1. The Importance of Good Media Relations

Public opinion, the key to community image, is shaped by newspapers and radio and television stations in the community around us. Reports from these media often influence our perception of events, and our behaviors toward individuals or organizations. It is imperative that organizations develop and maintain a good working relationship with the local media.

An understanding of the role of the media in your community aids in the development of good media relations. As public news-gathering agencies, the media enjoys a special protection under the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America, and it jealously guards that position. Its primary function is in reporting information and news that is of general interest to the majority of its subscribers. Unless its subscribers are involved in the organization, organizational news is of little interest. To qualify as news in this category, the story must involve the general public. Stories about our “Hoop Shoot,” Drug Awareness and Youth Activities programs are good examples.

A good relationship with the media will not grow on its own; it has to be cultivated. The first step is to notify the local media about your organization and the name and number of your spokesperson. Give this information to the assignment editor, preferably in person. That will ensure that your contact information will be on file so that you might have an opportunity to respond to breaking news. Remember that time is an important commodity to editors and reporters working within the strict deadlines of professional media. Keep your responses brief. Return all calls from news agencies immediately. If you are unable to provide answers to their questions, offer to help find the answer and call them back.

If you promise to call back, be sure that you do, before their deadline, even if it is only to inform them that you were unable to answer their question.

News gathering agencies all have several things in common, regardless of the medium:
1. Media Reporters are professionals; they know their business and what information they need from you.
2. The news must be factual and accurate.
3. Provide news releases about important events about two weeks before the event. News you release earlier than two weeks may be lost or forgotten; news you release later may not be covered. Do not depend on media staff coverage. Most agencies employ only minimal crews on weekends. Provide all the information the media will need to cover the story without coming out to the event. Be sure that the release includes contact phone numbers.
4. Reporters require all pertinent facts about a story. To maintain good relations, you must be prepared to answer any and all requests for information. This may occasionally include requests for information that you do not wish published. A measured, careful and truthful response will often avoid unpleasant publicity.

If you deal with the media at all times in a forthright manner, they will recognize your candor and willingness to help them. Reporters appreciate that kind of treatment and frequently repay it with fair and accurate reporting.

If you consider a story to be inaccurate or unfair, gather all of the facts before you approach the press. Approach the reporter who
filed the story or the editor who assigned it. Do not approach the publisher or station owner, even if they are acquaintances. If you have the facts to dispel the story, you will probably get a hearing. You may not get a retraction, but at least you will have shown that you are willing to work with them to get accurate stories in the future. Remember that retractions are often more damaging than the original story.

2. Who Are the Media?

The media are those who disseminate news to a segment of the population. In any given state, they will range from the large metropolitan TV and radio stations, to the single newspaper editor-writer who publishes a bimonthly throw-away. Every state has a bureau of the major wire services, Associated Press and United Press International. Those organizations are news-gathering services that provide information to all the subscribing news disseminators in the state. Virtually every daily newspaper, television station and radio station subscribe to this service.

Dealing with newspapers
The manner in which you deal with the newspapers in your community will depend, to a great extent, on the size and nature of the paper and the community it serves. Before making any contact, you should be well versed in the publication and its purpose. Read it first before talking with the editors. Too many public relations practitioners have suggested stories that were totally inappropriate for the publication or the column.

Once you know the publication, make initial contact with the appropriate editor. For a small community paper, you will want to contact the editor or managing editor responsible for most of the paper’s content. On larger metropolitan papers you will want to know the city editor, the lifestyle editor, the editor of the local Sunday supplement (newspaper magazines other than Parade and Family Weekly) and those editors who have an interest in specific Elks events — sports editors for the “Hoop Shoot,” political editors and columnists for events involving government representatives, medical writers for drug awareness programs.

You should make initial contact with the proper person. Introduce yourself as the Elks’ public relations representative, and make an appointment to meet him or her. Invite them to lunch and suggest that they select the location — they may want to stay near their office. In the initial meeting, you should provide them with information about the organization. A calendar of events would be helpful to them. You should also seek information from them. How can you help? What are their deadlines — for feature material and for breaking news? How would they prefer you to present story ideas? Are there others with the paper you should know? What type of stories are they looking for?

Utilize the information they provide when you present story ideas. Do not call when they’re on deadline unless you have new information important to a story on which they’re working. If you call near deadline, ask first whether they’re on deadline. If they are, suggest that you call back later in the day or the following day, unless you have urgent information. Journalists will appreciate this show of consideration and empathy. Always provide editors with a phone number where you can be reached.

Do not miss opportunities for news coverage. Keep your contacts informed, but don’t pester them. When presenting a story idea, DO take “no” for an answer. There are many reasons for a “no thanks,” and that’s not a reflection
on you or the Lodge. They may not have the space for your story or the staff to cover your event. This in no way should deter you from continuing to provide them with news stories.

Keep in mind that editors write for, and must hold the interest of, a diverse audience. Always thank your contacts for coverage, even if you feel that they could have done more.

Dealing with wire services
Wire services like the Associated Press and United Press International are just what the name implies — a service that gathers and disseminates news by wire. Newspapers, radio and television stations cannot cover all the news of importance to their readers. They depend on these wires to provide a significant part of their editorial content.

Most people incorrectly associate these wire services with national and international news exclusively. However, AP and UPI have state wires in almost every state, covering news and features of interest to a statewide audience and providing content to the subscribing newspapers and broadcast stations.

Those responsible for statewide publicity should know the bureau chief and news director for the wire service in their area. Schedule a meeting with the bureau chief, who will then tell you how to provide information to the wires on important state events.

In providing these wires with news releases (the most common approach), you must be certain that the news is of general interest statewide. The results of a state “Hoop Shoot” Contest would be appropriate. News from a state convention might be of interest. A local Lodge event would not be used unless it had application for your entire area.

Always present your news in written form.

Dealing with broadcast media
The broadcast media present some outstanding opportunities for publicity. A recent survey indicates that more than half the people in the United States receive all their news from television alone.

The purveyor of news usually approaches the broadcast media quite differently than the print media, for several reasons:

- **Broadcast news coverage lacks both the breadth and depth of most print coverage.** Walter Cronkite once pointed out that an entire half-hour newscast, if set in type, would take up about half the front page of a newspaper. It is therefore more difficult to place a story on a broadcast medium.

- **The bigger the market, the more competition for exposure.** Unlike most print media, whose amount of space in a given issue is determined by the amount of advertising space sold for that issue, broadcast stations are all limited by the hours in a day. That means the urban station with the widest audience faces the same time restrictions as the smallest station in a rural market. Since larger populations produce more people wanting coverage of more events, your story must have fantastic news value to be accepted by a major-market television station or a mainline radio station.

- **Even with broadcast, different media work different ways.**
  - Television invariably will select a story with visual impact over a story with strong content but little visual interest.
  - Radio and, to some extent, television play to the ear, not the eye.
  - Both radio and television offer publicity opportunities separate from the news department. Radio and television talk shows are excellent vehicles for our organization to tell our story to the community. Make sure you are well prepared before appearing on talk shows.

- **Broadcast uses the language differently than print.** A broadcast script usually flows better than newspaper/magazine copy and sounds more conversational, for good reason. The listener or viewer doesn’t have
the option of reading a paragraph he or she didn’t understand the first time it was read.

- **Broadcast deadlines bear little resemblance to those of the print media.**
  - TV news usually needs all but the hardest news packaged and ready to air by 3 p.m. for a 6 p.m. newscast.
  - Radio deadlines differ among themselves, but can be as frequent as once an hour.
  - Programming (talk show) deadlines take the form of bookings. Programs rarely book guests less than two weeks in advance.

- **Most stations prefer newsmakers’ voices.** For all but the “rip-and-read” radio stations, an actuality — a taped voice — will enhance a story. This is called a voice-over. Similarly, TV would rather have the newsmaker talking to the listener and have their anchorperson explain what the newsmaker said.

- **Broadcasters avoid detail in a story.** Their greatest fear is putting the listeners or viewers to sleep or, worse, sending them to another channel or station. They keep their remarks succinct. You should follow their example in dealing with them.

All these points suggest that the more you tailor your news item to broadcast use, the greater your chances for broadcast coverage. It is not absolutely necessary to write a release in broadcast style — broadcasters are used to plowing through long print releases — but it often helps to do just that. If a broadcast release is short, compact and conversational, that might just make the difference between it going on the air or being dropped.

Nor is it absolutely necessary to think in terms of the eye or ear when “selling” a story idea to broadcast, but it helps. Before approaching a broadcaster by news release or direct contact, give some thought to what the TV person would see in your story or the radio person would hear. If there is nothing in the story for either, you might be wasting your time.

Many successful public relations people make a practice of putting at the very top of their news releases something like “visual opportunities:” and then briefly describe the environment for the eye. (Such a technique often works for the print media as well. Then they call them “photo opportunities.”)

Also, keep in mind the titles and functions for broadcast news are not always the same as for print. The editor or managing editor of a newspaper usually finds a counterpart in the news director of a television or radio station. For most radio stations and smaller television stations, the news chain of command generally ends there; everyone else is defined by their function: reporter, tape or film editor, camera person, sound engineer. In the smallest stations, a staff member might do or help do everything from producing (putting shows together) to editing tape.

In large metro-market television and on all-news radio stations, the pecking order is longer. Under the news director you might find an assistant news director who heads the administrative function; an executive producer responsible for the content and quality of all news shows during a day; producers for each show; writers who put words in the anchors’ mouths, write minor stories and work with tape or film editors to package major stories; a host of other specialists who get the story from the microphone or camera to its position on the show’s menu for the day. To further complicate things, the titles change from station to station, so it is worth your while to know not only a person’s title but what he or she actually does.

A key contact on large radio stations and medium to large TV stations is the assignment editor, who might work alone or have a whole staff covering the assignment desk during the day.

Nor should you ignore broadcast wire services. Not only do the Associated Press and United Press International offer packages of
regional and state newscasts for their member or client stations, but in many states, state radio networks exist who serve dozens of stations. They often are adequately staffed in state capitals but are hungry for news other than that focusing on state government or politics.

A word of caution on dealing with wires and broadcast networks. Before selling a story to them, make sure it is of interest to listeners across the state. A meeting of a local Elks Lodge might make the community calendar of a small rural radio station, but for a wire service or state radio network, sifting through such news wastes time, which will lead ultimately to a lesser opinion of your news judgement.

The broadcast media are best defined by how they contrast with print. However, they are all media and therefore present more similarities than differences. So the general principles of media relations apply for broadcast just as they do for print: target the story to the medium that will most likely want to use it; represent the Elks professionally; serve media needs in terms of personal contact; know deadlines and suggest alternate ideas for presenting a story; and know when not to pester.

With these basic principles in mind and some rudimentary skills, you will go a long way toward enhancing the Elks’ image for a powerful segment of the media.

3. What Is News?

Publicity, or news coverage, may be defined as unpaid magazine or newspaper space or broadcast time for newsworthy events. Publicity makes use of the editorial pages of magazines and newspapers, and news feature time in broadcasting — as opposed to paid advertising space or time — to call the public’s attention to a person, place, thing or cause. Because publicity appears as news, it is believable.

One of the most basic and yet effective methods of publicity or media coverage is the news release. Releases are basically intended for newspapers, but should be sent to all media, including local magazines, radio and television. You should prepare a news release whenever you have newsworthy information. News, as defined by Webster, is “A report of recent happenings,” but could also include present and future.

Perhaps the primary ingredient in the success of any public relations effort is the ability of the public relations staff to recognize news. Virtually everything that occurs in an organization is news to someone. Ask yourself what audience your news would interest. Here’s a partial list of audiences:

- Members of the local Lodge
- Local Lodges and their members within the District or State
- The members of the Elks
- All citizens of the state
- The entire country

Other audiences might be members’ families, local government officials, neighbors of the Lodge and even other related organizations. You must first determine what’s newsworthy, and then ask whether it is really news.

Once you have determined that you really do have a valid news story, your next question should be, To whom does the news apply? Who is your audience? An increase of dues would be of interest to members of the local Lodge.
but not to the community. A state “Hoop Shoot” contest on the other hand would be of interest to the contestants’ communities, the citizens of the state or perhaps the entire country.

Once you have determined your audience you must then determine the best vehicles for reaching that audience. The Lodge newspaper, the bulletin board, Lodge meetings, direct mailing and the telephone are some of the vehicles that should be considered to reach members. The urgency of your message will dictate the mode of transmission.

Vehicles for reaching all members of your community would include the community newspapers, radio and television stations, local magazines, community bulletins, shoppers and throwaways. Be aware of the deadlines and other requirements for each of these modes of transmission. It will be of little value to provide a magazine or weekly newspaper with information of an upcoming event if its next publishing date occurs after your event has taken place. On the other hand, it may wish to cover your event for its next issue. An invitation with information on the event would be more appropriate.

Once you have determined the vehicle best suited to accomplish your objectives, you must choose a form that will most effectively provide the information you wish to publicize or broadcast. Don’t limit your news to one vehicle unless you have promised an exclusive story to that publication or station. Possible forms:

- News releases
- Backgrounders
- Fact sheets
- Tip sheets
- Photos
- Spot announcements
- Interviews

News releases should be employed for widespread distribution (newspapers, radio and television stations) with an indication of release date (“For Immediate Release” is most common) and the name and phone number of the local contact (public relations director) should the reporter require further information. (See the section on “Preparing the News Story.”)

Backgrounders are more narrative in nature, generally giving a historical perspective. Backgrounders are most often employed when seeking a feature article, editorial column or capsulizing an event in a historical framework for a reporter who may wish to cover it.

Backgrounders are also used to provide information on an organization. The appendix includes a sample backgrounder on the BPO Elks.

We encourage you to utilize this or a similar backgrounder you may wish to prepare, both for making basic contact with the media and for accompanying any release you issue throughout the year. You should also prepare a backgrounder on your local Lodge.

Fact sheets are brief, factual statements about an organization, event, ongoing activity or even an individual. They are most often employed to provide reporters with basic facts on a story or to whet their appetite for an event or activity you wish covered. They are also used in radio or television interviews to provide the interviewer with easy access to information, which will ensure that the best questions are asked and improve the chances of your story being broadcast. This is especially important with TV and/or radio talk shows.

Photos should be employed to amplify a story. Static photos — posed people looking at a camera — should never be utilized except in announcements of newly elected officers. In those cases, individual head and shoulder photos are better. Photos should always be
black and white with glossy finish.

The event is of more interest to the public than the after-the-fact awards ceremony. The photos should show the event. The accompanying article will identify the winners, if appropriate. Photos should be timely — within a day or two of the event. You should clearly identify those shown in the photos. Backgrounds should be simple and appropriate. Newspapers require a high degree of resolution for effective reproduction, so photos should be sharp with even lighting — no heavy shadows.

Spot announcements can be used to broadcast upcoming events to the public. Such announcements should be short (60 words maximum), concise and give only the important facts. The event must be open to the public. Give copy to the public affairs director of your local radio and television station. In most cases, they will not be able to tell you when it will air as a public service announcement. PSAs are slotted on a time-permitting basis. The radio log will indicate when it was used after the fact.

Interviews offer another opportunity to tell your story. You must be careful not to overdo them. The interviews should be focused on a significant event and the person being interviewed should be in a position of authority. Submit interview suggestions to radio and television talk show producers or news directors by letter. The letter should be accompanied with a biography of the proposed guest, a backgrounder on the subject to be discussed and a fact sheet on the subject.

Your guest should be thoroughly briefed before the interview. Maximize every media opportunity by having an objective and keeping it in mind. By establishing three to five key points that best tell our story and then injecting those points into the interview, you can make the difference between just filling air time and selling Elkdom. Be prepared to cite a dramatic, concrete example to illustrate each point. Below are four themes on which you can elaborate using specific local examples:

1. The Elks strive to lead by example through our civic activities. We feel that American citizenship carries with it certain responsibilities and these include community service. We try to make our communities better places to live through our scholarship program, major projects, sponsorship of Boy Scouts and Little League teams, etc.

2. The Elks believe strongly that service to others, especially those less fortunate, is the rent we pay for living. Our charitable and philanthropic activities include drug educational and youth athletic programs, college scholarships, veterans service and aid for people with disabilities. Each year, the Order contributes more than $140 million in time and money in support of these programs.

3. The Elks believe the future of this country is in the hands of its youth. Therefore, we are dedicated to providing safe, healthy environments in which today’s youth can learn, grow and mature into tomorrow’s leaders. Nationwide, the Elks award $6.3 million in college scholarships every year; in the Elks “Hoop Shoot” free throw contest, we operate the largest coeducational sports program in the country; the Elks contribute more than $45 million a year in support of youth groups and organizations, athletic and drug educational programs, and other youth activities.

4. Elks Lodges are social centers providing fun, wide-ranging activities that appeal to all members of the family.

Again, you should be prepared to support each point with specific local examples. Choose examples that will most effectively tell your story, sell your organization and win public support. When the opportunity to emphasize one of these points presents itself, seize it. Don’t hesitate to steer your answers toward these themes; you will then be controlling the interview.
4. Preparing the News Story

A good news release, whether intended for newspaper, radio or television, will give the news quickly and completely and reduce the need for the editor or reporter to seek additional information. (You will find sample news releases in the appendix.)

The first paragraph should summarize the information in 50 words or less including:

- **What** is happening
- **Where** it is happening
- **Who** are the principals involved
- **When** it is happening
- **Why** it is happening

Later paragraphs develop the information in the first paragraph and explain the implications of the story.

Above all, stories must be readable. They are not meant to stand as literature for the ages; they are meant to impart information. A story about Elkdom is of little use if it is understood only by Elks. For example, you can refer to the organization as the BPO Elks, but not many people will recognize BPOE. Once you’ve identified our organization, refer to it as the Elks.

**Titles:** Some titles have no meaning outside the Order and should not be used in a release. These include the Knights, Tiler, Esquire and Inner Guard. If establishing a position of leadership within the Lodge is essential to the story, use the term “officer” as follows: Jane Doe, an officer in Anytown Elks Lodge.

Titles indicating hierarchical position or distinguishing role should be capitalized when they precede the name: Grand Exalted Ruler John Doe. Titles should be lower-cased when they follow the name: John Doe, president of the New York State Elks Association.

When writing news releases, keep these 10 Principles of Clear Statement in mind:

1. Keep sentences short, on the average.
2. Prefer the simple to the complex.
3. Prefer familiar words; develop your vocabulary.
4. Avoid needless words.
5. Put action in your verbs.
6. Write as you talk.
7. Use terms your reader can picture.
8. Tie in with your reader’s experience.
9. Make full use of variety in your writing.
10. Write to Express, not to Impress.

Notice the difference in the following two versions:

**No:** Twelve year-old Jane Doe of Peru has emerged the winner in the state free throw shooting contest, the Elks “Hoop Shoot,” conducted by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, by sinking 24 of 25 free throws to defeat her nearest opponent by three shots in the event held at Market Square Arena in which 64 competitors, 32 boys and 32 girls, vied separately in three categories for the state championship and the right to advance to the regional semi-finals in Toledo, Ohio, next Saturday.

**Yes:** Jane Doe, 12, of Peru nailed 24 of 25 free throws today at Market Square Arena in Indianapolis to win the 12-13-year-old girls division of the Indiana Elks “Hoop Shoot” Contest.

Thirty-two boys and 32 girls, having advanced through local and district competition, vied for top state honors in girl and boy divisions in three age-groups. Jane and the five other state champions will now move on to the
regional finals, March 21 in Toledo, Ohio, where they will meet champions from Michigan and Ohio. The winners there will compete in the national finals, April 18-20 in Springfield, Mass.

More than three million kids, ages 8-13 embarked on the road to Springfield this year, including 67,000 Hoosiers. Their goal is to have their names permanently inscribed on the Elks “Hoop Shoot” plaque in Springfield’s Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame, an honor bestowed upon the six national champions.

OK, the first example is extreme, but you get the idea. Organize the story in your head before you start to write. Keep the five W’s in mind, and work them into your article early.

How to write news releases
- Write the most important sentence at the beginning of the paragraph, and the most important paragraph at the top of the story. Editors will begin cutting for space from the bottom, so that’s where your least essential information should be. Your story’s lead should tell the editor “who, what, where, when, why and how.”

- After the lead paragraph, give details in order. Keep timeliness in mind. The location or proximity is also important. Remember who your audience is and where your readers are located before writing.

- Don’t try to make news out of something that is not. Present truthful, newsworthy, helpful stories to the editors. Where possible, give interpretive or technical support to your story, and keep it factual.

- Write in conversational tones, but don’t discard good language usage and grammar. Most important, keep the interest of your audience in mind. Avoid complicated or technical language or difficult words, long sentences and long paragraphs. Write to express — not impress.

- No editor is obligated to print your article, no matter how good it is. Write it so they will see the value and worth. Then, if it needs some editing for publication, they’ll take care of it.

- Be objective in a straight news story. Stick to the facts. You abandon your objectivity and become an editorial writer when you say that a meeting was either exciting or dull. Editors of publications and news directors of broadcast stations want straightforward facts to present to their readers and audiences.

Whenever appropriate, include a glossy black-and-white photo with your article. Attach a photo caption with relevant information to the photo.

How to prepare copy
- Double-space all copy. This allows editors room to edit and also gives them a more accurate gauge for allotting space or broadcast time for the story.

- Leave generous margins — at least one inch on both sides and bottom, and three inches at the top. The editor needs this space to write typesetting instructions and headlines.

- Type all copy, using only one side of each standard size sheet of typing paper.

- Do not use lightweight or flimsy paper. This makes editing difficult.

- If you are not using Lodge letterhead, type your name, title, address, telephone number and date in the upper right-hand corner of the first page. This makes it easy for the editor to contact you and identifies you as a legitimate news source.

- In the upper left-hand corner, type the words “For Release” with the date next to it. This date tells editors when they may print your release.

- Write “-more-“ at the bottom of the page if the story continues on the next page.

- Indicate end of story by “#” or “-30-” or “-end-” at the bottom of the page.
• Make sure second and subsequent pages have your name, article title and page number.
• Do not put more than one story on a page.
• For distribution to several editors, duplicate the story on a photocopy machine or type originals for each media. Do not use carbon copies.

How to use a caption
The caption is the text beneath the picture. It should give the editor and reader additional information needed to fully understand the picture. Make it easy to read by using short, concise sentences.

If you plan a picture release only, your captions will likely be longer than when you send the picture with a story. If editors don’t have enough room to run your whole story, they may just run the picture and caption. Give enough information to make that possible.

Use given name or initials and surname of all people in the picture, plus correct titles.

People in the picture are always named left to right as shown in the photo unless otherwise indicated. It’s often best to name the most prominent person first, regardless of position in the photo. Double-check caption against people in the photo.

Say when and where the photo was taken. Do not assume the location is obvious or the date irrelevant.

Get your photo and caption to the editor in the most usable form. As with the news release, captions should be typed, double-spaced and identified with your name, address and phone number.

Each caption should be attached to the back of the photo with cellophane tape. It should then be folded over the front of the photo to protect it.

Do not use staples or paper clips on photos. They leave marks that can be seen when the picture is reproduced for publication.

Do not write on the backs of photos except for putting names on the backs of head shots. Then use typed labels or write with a soft pencil lightly on the back lower margin. Every head shot sent out should be identified.

Ensure safe handling of all photographs. Place them in properly sized separate envelopes, marked “PHOTOGRAPHS — DO NOT BEND,” between cardboard protective sheets the same size as the envelope. Paper clips and staples can scratch a photo, so don’t include them in the envelope. Label the outside of the envelope as to contents, whether they are being mailed or delivered in person.

10 Principles of Clear Statement

1. Keep sentences short, on the average.
2. Prefer the simple to the complex.
3. Prefer familiar words; develop your vocabulary.
4. Avoid needless words.
5. Put action in your verbs.
6. Write as you talk.
7. Use terms your reader can picture.
8. Tie in with your reader’s experience.
9. Make full use of variety in your writing.
10. Write to Express, not to Impress.
5. Do’s and Don’t’s

✔ Do prepare your release far enough in advance to check for accuracy.

✔ Do double-check each spelling, age, statistic and other facts to assure they are absolutely correct.

✔ Do strive for short, snappy sentences and paragraphs. Keep quotes brief, informative and to the point.

✔ Do time your release and photos so they reach the media in time for the next edition.

✔ Do keep the news release brief (three pages maximum).

✔ Do double-space all releases.

✔ Do begin the release halfway down the page.

✔ Do allow ample margins.

✔ Don’t send out messy releases, poor photos or releases where you have obviously filled in the blanks.

✔ Don’t ask the editor or reporter to send you a copy of the story or extra copies of the newspaper when the story runs. If the story is important enough to you, you should purchase a newspaper.

✔ Don’t ask editors when they are going to use the item.

✔ Don’t refer to advertising or friends in high places as a means of influencing the editor.

✔ Don’t send releases to personal friends at the paper unless that friend is in charge of the section to which that release would apply.

✔ Don’t puff up the story with flowery adjectives. Let the facts speak for themselves.

✔ Don’t, above all, offer special favors for special treatment.

✔ Don’t call higher-ups each time a story is not used or is given poor treatment. There are times when a protest is called for — when there are errors in facts — but editors will resent routine questioning of their news judgement.

6. Public Relations Responsibility

Ultimately, the responsibility for generating exposure for any Lodge lies with those responsible for the program itself. But realistically, the most effective job will be done by those responsible for public relations.

The media are both demanding and insatiable. Their responsibility to fill the paper with solid news that will attract and interest their readers every day makes them hungry for more and better information.

Rarely will a release be used as it is presented — it’s a journalist’s nature to edit, rewrite and then edit some more. That is not a reflection on what you have provided. They simply want to make it as good as possible, recognizing that there is limited space in which to get your information to their readers.
7. Prepare to Meet the Media

You might find yourself called upon to respond to media inquiries. Whether responding to an unflattering article or being interviewed for the evening news, we must be ready to work with the media. Ignoring the media only provides reasons for them to gather information from unofficial sources.

Of course if you do get a call, the first thing you should do is contact your state public relations chairman and state sponsor for immediate and detailed advice on how to respond. The inquiry may turn out to be sensitive or tricky, and you need to project “one voice.”

There are, however, some basic things to remember. Here are some tips developed over the years through experience:

- Know Your Interviewer: Before you make any commitment, check the reporter’s background on the particular issue. Has the interviewer always been open-minded on the issue? Listen and watch several of the interviewer’s programs, read past columns to determine if any bias exists. Always be careful in your answers.

- Know Your Material: Nothing can compare with complete knowledge of your topic. Faking an answer during an interview might get you into more trouble than admitting you don’t know. If it is an issue with which you are unfamiliar, say so. If you can direct them to the proper person for more information, do so. However, there is also “technical overkill.” Do not overload your audience with statistics and figures — you will only confuse them.

- Know Your Audience: Direct your information to your audience, not the interviewer. If you are speaking on the radio, do not get too abstract or complex. Find out from the station who is listening to the program. Knowing who they are will help you develop material to which they can relate.

  With print and television, communicating your message is easier. Use illustrations or facial expressions to get a point across. However, you should be aware that in the case of television interviews, the camera pans between interviewee and interviewer throughout the interview. Do not be caught off-guard; you may be on camera.

  For example, do not smile if your opponent or interviewer is talking about a controversial subject. But do shake your head where appropriate or indicate your disapproval of your opponent’s statement. This will let the viewers know your feelings on the issue without your having to interrupt.

  Involve the audience in your discussion. Whenever possible, alert Elks to your appearance on a live radio or television show. During call-in segments, they might be able to call in and bring up points that you were unable to address earlier.

- Know Your Rights: Before you arrive at your interview, there are several things you have a right to know. You should know the length of your interview so you can tailor your answers to the format. If it is going to be short, use brief “bites” of information (approximately 20 to 30 seconds in length). You should also know if it is going to be a live or
taped interview and whether there will be a call-in segment.

Tape the segment once you learn when it is going to air. The station can not always send you a copy.

In addition, you also have a right to know who else will be appearing with you. The last thing you want to do is face an adversary unprepared.

During the course of the interview, you should feel free to interject your thoughts if another interviewee or the interviewer offers a statement you disagree with. You do not have to be rude; a simple “Excuse me, but I have to disagree with you on that point” will suffice. This will let the viewers or listeners know that you oppose this statement. Likewise, if you are interrupted, you have the right to finish your statement.

- Know Yourself: Assess your skills and flaws honestly before you share them with the general public. If you know you tend to use your hands to speak, try to control that habit during your interview. If you speak quickly, rehearse with a friend and try to slow down.

- Know Your Medium: Different media require different types of preparation. For example, for a newspaper interview, it may not be as important to sit up straight and empty your pockets as it would be for a television interview. However, you should not take a newspaper interview any more casually. As a matter of fact, don’t ever feel too comfortable with a reporter in an interview situation. Be aware that the “off the hip,” “off the cuff,” “off the record” comments can be the first ones to see print or hit the airwaves.

For television interviews, do not wear print patterns or white clothing, and don’t overdue the accessories. You don’t want the viewers paying more attention to what you are wearing than to what you are saying. Remember to look into the camera when you want to make a point and speak directly to the audience. If you can wear contact lenses, do so. But do not remove your glasses and attempt to squint your way through the interview. That’s exactly what it will look like you are doing.

Men should stick to business blue or gray suits, except in special situations that might warrant a more casual look. Women should stick to light makeup and suits or medium-length skirts or dresses. Even if miniskirts are in style, you don’t want to be tugging at or adjusting your skirt throughout the interview.

Radio interviews allow you to concentrate more on your message than your appearance. Without the glare of lights and camera, you can use a checklist of points you would like to cover during your interview. However, you should not tote an entire encyclopedia of information. Some short, factual points on which you can easily expound should be sufficient. They will help keep you on track during the interview.

Often, facing a diversity of questions from listeners and host, it can be easy to jump from topic to topic and lose your train of thought. Outline your objectives before the interview and try to work your way back to them. However, do not read your objectives; instead, discuss them with the audience. Even over the radio, your audience can hear you reading your message.

There is no magic formula for succeeding in an interview, just preparation, knowledge and presence. Be fleet of foot and keen of perception. There’s no substitute for these, but knowing the rules of the game can certainly make playing it a lot easier.
Appendix

Submitting Material to the Elks Magazine

Lodges are expected to share news and pictures of their successful programs with The Elks Magazine.

Material submitted should involve Lodge or State Association activities unusual or unique enough to merit national exposure. All news must be submitted as soon as possible after the event occurs, in no case later than four weeks.

Photographs should be “human interest,” depicting the event, not merely groups posing for the camera. Instead of sending pictures of check presentations, send pictures that show the donated money “at work,” providing equipment and/or service. Photos must have sharp focus and good contrast, and be accompanied by a complete, accurate identification of all individuals shown, and a clear and complete explanation of the event. Do not write on the back of the photograph. Do protect it with cardboard when you mail it.

The Elks Magazine wants reports and photographs of charitable activities; civic involvement; youth programs, including Drug Awareness, in action; Elks National Foundation and Veterans Service activities, not check or certificate presentations; state Major Projects; visits of the Grand Exalted Ruler; dedications of new Lodge homes, institutions of new Lodges and mortgage-burning ceremonies; and state and national “Hoop Shoot” and “Most Valuable Student” winners.

The magazine cannot accept reports of Lodge officer installations; initiation group pictures or relative initiation pictures; poems, eulogies or editorials; publicity on future events; photographs of groups of 10 or more people or of one person; Elk of Year Awards, State Association Awards, or Student/Teenager of the Month/Year Awards; pictures of or references to alcohol; or reports of non-Elks activities. Additionally, material on such mandatory activities as Flag Day, Christmas Programs and Elks Memorial Sunday is not published.

Submit all material to The Elks Magazine, Editorial Department, 425 W. Diversey Parkway, Chicago, IL 60614. Include your name, address and daytime telephone number. (It is always courteous to send a concurrent copy to your Grand Lodge Sponsor).

For the magazine’s complete fraternal news guidelines, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the editorial department, or grab them right off the web at http://www.elks.org/elksmag/fratguid.htm.

The Elks Magazine looks forward to hearing from you.
**News Release Checklist**

The format for news releases was designed to facilitate the media’s job and is fairly standard around the country.

1) The letterhead identifies your organization, and a name, address and telephone number to call for additional information are listed at the top of the page.

2) It has a release date, which tells the media when the material can be released for publication. (This device permits distribution of releases in advance so that all competing media can have equal timeliness in covering the news.) Generally, it should read: “FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE” or the appropriate release date.

3) The news begins well down on the first page, leaving room for a headline to be written onto the copy by the editor.

4) It is double-spaced, leaving room for legible editorial changes without retyping.

5) The essential news is told in the first paragraph. Thus the basic information will be printed even if the publication carries only part of the release.

6) There are no unnecessary adjectives or immodest statements.

7) The information is accurate in every respect.

8) The news value is obvious to the editor at a glance.

9) It is typed neatly and cleanly.

10) Only one side of each page is used for the message. (Never use both sides of a release to tell your story.)

11) When delivered in an envelope, the envelope is clearly marked: “News Release.”

12) Keep a master of all your releases by date.

13) If you answer a question or are interviewed by phone, keep a record — what you said, who you talked to, and day and time. If either you or the person calling you on the phone records the questions, answers or comments, federal and other laws require each person recording to advise clearly that the recording is being made. In addition the law may require a periodic beep or tone during the recording (check with a member of the legal profession locally for applicable regulations). If such a recording is being made, be sure to state the date and time and the name of those participating along with the name of the organization each represents.

14) Keep a clipping file of stories that have appeared.

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**Media Contact File**

A major list covering every newspaper, radio and television outlet in your area should be prepared. The list should contain:

1) Publication’s name or station call letters, street address and telephone number.

2) Names of those responsible at each outlet for your news:
   a. editors, managing editors or news editors for weekly newspapers
   b. sports editors, writers, photo editors, feature editors, city editors and lifestyle editors for large dailies
   c. news and sports editors or directors for TV stations
   d. news and sports editors for radio stations
   e. names of writers or editors who have contacted you previously or written about your program
   f. bureau chiefs of wire services

3) Deadlines for news and photos, including those for evening TV newscasts.

4) Instructions for delivery:
   a. by hand to dailies and stations, or to weeklies when the newspaper is being prepared
   b. by telephone on late-breaking news and emergencies
Backgrounder

BPO Elks of the USA

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is one of the oldest and largest private organizations in the United States, formally meeting since February 16, 1868. Fifteen actors and entertainers attended that first meeting in New York City. The organization has since grown to nearly 1.3 million men and women in 2,200 local “Lodges” throughout the country, embracing all occupations and professions.

The organization’s philanthropic bent grew out of the founders’ desire to assist members in need and young actors who were out of work. In 1871, the Elks staged a benefit for the Chicago Fire, and the organization has responded to every major disaster since then, from the Seattle fire and Johnstown flood in 1889, to the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 and the Red River flooding of 1997. This in addition to the community service that has become an Elks tradition.

The Order is best noted for its work with youths. The Elks annually award scholarships at the local, state and national levels and sponsor activities such as the Elks “Hoop Shoot,” Drug Awareness programs, Scouting, Little League, summer camps and in-home treatment for children with disabilities.

Of the many additional prides in Elkdom, two stand tall. The first is the patriotism displayed by the Order. In 1907, the Elks became the first fraternal organization to observe flag day on June 14. More than 40 years later, President Harry S. Truman, a member of the Order, declared the date a national observance.

The second is the promise made in World War I that disabled American veterans would never be forgotten. The Order of Elks supplied and equipped the first two field hospitals in France. For returning wounded, the Elks constructed the first hospital in Boston and then donated it to the federal government. This was the start of today’s veterans hospital system.

The Order’s history of patriotism and service has set the tone for the modern Lodge. Last year, the Elks and their families contributed more than 5.6 million volunteer-hours and $143 million in philanthropic service. As they have for more than 129 years, the Elks continue to make a difference in their communities, their states and their country.
The Elks National “Hoop Shoot®” Program

The Elks National “Hoop Shoot” free-throw shooting contest is the largest and most visible of the many youth activities sponsored by Elks lodges throughout the country. More than three million boys and girls from ages 8 to 13 participated this year.

The Elks “Hoop Shoot” has served to highlight the Elks’ national commitment to youth. But the program started originally as a local Elks activity in Corvallis, Oregon, in 1946.

Out of that local program grew the national program, which just completed its 25th year. Each of the more than 2,200 Lodges was encouraged to establish its own local contest involving boys from ages 8 to 13. From the local area, contestants would advance through district, state, regional and national competitions.

In the first year, 1971, boys from 19 states participated. Two years later in 1973, more than 750,000 boys from 42 states took part in the contest. In the following year, girls joined the competition, and the program has continued to expand ever since. All 50 states and the District of Columbia are represented.

From the millions of youngsters who participate, six champions are named — one boy and one girl in each of three age-groups: 8-9, 10-11 and 12-13. The winners each receive a trophy, and their names are inscribed at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, Massachusetts. Past champions include Golden State Warrior Chris Mullin and North Carolina State star Jennifer Howard. The competition to become a champion is tough. At each level, contestants take a total of 25 free throws. National finalists average around 90 percent.

Families participate with contestants throughout the competition. The parents of finalists on the state, regional and national levels attend the competitions as guests of the Elks.

The Elks “Hoop Shoot” has been effective not only in developing champions, but character as well. Educators and parents have endorsed the program. One parent wrote, “It teaches a person how to win in good grace and how to accept the moment of defeat without bitterness.”

The Elks “Hoop Shoot” Contest is funded entirely by the Elks National Foundation, the primary charitable arm of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America.
Elks “Hoop Shoot” Competition

Media Notes

TODAY’S CONTEST marks the (first/second/third) round of competition in the annual Elks “Hoop Shoot.” “Hoop Shoot” is the copyrighted trademark owned by the Elks for this National Free Throw Shooting Contest. It was originated by Frank Hise, a Past Grand Exalted Ruler of the BPO Elks, in Corvallis, Ore., in 1946. The Oregon State Elks Association took it to a state level of competition in 1958. Gerald L. (Getty) Powell directed the program on a national level beginning in 1972. More than three million youths, ages 8 through 13, participate each year.

SITE: (Your local gymnasium, with whatever newsworthy descriptive information is available, i.e., is this the first/10th consecutive time the contest has been held in this facility.)

ITINERARY: The contest will begin at (time). The event is open to the public at no charge. The 8- to 9-year-old boys will begin the contest shooting from one end of the court, while the 8- to 9-year-old girls shoot at the other end. This age category will shoot from four feet in front of the regulation foul line. The other age categories, 10 to 11 and 12 to 13, will shoot from the regulation foul line. Each contestant will be given five warm-up shots and then 25 shots for score. When all contestants in the age category have completed their first round of 10, the contestants will return to the line, in the same shooting order, to complete their 25 total shots for score. No warm-ups will be allowed in the second round. Ties will be broken by shoot-offs to be conducted in rounds of five until a winner is decided. The Awards Ceremony will be held at (place).

CONTESTANTS: Today’s contestants are winners of competition in schools and in boys and girls clubs throughout the area. The three boys and three girls in age categories 8-9, 10-11 and 12-13 who score highest here will advance to the (District/State/Regional) Finals at (place and date.) From there, winners continue on to the National Finals in Springfield, Mass., on (date). The names of the national winners are engraved on plaques at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield.

REPEAT CONTESTANTS: (The names, ages, scores and ranking of contestants who participated last year should be provided, especially if one of the youngsters is a previous national winner.)

PREVIOUS LOCAL WINNERS: (Notable accomplishments by past local Elks “Hoop Shoot” participants should also be provided.)

INTERVIEWS AND PHOTOGRAPHHS: All contestants will be available following the contest for interviews and photographs. Photographs may be taken during the contest, but we ask that you not use flash or strobos during the Contest and that you not distract the shooters.

NATIONAL DIRECTOR: Cam Cronk of Billings, Mont., was appointed to this post in 1997.

AWARDS: (Any special arrangements you have made to present the awards should be noted, such as an awards banquet or halftime presentation at a high school basketball game.)

SPONSORSHIP: This program is sponsored by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the U.S.A. It is endorsed by hundreds of school systems around the country. The Elks fund the program primarily through the Elks National Foundation and the support of its subordinate lodges and state associations. Travel and lodging expenses for the contestants and their parents are paid by the Elks.
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Jack Jackson, PR Chairman
Anytown Elks Lodge
456-7890

Elks to Hold Drug Awareness Seminar

Anytown Elks Lodge No. 3333 will hold a drug awareness seminar from 7 to 9 p.m. October 13 at their Lodge Home at 4444 Main St. in Anytown.

Investigator Sarah Parker of the Anytown Police Department will conduct the seminar. Parents, teachers and anyone else who would like to attend should call Doug Douglas at 456-1234.

Drug awareness is just one of the Elks’ many philanthropic and charitable programs. Others include college scholarships, youth athletic programs, veterans service, aid for people with disabilities and camps for disadvantaged youths. Nationwide, the Elks contributed more than $143 million in support of these programs last year.


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**Please Note:** New Lodge chairmen with no previous journalistic experience should refer first to section 4, page 9, “Preparing the News Story,” then refer to section 2, page 3, “Who Are the Media?” Also note the backgrounder and samples in the appendix.
Tools and Resources

The GL Public Relations Committee has a variety of tools and resources available that do none of us any good just sitting in our Chicago office.

Our free publications include:
• The ABCs of Publicity
• Seven Easy Steps to Planning and Staging a Special Event

Our free kits include:
• Making a Difference through Publicity, which incorporates ABCs and Seven Steps, as well as backgrounders on the Order, drug awareness, scholarships and the “Hoop Shoot”
• The GER Media Kit
• The Lodge and State Anniversary Kit

We also have professionally produced 30-second radio spots on veterans service, reinstatement, drug awareness, scholarships and the “Hoop Shoot.” These five spots are available on one cassette tape for $5 plus $1.50 shipping handling.

This “Media Relations Handbook” (Code 5107-1) and “What You Should Know about the Elks” brochure (Code 5125) are available from the Grand Lodge Shipping Department.

For more information, contact the BPO Elks PR Department, 2750 N. Lakeview Ave., Chicago, IL 60614-1889, 773/477-2750 ext. 280, pr@elks.org.

How to Kill Your Lodge in Seven Easy Steps

1. Just pretend everyone knows what you have to offer. Don’t Advertise.
2. Convince yourself you’ve been a Lodge so long members will automatically come to you. Don’t Advertise.
3. Forget there are new potential members who would join if they were asked. Don’t Advertise.
4. Tell yourself you don’t have time to spend thinking about promoting Elkdom. Don’t Advertise.
5. Forget you have competition trying to attract members away from you. Don’t Advertise.
6. Tell yourself it costs too much to advertise and that you don’t get enough out of it! Don’t Advertise.
7. Overlook the fact that advertising is an investment in selling Elkdom — not an expense. Don’t Advertise.

The Volunteer World

In the volunteer world of Elkdom, to stand still is to slip behind, and to slow up is to give away any chance to really move ahead. 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.
To help your Lodge celebrate landmark anniversaries, you may want to publish a tabloid covering the event. This will usually be included in one edition of your local newspaper.

There are two ways to sell ads to fund the cost of the tabloid:

1. The Lodge sells the ads.
2. The Newspaper sells the ads.

The tabloid should feature various articles covering the history of the Lodge, with pictures, wherever possible. Accomplishments of the Lodge should be featured, with special attention to those which benefit the community. A historical overview of early members of the Lodge and their impact on your community.

A record of successful youth opportunity programs and their community impact could be included, and if your “Hoop Shoot” winners or scholarship recipients have attained any public recognition in later life, mention in your tabloid would be appropriate.

Your local newspaper may have a file or archive about your lodge that could be examined for interesting highlights.

Treat the tabloid as you would an entry for the “Community Image” contest. Your Lodge has undoubtedly had a positive impact on life in your community during its existence.
Anytown Elks to Celebrate 100 Years of Community Service

Anytown Elks Lodge No. 0000 of the BPO Elks of the USA will celebrate 100 years of service to the community over the weekend of December 13. Festivities will include an open house from 7 to 10 p.m. on December 13, a black-tie banquet for members only beginning at 6 p.m. on December 14, and a pancake breakfast fund-raiser for the Children’s Hospital from 8 a.m. to noon on December 15.

Anytown Lodge was instituted on December 1, 1886, with a total membership of 75 men. The Exalted Ruler, or Lodge president, was William Johnson. Today, the Lodge, located on Main Street and Hickory Avenue, boasts a membership of 763 men and women. The Exalted Ruler is Harry McHugh.

Anytown is one of 2,200 nationwide Lodges in the Chicago-based charitable organization. Last year, the 1.3 million Elks contributed more than $143 million to charitable and philanthropic programs. These include youth athletic and drug education programs, college scholarships, veterans service, and aid for people with disabilities, the major project of the Anystate Elks. The primary beneficiary of the Anytown Elks’ charitable work is the Children’s Hospital. The Lodge annually raises about $10,000 for the hospital.

Among the Elks dignitaries who will be helping the Lodge celebrate is James Jones of Green City, a national officer in the organization.

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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.