



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set I Number 14

December 1997

Set I Strategies for Societies

Get the Word Out! Hints for Publicity Chairs

by Linda Herrick Swisher

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

This paper describes how to get the publicity out about your society.

While meant for print publications, a decreasing source for the spread of information, this paper offers ideas about the possibilities for publicity outlets in your region; a discussion of deadlines, always a concern for print media and electronic media outlets; and a description of the elements of a good press release.

The FGS address on page 1 is incorrect.

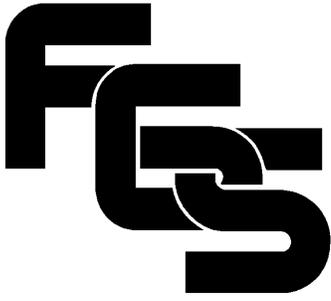
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Society Strategies

FEDERATION OF GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES

P.O. BOX 830220 • RICHARDSON TX 75083-0220

Series Set I Number 14

December 1997

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Get the Word Out! Hints for Publicity Chairs

by Linda Herrick Swisher, Hobart, Indiana

"Boy, that group is always in the paper. How do they do it?"

Getting your society's name known doesn't just happen. Publicizing your events is crucial to gaining new members, fostering community support and communicating with other like-minded groups. Every game has its rules, and the publicity game is no different. Those who win know the rules and play by them.

A society's publicity chair submits news and events to appropriate media. Let's assume the chair is you. Seek opportunities to publicize your group, and serve as the society spokesperson if the media need quotes or an interview.

HOW DO I BEGIN?

- If you have no experience, read books on publicity and working with the media. Such books are at your local library.
- Compile a media list of every newspaper, magazine, radio and television station in your geographic area. Include the name, address (including any post office boxes), phone and fax numbers, on-line or E-mail addresses. These

outlets will receive your society's news, including notices of meetings and programs.

To find this information, ask if your local convention and visitors bureau has a media list. Check the informational pages of your local telephone directory. Look for a copy of *Gale's Directory of Print and Broadcast Media* at your local library. This three-volume set is arranged by state and town. Note the paper's frequency of publication (daily, weekly, or other), call letters and station format (local cable access, all-news, all-talk, religious, rock, jazz, network affiliate, etc.) Add this information to your media list.

Although you will find these details in *Gale's Directory*, you will still want to call the paper or station at least twice a year to update it. Media information changes often. The paper may have merged, folded or moved. What was once a hard rock radio station may have recently become a local talk-radio format, more suited to publicizing your event.

- What is the publication's (or station's) deadline date for submitting news releases? If you cannot find these dates printed in the publication or if they are not announced by the station, call and ask.

Hints for Publicity Chairs

- Make an additional list for publicizing seminars or other items of interest to those who live elsewhere. List *FGS FORUM*, *The Genealogical Helper*, *Heritage Quest*, *Ancestry Magazine*, etc., with the same information as you collected from your local outlets. Check issues of these publications for deadlines, departments, and requirements. Always use current issues, as deadlines may have changed.

WHAT MUST I KNOW?

- Is the newspaper zoned (circulation and news divided geographically)? This means your news may appear only in certain editions. If your society covers a wide area, **be sure to mention this in the release** (for example, “serving Jones and Tyler counties”), or ask “Please release in all zones,” which might help your news reach the maximum coverage area.
- What department runs notices such as yours? To whom should you address your news? Read the publication regularly (or watch TV or listen to the radio) to see where and when news from similar groups appears, and to whom your news should be sent. Or call the paper or station to get this information. Sending news to the wrong department, or to someone who hasn't worked there for years, tells the folks at the publication or station that you don't read (or watch or listen to) their product. This will not make you a media darling!
- Editors won't always pass your news to other departments. For the news to appear in several places within the paper, or if a publisher puts out more than one paper, send a separate release to each department or paper. The same advice applies if you submit news to a TV and radio station sharing the same facility, or an AM and FM radio station in the same offices.

WHAT'S A NEWS (OR MEDIA) RELEASE?

- Know your terminology! An ad is space (and a commercial is time) that is **paid for**. Unless your society has a generous benefactor, what you want

is free publicity. You will submit a **news (or media) release** for publication or broadcast. Broadcast media usually run a group's news as PSA's (public service announcements), which may be recorded by studio personnel or by a society representative. PSA's may be limited to certain types of groups. Check with your station about its policies.

- A news release contains details that the paper (or station) and its readers (or viewers/listeners) need to know. It is **always** double-spaced (to allow editing), **always** on one side of an 8.5 by 11-inch sheet (smaller sizes tend to get lost), and **always** typed (handwritten releases look amateurish and may be undecipherable). Books on publicity will give examples of news release formats.
- Most releases use an “inverted pyramid” style. The most important information is mentioned in the lead paragraph, with the least important information at the end. (Editors will cut from the bottom up.) Follow the five W's and an H: What, When, Where, Who, Why and How. Include extra information in paragraphs other than the lead paragraph. The paper or station may have space to fill and want to mention much more than the basics, but they can't if you haven't provided this information.
- Eliminate confusion. Write the event day and date (“Thursday, July 16”) instead of day only (“this Thursday”). Newspapers don't use the genealogical method of day-month-year. Avoid terms or abbreviations unfamiliar to most readers (use “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” as opposed to “LDS”).
- Be sure your release mentions any costs, restrictions or deadlines of which participants must be aware. Readers won't appreciate arriving at an event where admission is by reservation only.
- State your news simply, objectively and free of opinions. (“The society will host its annual luncheon” instead of “Society members will enjoy a beautiful repast”. Some members may not enjoy it, and “beautiful” is in the eye of the beholder.)

Hints for Publicity Chairs

- Your release should include your society name, address and phone number. There should be a name and phone number for readers, viewers, or listeners to contact about the event. The media may need more details or clarification from you, so add your name, title, and day and evening phone numbers. Make sure your society immediately refers to you any calls from the media. If the paper or station does contact you, get back to them as soon as possible.

Deadlines are often measured in hours rather than days. And keep a copy of all releases so that if the media does contact you, you'll know what information you provided.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, IT'S TOO LATE?

- Pay attention to deadline dates! Does the radio or TV station need community calendar items four weeks in advance of the event? For a newspaper, does certain news run only on certain days, or in certain sections? Note the date of your event and then work back from the media deadline.

An example: one local paper is published on Sundays and Thursdays. Religious news runs in the lifestyles sections on Thursdays only, and the deadline is one week prior to publication. To publicize a church program scheduled for Wednesday the 19th, the news must run in the paper on Thursday the 13th. This means the news item must be submitted to the newspaper by Thursday the 6th.

Print and broadcast media receive tons of mail daily, so you must also allow several days for your release to reach its destination. Faxing will save time, as will delivering the release in person. Beware, however, trying to meet with an editor on deadline (or a producer near airtime)—they won't appreciate an interruption.

IT HELPS TO KNOW...

- Some papers or community calendars will run your news several times, from the time it's received up until your event. It may pay to send your news in early for maximum exposure. Check with the newspaper or station for their policy.
- Ask if your local paper or station conducts a free workshop specifically for those responsible for a group's publicity. The workshop may mention contact persons, deadlines, and format. Or, your media outlet may offer a publicity manual. It is worth your while to take advantage of these offers.

SOME "DON'TS" TO REMEMBER

- Don't ask the paper for copies of the article, or even a single "tear sheet" (the page on which your article appears). If the paper sent complementary copies to each person and group mentioned, nobody would buy one! The paper is in business to inform—and to be financially profitable. If you want to see your society's news, subscribe. Or read the paper at the local library, and contact the newspaper's circulation department to buy a back issue.
- Don't ask to see or approve what will be written or broadcast. Once you submit the information, how (and if) it's used is up to the discretion of the media.
- Don't ask when the news will appear or air, especially if your release has no deadline. News with an impending deadline takes precedence over other items. Space considerations and time constraints rule. And since advertising pays for it all, an ad's size or timing will determine where and when your news appears.
- Find out your newspaper's policy on coverage of your event. Do they send a reporter or photographer to your type of event or should you submit a news release and photo? If you want to request a photographer, know the deadline for doing so. The request should be for a special event, not a routine meeting. A reporter may

Hints for Publicity Chairs

attend, or more likely, may interview you by telephone or use information from your news release for a photo caption. Know that late-breaking news or scheduling difficulties may prevent a photographer or reporter from attending as planned.

SPEAKING OF PHOTOS...

Can you submit photos? Should they be black and white, or is color acceptable? What size is best? Will they be returned, and if so, do you need to send an SASE with the picture?

If the photos won't be returned, submit **reprints** of the photo, and keep your negatives. Do NOT submit photocopies, Polaroids or laser copies. The exposure may be too dark or the resolution too poor; check with your paper.

Limit the number of people in the photo to three or four. If more people are involved, it is best to take several photos with a few people in each than one large group shot.

Proper identification is important. If you submit the photo, identify the people in it from left to right, or clockwise from top. If the photographer takes it, be sure he or she obtains all needed information. People in photos should be identified by their **first and last names** (not "Mrs. John Jones"), and places of residence.

Are there types of photos the paper will not run? Is there a policy against photos that show "check passing," where one person presents a check or donation to another? Or does the newspaper prefer not to use "grip and grins" (two people shaking hands), group pictures, or officer installations with members all lined up in a row. Does the editor prefer "action" shots, with people talking to each other or engaged in some activity rather than eating or just standing around? Find out your editor's preferences, and provide those types of photos.

THE MEDIA NOTEBOOK

Maintain a notebook of all your press clippings. You may also want to tape any broadcast spots mentioning your group. Seeing or hearing your society's name in the media is your reward for a job well done. The publicity chair's job isn't difficult, but does require some easily acquired background. A little know-how will keep you in the public eye.

[Linda Herrick Swisher, a former columnist for *Ancestry* magazine, is publicity chair for the Indiana Genealogical Society. She is a staff assistant for the lifestyles section of Star Newspapers in Tinley Park, Illinois, where she also writes a monthly genealogy column.]

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