



**SERVICE Above Self**

# Rotary PR 101

## *Ten Useful Ideas for Enhancing Your Rotary Club's Image in Your Community*

By Mark A. Miner, District 7300 PR Chair (2005-2006)

### **Overview**

This is a compilation of articles published in *Rotary 101*, the District 7300 newsletter published by Governor Joel M. Nagel during the 2005-2006 year. It contains 10 useful ideas for broadening and enhancing the public image of your Rotary Club in your community. These ideas, when put to work, will produce results.

### **1. Is Your Club Enjoying a High Profile in the Community?**

One of the top things a Rotary Club can do is keep a high public profile to attract and retain members, and nurture a strong community funding base. This has not been a traditional Rotary value, but times are changing as Rotary competes with a variety of public-minded organizations to capture public awareness and support. During the 2005-2006 year, to support DG Joel Nagel's strategic goals, this column will provide you with helpful ideas to accomplish this, to empower you and your club by providing the right tools and techniques.

Public visibility can be achieved through six major areas: 1. elevator speech; 2. news media coverage; 3. website; 4. publications; 5. direct mail; and 6. the personal touch. You can use these techniques to position Rotary as a "group of choice" for busy business and professional leaders; a "charity of choice" for the community's donor dollars; and to retain members to avoid "churn" and provide longer-term continuity.

The structure of any Rotary public outreach should be to articulate the unique differentiators that make the Rotary approach unique; spell out the benefits that will attract members and donations; and while not downplaying Rotary's international success, be as local as possible.

### **2. Articulating Rotary's Unique International Differentiation**

Articulating Rotary's unique international differentiation can play a huge role in your club's recruiting and public relations efforts. Many successful business and professional leaders are not Rotarians, but have a strong desire to give back to their community, and many not know how to do so, or may be considering membership in other organizations. These types of VIPs typically are drawn to other successful people who have a reputation for making an impact in unique ways – in other words, "important people doing important things."

Rotary has many such differentiators, and the international component is strong. You need to be able to spell out these points in short, pithy sound bites to get people's attention. Consider using the following nuggets when talking about Rotary to VIPs in your community:

- Rotary is the oldest service organization in the nation, and the only one with a permanent seat in the United Nations;

- Over the past decade, Rotarians have conducted 1.8 million projects and donated more than 25 million hours worldwide.
- 1.2 million Rotarians belong to more than 31,000 Rotary clubs in 202 countries and regions – more than the U.N.
- Rotary has raised half a billion dollars in a 20-year push for the global eradication of polio.
- Rotary gives more money each year in scholarships than the Rhodes, Fulbright and Eisenhower programs combined.
- The Rotary International Foundation has awarded more than \$1.1 billion in humanitarian and educational grants.

### 3. Rotary's Accomplishments in Your Own Backyard

In telling Rotary's story to prospective members, influential business and community leaders, and the media, point out all the permanent ways Rotary has impacted your town. Properly packaged, this story can show VIPs what Rotary has done in the past, to set the stage for describing where Rotary is today, and where it's heading in the future.

In my community of Beaver, for instance, Rotary is named on plaques and signs throughout the town. Passersby see the Rotary name and logo, and the impression is made that Rotary was involved there. These include:

- A bronze marker added in 1966 to the old, worn grave marker of a baby swept downriver after the horrific Johnstown Flood of 1889;
- Street signs with the Rotary logo at the top, installed in the mid-1990s;
- Plaque in the garden of Beaver's newly renovated public library, circa 2003;
- Plaque at shade trees planted near the entrance of the post office (2003);
- Name on a donor plaque at the Beaver Area Historical Museum (1998); and
- Two prominent community message boards along Beaver's main street (2005).

As part of Rotary's centennial this year, we'll include photos of these landmarks in our *Annual Report* to show our permanent mark on Beaver. Consider photographing all the Rotary landmarks in your

community, and doing a collage on paper as a handout, or a photo page on your club's website, to share with VIPs.

### 4. Using Statistics as a Rotary PR Tool

There are many ways to tell our story to the media as well as prospective members, and one of the best is by using statistics and numbers. A well-quantified set of "Rotary Stats" can really capture people's attention and spark their curiosity. Here are some basic examples:

- Rotary has 1,500 members in 51 communities in Western Pennsylvania;
- Each year, we donate \$2 million in grants and in-kind services district-wide;
- Worldwide, 1.2 million Rotarians belong to more than 31,000 Rotary clubs in 202 countries and regions – more than the U.N.
- Rotary has raised half a billion dollars in a 20-year push for the global eradication of polio.

To be really effective in your community, however, you need to package your local club's statistics. In my home club of Beaver, we are able to say the following:

- In 2004-2005, the Beaver Club made 17 grants totaling more than \$17,700 to local and international causes.
- Over the past three years, we have made 56 grants collectively totaling more than \$65,000.
- We have more than 50 members who are the top leaders in the Beaver business and professional community.
- Our club has been doing good works for nearly 60 years since our founding in 1947.

### 5. What's Your Elevator Speech?

I first heard the term "elevator speech" in the late 1990s in connection with the dot-com boom. It was in the context that if you and a venture capitalist got into an elevator on the first floor, and you had his or her attention all the way up to the 20<sup>th</sup> floor, but only had that amount of time to convince him or her to fund your hot idea, *what would you say?*

Rotarians need good elevator speeches to describe the essence of Rotary's mission, as a way to impress relatives, neighbors, friends and colleagues at work. The speech needs to sufficiently hook the listener into wanting to learn more. The best time to put this into action is when someone asks, "What have you been up to?" Do not automatically answer "Not much," but rather, have the answer prepared, and when the question comes, you're armed.

Here are some suggestions on good elevator speeches that answer "What have you been up to?"

- *"I just helped our Rotary Club raise money in a fundraiser that's going to help children and families in need."*
- *"I just helped our Rotary Club deliver an ambulance to Nicaragua that's going to dramatically increase the quality of local healthcare."*
- *"I just volunteered for our Rotary Club's Ducky Derby race that raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for local Rotary charities."*
- *"I just helped our Rotary Club perform a community service project, and have never known a better group of successful, busy people who put their time and money on the line."*

Practice and perfect your speech a few times, and the next time someone asks you about you, you will be ready to spring into action.

## 6. Increasing News Media Coverage of Your Club

In today's news-saturated society, Americans are bombarded with an estimated 237 advertising messages every day, or 86,500 each year, via one mass medium or another. Our minds suffer from "information overload" and distrust the credibility of what we hear, see and read. How can Rotary break through this clutter and emerge as a charity of choice in our communities?

News media coverage is one such way. The public depends on journalists to tell us what's important, and why. The more that Rotary can generate positive media coverage about substantive, quality subjects, the better we will be perceived. But how do we get our club's stories to the key gatekeepers in the media who decide what to cover?

Here's the quick answer – find out who they are, and what they want. Here is a shortlist of major Pittsburgh print and TV newsroom phone/fax numbers you can use to call the people who typically cover community-service types of stories:

- **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette** – West Edition (724-375-6814); North (412-263-1569); South (412-851-1513); East (412-263-1470)
- **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review** - Monroeville Bureau (412-856-2750); South Hills (412-343-1000); North Hills (724-779-TRIB); Gateway Newspapers (weekly - 412-856-7400).
- **KDKA-TV** - 412-575-2245 - fax: 412-575-2871
- **WTAE-TV** - 412-244-4460 - fax: 412-244-4628
- **WPXI-TV** - 412-237-4902 - fax: 412-237-4900
- **WPGH/Fox 53** - 412-939-6397 - fax: 412-931-4284
- **KQV Radio** - 412-562-5960 - fax: 412-562-5903
- **KDKA Radio** - 412.333.KDKA

## 7. Think Like a News Reporter

As your club seeks to increase media visibility, you should become proficient at seeing your world through the media's eyes. Understanding how to talk to news reporters, and presenting Rotary's story in their self-interest, is critical for success. This article contains some helpful do's and don'ts.

The media generally do not care about traditional Rotary fundraisers and "grip and grin" check presentations. To generate a reporter's interest, your news has to be different, unusual or unique. Consider re-inventing traditional but stale fundraisers to encompass a technique, location or personality that's out of the mold.

- **Press Releases** - When preparing a press release, state the conclusion first, not last, and then support it with the remaining text. Always include key information about the "who, what, when, where and why" of the event or issue. Include your name, phone number and email address so the journalist can contact you with questions.
- **Timing** – Journalists hate to hear about news after the fact. If you're planning an event, send your press release a week ahead of time. Don't wait until it's old news.

- **Photographs** – Many newspapers such as the Post-Gazette are union shops. They will not accept submitted photos as a rule.
- **Think Visually** – If you want a newspaper or TV station to shoot your event, then plan it to be unusually “visual” with an attraction that “looks good.” When calling or faxing information to the news desks, be sure to tell them why your event is visual.
- **Develop Relationships** – Consider inviting the editor of your local newspaper to speak at a club gathering. Have her or him tell you what the paper is looking for. Get editors’ feedback on proposed ideas, and listen closely and modify your approach accordingly.
- **Make News!** – One of the best news articles about our Beaver Club resulted when a well-known Pittsburgher spoke at our lunch meeting about a hot issue involving economic development. We invited the local editor to attend and do an interview. It worked!

## 8. Is Your Club Using the Web Effectively?

There’s no question – the Internet is Business America’s resource of choice for finding information. If you are not using this powerful medium to communicate all the good things your club is doing, you are missing a real opportunity. A good website can help you influence the public’s perception of Rotary’s importance in general, and tell your club’s story in particular.

You have several options. You can develop and host your own site, as several clubs such as Elizabeth ([www.elizabethrotaryclub.org/](http://www.elizabethrotaryclub.org/)) and Etna-Shaler ([www.etnashalerrotary.org](http://www.etnashalerrotary.org)) have done, among others. You also can utilize District 7300’s website for your club’s page, as Bethel Park ([www.rotarydistrict7300.org/ClubPages/BethelPark/Club31218.htm](http://www.rotarydistrict7300.org/ClubPages/BethelPark/Club31218.htm)) has done, for example. The Forest Hills Club even developed a specialized site for its “Pure Water for All” initiative – [www.purewaterforall.org](http://www.purewaterforall.org).

To access the District 7300 web space, contact our webmaster, John Bobbs, at [pdqjohnny@hotmail.com](mailto:pdqjohnny@hotmail.com). Rotarian Jurgen Brune also has offered space on his personal web servers for hosting sites. Contact him at [cjv1@cec.gov](mailto:cjv1@cec.gov).

What type of content should your club’s website include? The sky is the limit, but at minimum you should consider the following: meeting schedules, weekly newsletters, photos of club activities, the four-way test, contact information, benefits of membership, and links to other community and Rotary websites.

## 9. Using An Annual Report to Reach VIP Decisionmakers

When all is said and done, the only way for Rotary clubs to increase their public visibility is to fine-tune how they tell their own story. One way we’ve done this in the Beaver Club is through a high quality annual report. It helps accomplish three objectives: attract new members; enhance our public standing; and remind our members of the benefits of membership, as a retention tool.

Framed in language that the business community will understand and appreciate, an annual report is a forum for sharing photographs and stories about how Rotary impacts the community, with an accounting of the funds Rotary has collected and disbursed. Ours’ is an eight-page format, but even one page will do, if formatted effectively.

For the past three years, our annual report has been mailed to more than 125 business and community leaders in Beaver, along with a cover letter from our president inviting them to join us at a lunch meeting. The mailing list came from the local chamber of commerce. The printing in color was done for free by a vendor of one of our members.

Not only has our annual report improved our public image, but also has led to a number of visitors and, in fact, new members for our club.

I would be glad to help you begin planning for its own report, using a template in Word that I have created. It’s really not hard to do, provided you have photos, stories and financials, as well as a current mailing list.

## 10. The “Year in Review” Via Powerpoint

Joel Nagel’s year as District Governor has been marked by many important highlights, at both District and individual club levels. I gave a 30-minute powerpoint

presentation on the "Year in Review" at the District Conference at The Greenbrier last month, and would be glad to share it with your club as well.

The presentation, in photos, graphics and text, provides a powerful overview of the inspiring accomplishments by our Rotarians. Individually, the activities are great. Viewed collectively, the impact is stunning. It will give you an array of ideas for what your club can be doing for local and international projects, raising funds and recruiting new members.

At the District level, the year was marked by a visit by President Carl-Wilhelm Stenhammar of Sweden; a visit by RI Foundation Chair Frank Devlyn of Mexico City; world-class fundraising for the RI Foundation; and substantial membership increases. Additional District highlights included significant international outreach in Nicaragua and Vietnam; volunteer teams helping to rebuild Gulf Coast communities devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; expanded news media coverage and visibility throughout the region; enjoyable social gatherings; Group Study Exchange teams going to and from Germany; and the loss of esteemed Rotarians.

In closing, I will be preparing a booklet containing my 10 PR-focused articles in the newsletter the past year. My goal is to send it to incoming club presidents for their brainstorming and use during the upcoming year. I'm also pleased to announce that Chad Amond of the Monroeville Club has agreed to serve with me as PR Co-Chair in Bob Rupp's year as Governor.

---

***For more information, contact:***

Mark A. Miner  
Mark Miner Communications, LLC  
P.O. Box 451  
Beaver, PA 15009-0451

Tel: 412-370-5302  
Fax: 724-770-9175  
Email: [mark@markminer.com](mailto:mark@markminer.com)

***About the Author:*** Mark A. Miner is the founder and president of Mark Miner Communications, LLC. He is a pioneering public relations and marketing advisor who for more than two decades has helped build the public image of professional service firms. In 2005, he was inducted into the "Renaissance Hall of Fame" of the Public Relations Society of America, the world's largest organization for PR professionals, for his trail blazing work in the fields of law, engineering and accounting. A member of the Rotary Club of Beaver board of directors since 2003, he has served as PR Chair of District 7300 and PR Chair of the Ducky Derby and spoken at numerous Rotary events throughout the Pittsburgh region. In 2005, he was named "Rotarian of the Year" in District 7300 by District Governor Jon Maurer.

