

Newspapers as a Communications Tool



Newspapers remain a valuable communications tool, even in today's world of radio, television and the Internet. The electronic media has immediacy to its credit, but newspapers are there for reference minutes, hours and days later. Newspapers are the most likely partners in providing coverage to your Branch, District or Area events.

Meet the People Behind the Print

Get to know the people in the newsroom. It is essential for success. Meet with the appropriate reporter and spend a few minutes describing the organization and the stories you hope to have covered.

A Working Relationship

Encourage reporters to call you with any questions they might have at any time. The more you can help reporters do their job, the greater your chances of getting them to meet your needs in having events covered. It is all part of developing a relationship. You have to be able to trust the work of reporters and they have to be able to trust your sense of news.

A news release is considered the tool of delivery for routine news events. If it is something unique, or of a major nature, let the reporter know well in advance and seek confirmation a few days before your event that it will be covered in person by the reporter, and a photographer if justified.

If you are fortunate enough to find a reporter willing and able to attend a significant number of your events/activities, treat him/her with great respect and give all the help you can in understanding your organization.

Try to avoid criticism of a reporter's work, unless there is obvious need to challenge something a reporter has written. If

this is necessary, write a letter to the editor and confine it to correcting misinformation.

Writing a Press Release

For the untrained, preparing a news release can be an intimidating experience. Where do you start? The start or "lead" of your news release is the most critical aspect. It has to be short, yet contain enough detail to make the reader curious enough to want to read further. You've gone a long way in your job of writing a news release if your lead paragraph can answer the basic five w's – who, what, where, when and why?

A news release should be limited to six to eight paragraphs. Each paragraph should be no more than three sentences. Short, simple sentence structure is preferable to long, complex sentences. People want to get details from a story, not the sense that the writer wants to demonstrate elaborate skills in constructing a sentence.

Editors/reporters responsible for preparing your release for publication will want to find the most important details in the first two or three paragraphs. And, rarely will they have the patience and time to search! If you wait until the end of your release to reveal the key facts, they may get cut because there isn't enough space for your entire release. If your news release is succinct, well written and timely, it will more than likely appear as you deliver it to the newsroom.

Ask the editor/reporter about deadlines and the preferred way to receive your information. Some still prefer fax, while others find email efficient and effective. Once you send something, follow up with a phone call to ensure the article arrived and answer any questions. Occasionally make a point of stopping by the newsroom to chat with the reporter/editor. Sometimes a casual conversation can inspire a feature article.

Finally, remember to always give a contact name and phone number on your news release. Lay the groundwork for a good working relationship with your local reporter/editor and get the results you want!

Source: This information was extracted from the Ontario Federation of Agriculture Communications Handbook, compiled by the OFA Communications Review Team, Winter/Spring 2001.

101 Dalmatians, Almost!



When the Moorefield WI found out that the Mapleton Fire Department was in need of stuffed dogs, preferably Dalmatian dogs, to give to children who were in accidents, they set to work. Firemen in Moorefield and Drayton were purchasing these dogs out of their own pockets. So, the Moorefield Branch got busy and started to collect the stuffed creatures. And in just a few short weeks, did they have dogs! There were nearly 30 in total.

The Moorefield WI is shown presenting the Dalmatian puppies to the Mapleton Fire Department. Pictured from left to right in the back row are Dorothy Dickson, Shirley Noecker, Jean Borth, Audrey Cummings and Nancy Stanners. In the middle row are Ileen Robb, Dora Smith, Irene Maurer, Mary Francovic, Florence Stanners, Bea Houston, Marg Olliff and Kay Ayres. Mapleton Firemen from left to right are John Slough, Bill Cummings and Rick Richardson. They all agreed that this was a fun project and will be repeated when necessary.

Submitted by Kay Ayres, President, Moorefield WI, Wellington North.