only one side of the paper. Leave a large left margin (1 1/2 inches) so that editors may "mark-up" your release. Editors may wish to specify a certain typeface for your submission, delete a line or two to make it fit a page, or add an editorial note about the copy. If your release requires more than one page, be sure to type "MORE" at the bottom of each page except the last.

At the top of each succeeding page, type the page number three times: 2-2-2, 3-3-3. Then drop down an inch and continue your story. At the end of your release, type the symbol "-30-," or "###," which means simply "the end."

There are other important elements of a release. Always include on the first page of the release at the upper left a release line that indicates when the story may be released. In most cases, "FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE," will be appropriate. Occasionally you may want to "embargo" the release and request that it not be used until a certain date or time. In such a case, the release line might read, "EMBARGOED UNTIL NOON, SEPTEMBER 28." Releases written for the sole purpose of alerting the media to an upcoming event, such as a speech, should use the words "NEWS ADVISORY" as the release line. In the upper right of the page, include a CONTACT name and phone number so that an editor or reporter can call for more information if necessary.

Another element is the "slug" or "head", which is a title for your release. The slug is between the release line and the lead paragraph and summarizes in a few words the contents of the release. Good "slugs" or "heads" should capsule the lead paragraph and grab one's attention. For example, a story about television stars of the show "The Love Boat" told of their decision to join a national volunteer drive to promote drug information. The head declared:

**"Love Boat" Stars Set Sail against Drugs**

An effective head can also be straightforward and factual:

**GAINESVILLE RESIDENT BATES ELECTED TO LEAD B.P.O. ELKS**

You also have the option of beginning the lead paragraph with a dateline, which tells where the release originated and what date it was written. If you are sending your release to a local editor, and if your event dates are in your lead, the dateline is unnecessary.

If you have read this far and understand what's going on, you can consider yourself a reporter. It takes practice to write a good release, but here are a few helpful hints:

- Use short words, short sentences, short paragraphs.
- Give exact dates in a release, not "next Thursday."
- Check and recheck your facts for accuracy.
- Never quote someone without his or her permission.
- Avoid the use of adjectives in a news release. Unless it's a quote, opinion is not appropriate in a release.
- Spell out numbers from one to nine, then use numerals. Never begin a sentence with numerals.

- Always proofread your release before sending it out. Correct all typographical errors.

Once your release is written, you have to decide where to send it. If your project covers a large area, find out what newspapers cover the same area and call each one to see who should receive your release. Larger daily newspapers have a number of different editors and reporters who cover certain areas of interest or "beats." On smaller, weekly newspapers, there is usually one editor who receives all releases. In either case, it is always best to have a name to send your release to rather than just a general address.

Remember, newspapers are flooded daily with releases from corporations, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations; you have to do everything possible to ensure that your release gets read.

In addition to having an editor's name, another technique is to handwrite the addresses on the envelopes (assuming you have legible handwriting). Still another technique is to call the editor/reporter whose name you have been given and discuss your event with him or her. Usually the person will ask you to send a copy of the release, and when it comes across that person's desk, he or she may be more likely to give some attention to it.

Since newspapers usually have afternoon deadlines, it is best to call in the morning or as early in the day as possible. Generally, calls should be limited to particularly important or unusual events.

Keep in mind that editors and reporters are almost always working under pressure of tight deadlines, so keep your conversation brief and to the point, and don't be offended if the person to whom you are speaking seems abrupt. They'll appreciate your professionalism in understanding their situation.

A good photograph -- with the emphasis on the word good -- will enhance almost any press release. Naturally, if you are promoting an event, the photo cannot reflect an event that has not yet happened. Photos of volunteers erecting a tent for the event, a photo of the mayor if he or she plans to attend, etc., can accompany a release about an upcoming event.

If the release talks about an event that has already happened, make sure that the photos show activity if at all possible. The photos known as "grip and grin" are very boring, although you see them all the time in newspapers, and sometimes they are inevitable.

Photos of an entire recognition luncheon showing 200 people are useless. Photos should zero in on no more than several people. Make sure your subjects are close to one another in the photo so that one person is not in the extreme left and another in the extreme right and a large desk is the subject in the middle. Don't be afraid to "stage" the shot you want. Professional photographers do it this way all the time. And speaking of professionals, try to find someone who is experienced with a camera and who has good equipment if your project cannot supply it. Snapshots are not acceptable; newspapers need black and white glossies; 5" X 7" or 8" X 10" are standard.

## **Using the Wire Services**

Nearly all points and broadcast media subscribe to news wire services of the Associated Press, United Press International, and other services. Reporters faithfully read the news wire "daybooks," listings of upcoming, newsworthy events. The wire services will list your event if you simply call them in advance with a brief description of its essentials -- who, what, where, and when. The major news wire companies maintain state and area



9

offices, usually offering statewide listings of newsworthy events and activities. You may call any such state service, tell them you have a news event for a particular day, and dictate your description over the phone. Remember, make it short and sweet, else the transcriber might confuse facts or worse, edit out important data. Include only the most essential facts in wire listings.

## **Public Service Announcements**

Now let's talk about public service announcements, more often referred to as PSAs. Radio and television stations air PSAs on behalf of nonprofit organizations. If you wish to get a PSA about your volunteer recruiting drive on the air, you should first call the Public Service Director at each broadcast station three weeks to a month ahead of time to find out a few things:

- Do they accept scripts or do they want taped material? If they want taped material, will they allow you to come to the station and tape the PSA?
- If they accept scripts, how far in advance do they want them?
- What length PSA do they prefer - 60 seconds, 30 seconds or 10 seconds? (30 seconds recommended)

If you are to write your own PSAs, bear in mind that broadcast writing is far different from writing for the print media. Broadcast copy is written and designed for the ear. It is personal and has a sense of immediacy.

There are four basic rules in writing broadcast copy: It must be clear, concise, conversational and correct. Also, broadcast copy uses the ACTIVE voice and PRESENT TENSE whenever possible. "The volunteer center will sponsor a jamboree Saturday, July 7," uses the active voice, as opposed to "A jamboree will be sponsored by the Volunteer Center, Saturday, July 7."

### **PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT**

CONTACT: Frank Thomas  
321/654-0987

**Announcer:** DID YOU KNOW LOCAL PARTICIPATION IN THE LARGEST COEDUCATIONAL SPORTS PROGRAM IN THE COUNTRY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN? IT'S THE BENEVOLENT AND PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS-SPONSORED "HOOP SHOOT" COMPETITION. LOCAL ELKS LODGE MEMBERS ARE LOOKING FOR BOYS AND GIRLS AGES EIGHT TO THIRTEEN WHO LOVE TO SHOOT FREE THROWS. LOCAL WINNERS WILL ADVANCE TO REGIONAL AND POSSIBLY NATIONAL "HOOP SHOOT" COMPETITIONS. CONTACT YOUR LOCAL ELKS LODGE FOR DETAILS. ... ENCOURAGE YOUR KIDS TO HAVE A BALL.

-30-

Clear copy is easy to understand the first time it is heard. It is developed in a logical way and flows smoothly so that it is easy for the listener to follow.

Concise copy does not include unnecessary words. The copy must sound conversational. One way to test your copy for conversational tone is to read it aloud. Make sure there are no hard-to-pronounce words or awkward combinations of words. Use contractions, just as you would if you were talking.

Once you're sure you've achieved clear, concise and conversational copy, make sure it

is correct.

Broadcast PSA spots are generally acceptable in lengths of 10, 20, 30 or 60 seconds. A 10-second spot is about 25 words long, a 20-second spot is 50 words, a 30-second spot is 75 words, and a 60-second spot is 150 words. It is a good idea to provide PSAs in all four lengths to a station.

Study the sample PSA and try to copy its format. As with a news release, always include a contact name and phone number.

## **What's What in the Media?**

Whether you live in a small town or large city, there are many different ways to get your message out. Here are some of them:

- Classified ads - help wanted
- Special events
- Radio/TV Public Service Announcements (PSAs)
- Displays/exhibits in highly visible locations
- TV talk shows
- Church bulletins
- Radio talk shows
- Posters/flyers
- Radio news features
- Newspaper community calendars
- Articles in special interest publications
- Billboards
- Newspaper feature articles on your project

You may include many of these outlets in your media plan, but success will depend on a bit of groundwork. The first step is to do a little research. Make a list of radio stations, TV stations, newspapers and other publications in your area.

Find out who does what at each of these places. For instance, find out what interview shows are available and appropriate, who books the guests for each of the shows, and who the show hosts are. Identify TV news assignment editors, TV/radio news directors, newspaper city and feature editors, and TV/radio public service directors.

Call the stations and newspapers and talk to their receptionists. They can be very helpful in providing answers to questions such as, "Can you please tell me what shows on your station have guests and to whom I should talk for each of them?" TV talk shows are usually booked a month in advance, radio talk shows about two weeks in advance.

## **Who's Who in the Media?**

Here are some of the people in the media with whom you might work:

### **Newspapers:**

- City Editor (makes assignments for local news stories)
- Reporter who handles volunteer news column
- Editorial Editor (chooses guest editorials and opinion columns)
- Feature Editor (makes assignments for human interest stories)
- Advertising Manager

- Community Calendar Editor

### **Radio Stations:**

- News Director
- Public Service Director
- Talk show producers/hosts/schedulers

### **TV Stations:**

- News Assignment Editor (makes decisions on where to send news crews)
- Talk show producers/hosts/schedulers
- Public Service Director
- Reporters who frequently cover social issues

## **So You're Gonna Be Famous Tips for Interviewing**

Congratulations! Through your hard work and ability to sell the importance of your organization, you've managed to schedule yourself to appear on a TV talk show. So what do you do now?

Here are a few tips for being interviewed:

- Dress appropriately. You represent your organization and its goal and should be ready to make the best impression. Suits/sport coat and tie for men, dresses/business suits for women are recommended.
- Carefully choose the colors you wear - avoid bright, flashy colors and white. Also avoid plaid or checked patterns. It's usually safe to wear "earth" colors or pastels. Shiny jewelry or a highly polished tie bar will reflect studio lights. The sound of loose change in pockets is picked up by microphones.
- Maintain good posture. If you're seated in a swivel chair, be conscious that your nervous energy might cause you to swing back and forth.
- ARRIVE EARLY. Often the host wants to talk to you before the show is scheduled to begin, and that's a good time to tell the host what you'd like to get across to the audience.
- Make sure you have facts straight before you go on the air - know your program. Memorize important phone numbers, addresses, dates, etc.
- Send a list of sample questions to the host well before the interview. Hosts who do a lot of interviews and don't have time to prepare will often rely on your list of suggested questions for the interview, and that will help you get your message out.
- During the interview, try to be relaxed. Try to answer the questions as if you're chatting with a friend over a cup of coffee. Above all, be honest, don't try to bluff your way through a question if you don't know the answer. Try not to be defensive or aggressive.
- After the interview when you're back in the office, take time to send a thank-you note to the host and scheduler. If the show increased interest in your organization in some measurable way such as number of phone calls, be sure to mention it.

## **Some Final Thoughts**

It is the mark of a successful publicity effort when writers, editors, broadcasters and others come to you with requests for information and interviews or suggestions for feature stories and broadcasts. The more effective your publicity job, the greater the

media's appetite for your news.

Some essentials that create a climate in which media people think of your organization whenever it might be part of a story are:

- The absolute reliability, accuracy, promptness, fairness, and objectivity of your publicity efforts.
- A good batting average when it comes to answering difficult or controversial media requests. Promptly dealing with rumors is also important.
- The ability of your officials to make interesting, powerful presentations is accomplished by briefing them on how to handle themselves in various situations - press conferences, hearings, provocative questioning by reporters, appearances with elected officials, community leaders, etc.
- Your success in convincing influential and respected groups to be allies in your public relations operation by endorsing your cause or backing your objectives.

### **ABCs of Publicity: Addendum**

After reviewing all of the GL Public Relations Committee materials, the handouts from the many other GL committees, commissions, and programs, and your own state association or Lodge's materials, you may feel a bit overwhelmed as a PR chairperson. But before you start wringing your hands or pulling clumps of hair from your head, remember that no matter what your background is, you already have all of the skills and most of the tools that you will need to run a successful public relations campaign.

"What skills?" you might ask. You may have never worked with the media before, you may be worried that you don't have "contacts" with the news media, you may not think that you're a "good writer," you might suspect that publicity and public relations will cost too much in time and money, and worst of all, that once it's all said and done, you may not have much to show for your effort. Those are good concerns, and they show that you've done your homework and already started to evaluate your resources before you've put your publicity program into effect. But, believe it or not, you'll see that each of those concerns is exaggerated once you realize the skills that each and every one of us already has--we can all tell a story.

Publicity and public relations are nothing more than telling your important stories to the right audiences.

### **"But I don't know anyone in the media and I've never worked with anyone in the media!"**

As a PR chairperson, that's a scary position to find yourself in, but it's one that you can change. And it's important that you do change it. A recent survey of ten national nonprofit organizations found that each organization believed that "personal contact" with people of influence and "cultivating reporters" were very important to successfully shaping public opinion.

Making personal contacts and cultivating relationships are things that we do in our everyday lives. Each new client that you have at work is a new personal contact. Learning about a new interest of an old friend involves cultivating a relationship.

As a PR chairperson, it's up to you to make contacts in the media and to cultivate these contacts into relationships. By doing this, you'll be able to use the media's skills, talents, and their means of communications to help you better tell your own story.

- Research your local papers and other media for the names of reporters, editors, publishers, freelance writers, news directors, and columnists. This can be done in

a number of ways. You can call your local paper or radio station and ask for the person who covers community events. Better still, do this, and then read through several issues of the newspaper to discover what type of stories this individual likes to write. Eventually, you're bound to come across a reporter who is interested in telling your type of story.

- If a reporter covers an event or program that is similar to one that your Lodge, district, or state association also sponsors, write that reporter a friendly "fan" letter. Congratulate her for the work she did on the story and let her know about any upcoming Elks events that are similar to the one she just covered. Everyone appreciates compliments and recognition, and they're definitely remembered. That old saw about catching more flies with honey than vinegar is true for public relations. Don't complain to the media about how it's biased. Change it's bias. Find something in your local paper or on your local TV station that you can praise and praise it. Be sincere. These simple kudos, which don't take a lot of effort on your part, will pay off in the long run. Keep in mind that other old saw about how one good turn deserves another.
- You might consider hosting a media awards night at your Lodge and presenting plaques for outstanding reporting and editorial work. The Lodges that have hosted such programs have seen a dramatic increase in coverage of Lodge events in their local media.
- Don't get discouraged if you don't see immediate results after you've met with members of the media. Powerful relationships develop over time. Make sure that your publicity campaign is working for long-range goals and not short-term, quick fixes.

Once you've met with the media, you'll need to cultivate those new relationships. With each reporter, writer, or editor, you'll need to do some very important things that won't take too much time, but will ensure that those individuals will provide the best coverage of your events.

- Address the reporters by name. Everyone appreciates being remembered.
- Maintain a list of each media person's name, address, phone and fax numbers, and e-mail address. Know their deadlines and make sure that your publicity campaign can work with those deadlines. Find out how they want to work with you (should you edit your own material, send photographs or negatives, write your own material) and then make it easy for them to work with you.
- Know each reporter's audience. The man who covered your Lodge's donation to a child with cancer may not be the reporter who covers your Flag Day ceremony. Knowing each reporter's "beat" and audience will save everyone time.
- Invite reporters to Lodge functions. If your Lodge hosts a social golf outing and you know the community events programmer for the local radio station enjoys golf, you might want to consider sending him a free invitation. Granted, the social golf outing might not be newsworthy, but your generosity will be remembered.
- If you want the media to cover your event, make sure that you know their deadlines and give them advance notice so that they can make arrangements to attend. Just as your Lodge wouldn't throw together a charity ball at the last minute, it's best if you can plan ahead with the media.
- If you've gotten the media to cover a Lodge function, be sure that you make it easy for them to do their jobs. You might consider providing them with a press kit (or even a simple handout that contains the relevant information and the name and phone number of the event's contact person) so that the reporters will

have the necessary background to cover the event. When the reporter arrives at the Lodge or the event site, introduce the reporter to the people in charge of the event and let the reporter know who can answer any questions that he might have. Find out if the reporter needs anything from you, and then let him work. Keep out of his way. It makes his job easier. Even though the reporter has a contact person at the Lodge, make your own follow-up call and offer to answer any questions that the reporter may now have.

### **"But I'm not a good writer!"**

If this is one of your concerns about being a PR chair, don't worry. Sure, it'd be great if you could craft a brilliant turn of phrase, but it's nothing to worry about if you can't. After all, press releases aren't "literature," and more often than not, you'll find that your carefully written press release will be rewritten, condensed, or heavily edited.

If you can write a sentence that makes sense, has minimal grammatical errors, and all the names spelled correctly, you've got the writing skills that you'll need to create a press release. As a PR chairperson, being a "good writer" isn't nearly as important as being an excellent storyteller. Publicity and public relations are about communication, and, at its most basic level, communication is about telling a story.

Our lives are built around stories. We tell them out-loud to our friends and family and we hear them every day. They teach us, they entertain us, and they inspire us. Press releases and publicity items aren't any different, they just happen to be written, and they're stories that are told to more than just the folks gathered at the kitchen table or the water cooler.

If you start thinking about the great stories that you've heard and think about the people who told them, you'll begin to discover the key elements that you'll need to make a press release--no matter how good or bad of a writer you are. After all, as a kid, you told stories before you even learned to write.

The bottom line is that a good story, more than good writing, makes for good publicity. Here are some of the keys to good storytelling:

#### The Audience

- Audience is one of the most important things about telling a story. At first, this might seem like a bit of an exaggeration, but the more you think about it the more you'll see its truth. Great storytellers--the guy at work who spins those amazing tales about his weekend, your hilarious neighbor who fills you in on her husband's screw-ups--know their audiences. The audience affects how we tell a story and what needs to be told. When you think about it, most people are very careful about telling off-color jokes in front of strangers that they'd have no problem telling to their friends. Why? Because the joke teller isn't sure whether he's got the "right" audience for his humor. What's appropriate for one audience in terms of language or content may not be appropriate for another audience. As a PR chair, it's up to you to find out what an audience is looking for. Is your local newspaper columnist more interested in the plight of our nation's veterans or in handicapped children? If he's interested in veterans (but you didn't know that) and you've told him about your Lodge's handicapped children's program, you've lost an opportunity to reach a wider audience. Make sure that your content (the story your press releases tell) reach the correct audience (reporters, editors, etc).
- An audience is always bigger than just you. We may think out-loud, but in most cases we don't tell full stories to ourselves, because there wouldn't be much point. We already know the story, so we tell it to others. As a PR chairperson, this is an important thing to remember. Public relations isn't about telling your Lodge about its good deeds--that's telling it to yourself--it's about telling the story of

your charities and programs to your community.

- An audience affects the length of the story. Considerate storytellers make sure that they can tell their entire story without boring an audience. The good storyteller tells what's essential and leaves out the rest. In public relations, the key is to be brief. We live in a fast-paced age of sound bytes, news clips, and ever-shortening attention spans. With your press releases, keep your story short and make what you tell essential to the story.
- An audience is made up of people and people like hearing about other people. Not many of us would spend a half-hour listening to the history of reinforced concrete. But let's say that the inventor of reinforced concrete spent his entire life in a wheelchair, had been born into poverty, and then struggled against these disadvantages to make something of himself--now we're beginning to get to a story that an audience might want to hear. Why? Because all good stories are about people, not things or statistics. We like hearing about each other's triumphs and tragedies. For the Elks, it's one thing to say that we spend millions of dollars each year helping handicapped children, but the story of one child who was helped is a more powerful publicity tool than the total dollar value of our charity. That's not to say that statistics aren't of value and can't be used in publicity. They can, but it's always more interesting for an audience if statistics are used as part of the story and not as the story itself.
- An audience knows self-promotion when it sees it and they don't particularly care for it. We all know at least one person who's smarter, richer, and better-looking than we are and doesn't mind reminding us of it. In some ways we might actually like "Mr. Wonderful," but when he starts telling us about how he's planning a three-month vacation touring the world, most of us begin ignoring him. After awhile, nobody likes a braggart. In terms of public relations and publicity, you need to find that careful balance of promoting the good works of your Lodge or state association and not being perceived as a shameless self-promoter. For your news releases, the key to this is making the story that you tell about the people that your Lodge helps and not the story of your Lodge helping people. The difference is slight, but it's an important difference that can mean reaching an even greater audience.

## The Story

- Stories involve something happening to people. It'd be easy to make a more complex definition of a story or a news item, but there's really no need to. This basic concept is the simplest definition you can use as a PR chairperson to determine whether or not you have an event that is newsworthy. If nothing happens in a story, the audience gets bored and stops listening. If nothing happens in a press release, the editor gets bored and decides not to cover your Lodge's news. Good or bad, it's not a story if nothing happens, because having something happen (or has happened or is about to happen) is what interests the audience. And if anything interests an audience, it's stories about things that affect people or about people themselves. Statistics and stock quotes are interesting, but they become more newsworthy when an audience can sense the affect those numbers have on people. In terms of publicity, "human-interest" stories are basically stories that show something happening to a person or a group of people. During your work as a PR chairperson, you should take a look at the programs and events at the Lodge and see if they hold up to this definition of story. If they do--if they involve something happening to people--then you have the makings of a news release. If they don't, you should ask yourself if there's a way that you can recast the information about the events (recasting information is putting a "spin" on it) so that they can fit this definition of story and then be used as a news release.

- Stories are either timely or timeless. The stories that we hear are either timely, dealing with current events or topical issues, or they are timeless, treasured anecdotes that don't need to be tied to a certain holiday, season, or time-frame to have significance. These timeless stories, or "evergreens" are often fun and heart-warming, but more often than not, the media will be more likely to cover a timely, topical news item than one that is timeless. As a PR chairperson, most of the news releases will be timely; an upcoming fund-raiser, the donation that the Lodge made during the last meeting. With timely stories, it is highly important that they be written and sent to the media as soon as possible. Since, it's the timely stories that the media is looking to tell, make sure that your press releases are current in nature.
- Stories always have a reason for being told. It's pretty rare when someone will tell you something for no reason. Normally, when we're told a story the teller wants something of us. They may want to teach us something, inspire us, or simply entertain us. But the storyteller wants something, and what they want shapes how they tell their story. After you've determined if your Lodge has a story to tell your community, it's up to you to decide why you and your Lodge want to tell that story. Your goals for your Lodge, district, or state association will affect the stories you tell and how you tell them. Your goals will help you decide what's essential to tell the audience.

### **"But publicity will cost me too much in time and money!"**

By now you've probably come to the conclusion that once you've done the basic groundwork and have made contacts with the media, a successful publicity campaign won't take enormous amounts of time. When there's a story to tell, you will be able to tell it without spending too much of your time. Also, since you've researched your media contacts, you'll know that you're telling your story to the right audience; i.e. sending your press releases to the right reporters or editors.

As a PR chairperson, you'll find that the more effort you invest at the beginning of the process is effort that you won't have to make later on. After awhile, you may even find that writing your press releases and sending them out to the appropriate media people will be something that you can practically do in your sleep.

What about money? Isn't publicity going to cost me?

True publicity shouldn't cost you anything more than your own time and the postage to submit your news releases. (Of course, it'll cost you more if you decide to take a reporter or editor out to lunch to win his favor, but the expense of a lunch tab versus how this might improve the way the local media covers your Lodge is minimal.) Publicity is different from advertising. With advertising, you pay someone so that your story can be told and your message can be spread. With publicity, you convince an editor or reporter that you've got such a good story that it will "sell" on its own.

Public relations often involves both publicity (the free stuff) and advertising (the stuff that costs), so as a PR chair there may be times when you deal with both. At different times, advertising might be better than publicity for reaching a specific audience or having more control over your story or message, but publicity always has the advantage of being free.

### **"But I won't have anything to show for my effort!"**

With a strong public relations campaign, the notion that you won't have anything to show for your efforts simply isn't true. If you've decided whom your audience is, what the story is that you want to tell them, and what your goal for telling that story is, you'll definitely have something to show for your effort.



The results of a good public relations campaign can be varied--you can help to shape the public's opinion of your Lodge, you can promote the good work of the Elks, you can gain volunteers or participants for Lodge programs, and you can even try to increase membership. For each goal that you want to achieve, make sure that you send out a number of press releases that will help you meet that goal.

In public relations, the old maxim that says "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," is true. In advertising, there's research that suggests that a potential customer needs to see an advertisement seven times before he'll decide to make a purchase. The same thing holds true for your Lodge's own PR campaign. It may take seven news releases about your Lodge's work with handicapped children before the community begins to become aware of that Lodge-sponsored program. But once you've made your community aware of your programs, you'll see that it will have been well worth the effort.

But as you submit your news items to the media, make sure that you maintain your credibility. You should be sending press releases to the local media on a regular basis, but only if those press releases are stories that are truly worth telling. If you send too many press releases that aren't really "news," you'll quickly lose credibility with the media, and then when you do have a truly noteworthy story to tell, you may find that your audience isn't willing to listen. Before you send a press release, it wouldn't hurt to remember the story of the little boy who cried wolf. Is your story really "news" (that there really is a wolf) or are you making something out of nothing? If you're not sure, it's probably best not to risk damaging your credibility. After all, being known as a credible and dependable storyteller is one of the most important ways that you can do to help your public relations campaign.

In the meantime, collect the newspaper clippings of your Lodge's coverage. Post them in the Lodge facilities. Doing this will not only remind you that you do indeed have something to show for your efforts, but it will also inspire and motivate your membership. And just think of the many things your Lodge will be able to accomplish with a newly inspired and motivated membership. The possibilities are limitless.