

## MAKING YOUR PROBUS CLUB A 'MEDIA STAR'

Promoting Probus as a worthwhile community organisation via the media, is an option available to Probus Clubs across Queensland and will soon be made easier with the launch of PAQ's Media Guidelines.

Positive editorial publicity is effective. It's a way of getting a message across to local and wider audiences that carries great credibility. People tend to believe what they read in the papers, see on television or hear on the radio.

The important difference between publicity and other forms of promotion is that it is not paid for.

Information generated by clubs may appear in a story or editorial form in the print media and in the non-commercial portion of radio and television programs as community service announcements.

As a starting point, you need to understand 'what is news' as far as media is concerned. The short answer: anything that a journalist thinks is newsworthy, interesting or worthy of record.

News must have one or more of the following elements to get the journalist's attention:

|  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| <i>Information</i>                                   | <i>Interest</i>        |
| <i>Controversy</i>                                   | <i>Celebrity value</i> |
| <i>Timeliness</i>                                    | <i>Uniqueness</i>      |
| <i>Human interest</i>                                | <i>and</i>             |
| <i>Relevance to its readership listeners/viewers</i> |                        |

Once a topic is deemed to be newsworthy, the job of the journalist, or the Probus member putting together a media release, is to write a story that answers as many of the following questions as possible:

- *Who?*
- *Why?*
- *What?*
- *When?*
- *Where?*

When you write your media release, make sure that the whole story is encapsulated in the opening sentence, then add supporting detail in subsequent paragraphs. If the editor decides to run your story 'as is', it will be passed to a sub-editor who may have to reduce the length to fit the available space. Sub-editors tend to work from the bottom up, because they know that in a well-written story the final paragraphs will contain only minor detail. The theory here is that if everything is cut except your opening paragraph, and that does happen, the gist of your story will still come across.

Embarking on a publicity program may have appeal to clubs with declining membership, positive media coverage can create interest and enquiries. When a Probus club has a positive public image, current members are motivated to be active, and prospective members are often eager to join.

To demonstrate the power of the media, I can draw on the example, the foundation of my own club two and a half years ago.

Probian Judy Magub who is also a member of the

sponsoring Rotary Club of Brisbane Planetarium, was interviewed on the ABC radio breakfast program and announced that a new Probus Club would be formed in Brisbane's west.

Reaction to the initial call for potential members was impressive with over 150 people attending the first information meeting. The response from enthusiastic prospective members was so great, that two clubs were formed, Probus Indooroopilly West and Probus Indooroopilly.

Effective use of media had meant that both clubs began with close to 80 members who were attracted to the prospect of new social engagement.

During the radio interview Judy Magub talked about the enjoyment of member benefits including international and domestic travel, daytrip excursions, monthly meetings with interesting guest speakers and opportunities to meet new friends.

When creating a publicity strategy it's important to identify and agree on your goals, what do you want to achieve?

Because Probus is all about fostering the wellbeing and involvement of older people in the community, by promoting these ideals via the media, we help secure the sustainability of clubs across the state.

Here's a few pointers:

- The best key messages are believable, easy to understand, distinctive, credible and succinct while accurately communicating your club's event, activity or member profile. Use simple and easily understood language.
- A media release should be typed - double spaced and written as close to the style of a news story as possible, Be mindful that the topic and content be of interest to non-club members.
- Put the name of your club at the top of the release. The wording 'Media Release' needs to also be prominently displayed and include the name and contact details of a club person to contact for further information.
- Create and maintain an accurate database of local media outlets. These will probably be newspapers, local magazines and radio stations.
- When speaking on the radio make your most important point first, interviews are generally brief and you may only have a few minutes. Utilize community radio stations as they are often looking for newsworthy stories.
- The benefit of regular contact with local media is even though they are unlikely to cover everything you suggest, they may contact you one day as a source for a story.
- Finally, don't take rejection personally, vying for media attention is highly competitive and can be difficult, tenacity and persistence are common traits in a good club Publicity Officers.

Judith Maestracci AM is President of the Probus Club of Indooroopilly. Judith owned and operated a successful public relations and marketing company for over twenty years. She has worked as a newspaper and magazine journalist as well as a radio and television presenter.