

THIRTY EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SPONSORING

(presented by Past Council Chair JT Binstead at the 2009 USA/Canada Forum)

These strategies can be used either for individual sponsoring or club formation

STRATEGY #1: PUT AN AD IN THE PAPER! Admittedly, this is expensive and it doesn't always work. But develop a good ad, e.g. "Change the World Through Lionism", "Help the Blind See", "Be Part of One and a Half Million Miracle Workers", "Spread Joy Without Spending a Dime". One club put in an ad that said, "Have a free meal on the Lions! No strings attached!" All the prospect had to do was listen to a membership presentation. These are all viable ads that will generate phone calls. And all you want from an ad is a phone call. The rest is up to you.

STRATEGY #2: GIVE AN AWARD LOCALLY! Pick a celebrity (or an average citizen who has done something extraordinary) and honor him/her with a dinner and a plaque. "Presented to J.T. Binstead by the Bala Cynwyd-Marberth Lions Club in appreciation of his community service." The phrasing is up to you. Cover the cost of the meal for the recipient and maybe a few of his family. It will generate income and name recognition for your club. In the award presentation mention that J.T.'s service is "in the spirit of Lionism – for here is what we do" Then you launch into your commercial. No one will leave the dinner ignorant of what your club is all about. At that point, it's up to you to close the deal.

STRATEGY #3: GIVE INCENTIVES! Join this month and get a free car wash! I find this works even better when you give the incentive to the sponsors. In my district I put the name of everyone who sponsored a new Lion within a certain period of time into a hat. If they sponsored two, their name went in twice. At the end of the time, the District Governor drew a name from the hat. The sponsor, spouse, and their club president and spouse were then the guests of BetteAnn and myself at one of the finest gourmet restaurants on the East Coast. For that investment, I brought in several dozen new Lions my District might not have gotten otherwise. Your incentive need not be as elaborate or as flashy. Consult your Governor, consult your budget and consult your District. Maybe they'll share the cost with you.

STRATEGY #4: COMMUNITY SERVICE OUTREACH PROJECTS! I am a Red Cross certified CPR/First Aid/AED Instructor for both the layman and the professional rescuer. On a Saturday in August I offered free CPR/First Aid/AED training to the general public. The only glitch was they had to listen to a pitch from various Lions at different times during the program. We gave out free coffee and soft drinks and everyone had a good time. They all left feeling that they had spent their time wisely. Seven of them left with new Lions cards in their pockets.

STRATEGY #5 : DEAL WITH LATCHKEY KIDS! My District and probably yours is a victim of its own success. Because our real estate values are so high, both Mom and Dad have to work at least one full time job (and maybe moonlight). This does not bode well for their kids. Here's a need we can fill. My club is considering hiring local teachers to do SAT Prep classes on various days. It is something the kids need, the parents want, and the community will appreciate. The investment is modest. Having been a teacher, I know what they make. And the good will we generate is priceless.

STRATEGY #6 : CONTESTS! Lion International has been amazingly successful with the Peace Poster Contest. Several sub districts in my state have used a Substance Abuse Prevention Poster Contest with great results. This is a wonderful way to develop enthusiasm among the parents who, basically, are the demographic we are seeking to engage. Most people appreciate efforts directed at improving their kids' lives. It is prudent to have an "outside" judge for these events. Nothings ticks off a parent more than having his little "Johnny" disrespected by a judge. Let somebody else take the heat on that one.

STRATEGY #7: D.A.R.E. PROGRAM/QUEST PROGRAM! LIONS QUEST is an even more inclusive program than D.A.R.E. and LCI owns it! Once a school district is properly informed about the LIONS QUEST Program, any superintendent will welcome Lions with open arms into his school system.

STRATEGY #8: LEO CLUBS ACTIVITIES! How many clubs hold a graduation ceremony for Leos? If you do, what happens? Do you give them a certificate (if that!), thank them and send them on their way? I have been encouraging Lions Clubs to actually pay the dues of their Leos while they are in college. I would induct them immediately as associate members with the stipulation that they attend meetings and activities when they are home on their break. Why lose these enthusiastic, motivated potential Lions? Those who remain in the area should be inducted as full-fledged Lions immediately. It is an absolute waste to dismiss these young people who are vital to our growth.

STRATEGY #9: BABY-SITTING CO-OP! Young mothers, either married or single, have a clear need for someone to “take the kids off their hands” for brief periods during the day. Maybe not every day, but often. It is not necessary that you be a child care professional, although it wouldn’t hurt. This is a group of concerned amateurs who are caring for each other’s children for short periods during the day. Professional day care facilities are expensive and out of reach of many parents. Rather than leave the children home alone (a bad choice but one often chosen), we are providing a service. No one expects us to provide the educational opportunities that day care facilities offer. But we should be competent in basic first aid and parenting skills.

STRATEGY #10: DAY CARE CENTERS! This is not the same as #9. Baby sitting is just that. You’re watching someone’s kids and hopefully keeping them out of harm’s way. Day care centers may offer instructional programs, recreational activities, nutritional snacks, etc and need not be licensed – so long as you don’t charge for your services. Check with your local municipality for regulations. Make it clear to them that you are VOLUNTEERS(!). Lions Clubs International’s blanket insurance liability policy should cover this. Again, check with LCI. Additional food for thought, day care need not be restricted to children. Many families would cherish the opportunity to place their elderly relative in a center where they will be loved and cared for throughout the day. The basic mantra of Lionism should be: find a need and fill it.

STRATEGY #11: AFTER SCHOOL CARE! Is this the same thing? No, but it’s similar. Maybe you have a member with the expertise (and the time) to offer an interesting program on a temporary basis. My club has me offering an after school program in what I call “street first aid”. The young people actually enjoy wrapping each other in bandages and, while they are not looking, they actually learn something.

STRATEGY #12: SPORTS SPONSORSHIP! We all sponsor Little League teams and Boy Scouts and local basketball leagues. But what about something like the Narberth Run – a 10K run to fund cancer research? This idea did not originate with our club but, once we heard about it, we made it our own. Now even the founders call it the Narberth Lions Run. It requires some manpower and some administrative capability, but the results are well worth it. The community sees one of us in a Lions jacket and immediately says “Oh, you’re the guys fighting cancer!” That’s a lot better than “Oh, you’re the guys who stand on the corner twice a year and collect money!” What about a foul-shooting contest? A home run derby? What about presenting trophies from your local club to the “most motivated” athlete at your local high school? “Best all around team player”? “Most improved”? The list is endless.

STRATEGY #13: SPONSOR DRAMA CLUB! Ever wonder what most kids want to do in their free time? SHOW OFF! What better way to accomplish this than to stand on a stage and do something? I’d recommend against “A Streetcar Named Desire” or “King Lear”. In one case, it’s too difficult; in the other, it might not be well received. We’re not developing Oliver’s; we’re finding a way to serve our local community! A nice comedy or musical or variety show would fill the bill. During these shows, you might have one or two parents in attendance. (More likely dozens!) One local high school drama teacher does what I think is most brilliant marketing move I’ve ever seen. He casts virtually the entire student body in his shows. Do you think he has a few people buying tickets to see their little Johnny perform?.

STRATEGY #14: AFTER SERVICES CHURCH COFFEE! This has been used very successfully in our district for some time. It’s usually done in the spring. Each Sunday (or Saturday) in April and May, a local club hosts a coffee and doughnut get together at one of the churches. Most people come simply for the free doughnuts. However, one Lions club has picked over 30% of its members that way.

STRATEGY #15: EYEGLOSS/HEARING AID COLLECTION! Did you know Pennsylvania collects 1,427,696 eyeglasses and 22,368 hearing aids every year? I am on the PA State Long Range Planning Committee, and we felt it would be helpful to have a specific number to throw out when someone actually asks you, “How many eyeglasses do you guys collect?” Instead of mumbling, “I don’t know, but it’s a lot”, we can actually give an amount. How did I find this out? I asked! I emailed each of my 18 governors who, in turn, asked each of their district chairs. Within days I had my answer. Now we can provide accurate information instead of sheepishly saying, “Duh, I don’t really know.” Is that questioner likely to respond to your invitation to join your club? I’d want to join a club that had somebody who actually knew that he was talking about!

STRATEGY #16 : COMMUNITY SURVEY! Remember how I found out about the eyeglasses? I asked! Please don’t make this technique such a rarity. If you are a doctor, you always say, “Where does it hurt?” Why not inquire of the community what they feel their needs are? Incidentally, International has an excellent community needs survey. This is a brochure you give to the borough council, mayor, commissioners, or any other movers and shakers in the local community. When they fill it out, you have your strategy. Find a need and fill it!

STRATEGY #17: EXISTING COMMUNITY SERVICE COMMITTEES! In Narberth (which, like every other Pennsylvania town, thinks it invented the fourth of July!) we have a committee called the Fourth of July Committee. This is actually a misnomer because this committee functions year round. They plan the Halloween Parade, the Christmas Caroling, the Autumn Hayride, the Memorial Day Celebration, etc. This year I asked them how much they paid for liability insurance. The figure they gave me was staggering! I explained to them how, if they formed themselves into the Narberth Fourth of July Lions club, Lions Clubs International would indemnify them to the tune of \$1 million per occurrence. To date, no response but it’s till early. What a nice supplemental piece of coverage this policy would be!

STRATEGY #18: TOWN WATCH! Does your neighbourhood have a “Town Watch”? They may call it a “Neighbourhood Night Out” or “Operation Alert” or whatever. Basically, it’s neighbours looking out for each other, reporting suspicious characters – not taking action, simply reporting any activity that looks out of the ordinary. My neighbourhood has one and I love it. It’s nice to know that somebody’s watching your house while you’re away. If such an organization exists in your town, join it. Ask how your club can support it. If there is no such organization in your community, start one. Push the liability insurance angle. Municipalities tend to cover these types of projects but that’s your tax money. Wouldn’t it be nice if you could save your town (and your fellow citizens/soon to be Lions) some money?

STRATEGY #19: BLOCK PARTY. Did you ever enjoy blocking off your street to traffic and just chilling out with your neighbours? Organize one of these and the world will beat a path to your door. “The Narberth Lions sponsor a block party on Lantwyn Lane Thursday evening between 7:00pm & 9:00pm! Free soft drinks and cookies! Come hear about the world’s largest service organization! We are in your community. Get to know us and tell us how we can help your neighbourhood meet the needs of your children.” Think anybody will show up for this? I do.

STRATEGY #20: 2nd TIME LIONS CLUB. Do you have old members who have just “drifted away”? Do you have people in your community who have at one time flirted with the idea of becoming a Lion? Do you have people who show up when you sponsor events, but are not members? Don’t write them off. Maybe their situation has changed. Maybe this is just the right time to ask them to reconsider their previous decision. If you don’t ask, you don’t get. And, if you ask and still don’t get, what have you lost? You never had them anyway. These are people who are valuable resources. They help your club regardless. If they are, in fact, not interested in joining, ask them if they know anybody who might be. They obviously respect your organization. Otherwise, they wouldn’t attend your functions.

STRATEGY #21: SPECIALTY CLUBS. This is different from #17. There are organizations in your community such as the police, letter carriers, municipal workers, etc. Pennsylvania has among its clubs the following: Law Enforcement/Firefighters Lions, Chinese-American Lions, Korean-American Lions, Philadelphia Deaf Lions, and the Philadelphia College of Optometry Lions. There are people out there who want to join a club of people with similar interests. Start one.

STRATEGY #22: CAMPUS CLUBS. This idea certainly did not originate with me. Lions Clubs International has an entire kit developed for this. It works! Colleges are always looking for activities. Lions Clubs provide serious, community service activities that are also a lot of fun.

STRATEGY #23: NURSING HOMES, ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES, ETC. The people who reside in institutions for the elderly are vibrant, lively people. Lionism can keep them alive and interested in living. Nothing gives you a greater rush than helping someone as a result of your expertise. The residents of elderly facilities have a wealth of experience and are willing to share it. They will join your club if you provide a MEANINGFUL task which they can accomplish. Put eyeglass, hearing aid and money collection containers in each facility. Even if you don't start a club, you are generating Lions activity. You should be the activities director's best friend in these facilities. You are providing what it is their job to provide and they should welcome you with open arms.

STRATEGY #24: SENIOR CENTERS, SENIOR CLUBS. These, too, are people who not only have a zest for life, but they have a talent to share with the world and a willingness to do it. They wish to prove to the world they are still useful. The best way to do this is through service. Their expertise can prove valuable to others. AND IT KEEPS THEM ALIVE!

STRATEGY #25: FAMILY PLAN. Currently, Lions clubs International offers a discount plan for multiple members from the same family. I believe that, even if no such discount is offered by International, the individual club should do it. It is worth the few bucks to generate a family involvement in Lionism which could, if nurtured properly, last a lifetime – in the case of a family, several lifetimes.

STRATEGY #26: WORKPLACE CLUBS. Not every employer will be receptive to this concept, but the larger employers tend to look at our presentations. The bigger firms need to have happy, well-adjusted employees who look forward to coming to work. Hence, all the myriad softball, bowling, golf teams, the Christmas parties, etc. Here is an opportunity for a company to generate magnificent positive publicity for itself by providing a community service – through its employees!

STRATEGY #27: MEMBERSHIP SOCIALS. “Come out to Soandso Field Sunday and meet the Lions! Free refreshments! Bring the family and find out what Lions do!” This is a sample ad. This activity is a proven successful sponsoring tool when used in conjunction with the Pennsylvania Plan – a step-by-step program designed to get prospects to WANT to become members.

STRATEGY #28: INFORMATION BOOTHS. All municipalities have public events (county fairs, carnivals, church picnics, etc) where a table can be set up. Instead of selling hot dogs, you can give away free mints and tell people what exactly your club does. Have plenty of brochures on hand, all of which have a phone number in plain sight. This booth should be manned by experienced, knowledgeable Lions. There is a place for new Lions to serve on these functions, but mainly in the enthusiasm department. The actual nuts and bolts of information should be presented by a veteran Lion.

STRATEGY #29: SPAGHETTI DINNERS, PANCAKE BREAKFASTS, FISH FRIES, ETC. These events, in addition to being proven fund raisers, are useful sponsoring tools. Have a table set up with a display. “Do you know where the dollar you just spent goes?” Have information ready explaining all the activities LCIF supports throughout the world. Have flyers about our flood relief in New Orleans, our tsunami relief in Indonesia, plus any items which may be of local interest. The better you do your homework on this one, the better your results.

STRATEGY #30: NETWORKING. Is your banker a Lion? Your dentist? Your primary physician? Your letter carrier? Your attorney? Your service station attendant? Your travel agent? Your grocer? Mine are. How did I sponsor them? I asked.