

The Power of PR



The principles of public relations that worked for the Gig Harbor club can work for your club too!

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In a two-part series, the power of public relations will be explored. In Part One, Altrusa International, Inc. of Gig Harbor, Washington shares how their club's long-term public relations plan helped to build community recognition and grow their club. Next month, Part Two will share some pointers and resources to make it happen in your club.

Part One: Community Awareness - A Success Story



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Saturday, December 12th
10 am to 4 pm for the

**14th Annual
HarborFest
Holiday Tour of Homes
and Gift Raffle**

A self-guided inside tour
of festively decorated Gig Harbor area homes.
Pick up maps and programs after 9:45 am at
The Inn At Gig Harbor.



Sponsors:
The Peninsula Gateway
The News Tribune
The Inn at Gig Harbor
The Galaxy Theater
Cutters Point Uptown

The city of Gig Harbor, Washington has a population of about 7,000 with a surrounding rural and suburban community of about 38,000. The city is somewhat isolated, cut off from the mainland by a mile-wide expanse of water, with only a bridge to connect the peninsula to the city of Tacoma and the rest of the Puget Sound metropolitan area. Because it is now without any large local industry to employ its residents (it began life as a fishing village), Gig Harbor is largely a community of commuters who have a limited amount of time to involve themselves in their home area.

In Gig Harbor, the Altrusa Club, chartered in 1981, had been fairly invisible for many years. The members have worked hard and accomplished significant

Tickets \$20 in advance, \$25 at the door.
Available at Gig Harbor Chamber of Commerce, John L. Scott Real Estate, Kitsap Credit Union at Gig Harbor North and Point Fosdick locations, Water's Edge Gallery, or from Altrusa or Kiwanis Club Members.
Group rate \$15, purchase of 10 or more.

253-858-0088 or www.altrusa.org/Washington/gigharbor

Altrusa Foundation of Gig Harbor is a 501c3 NonProfit Organization

projects for children and the community at large. They have kept a steady, if small, membership in an isolated and close-knit segment of a large metropolitan area. For the most part, however, the general public did not know who Altrusa was or what the club did. That changed about eight years ago when the club mapped out a *long term plan and strategy to increase their visibility and influence*.

The Plan

The plan included two primary avenues for increasing awareness and attention by the community at large and by the media.

First, the club formed a foundation of its own with a focus on supporting local projects and programs. A foundation, by definition, improved the club's status. Perception being paramount, the public's perception is that a foundation is large, complex and wealthy, regardless of reality.

The foundation, after some research, recognized that one of the biggest community projects on the horizon was the construction of a Boys & Girls Club. It pledged to provide the project with \$100,000 to equip a community kitchen. The pledge was predicated on the Boys' & Girls Club expanding their normal mission to include space for a Senior Center, and incorporating community use into its mission locally. That condition gained favor in the entire community, and has become the model for Boys' and Girls' Clubs, nationwide, on all new construction.

Second, to support the pledge, the members reenergized their effort to grow and expand their annual fundraiser, the HarborFest Holiday Tour of Homes. The Gig Harbor community is well-known for its beautiful homes and water views. For the public, the opportunity to get an inside look at some of those homes with great views, exquisite decorations and often significant local history is a great draw.

HarborFest is a very visual experience, so the next challenge was managing the event to *provide the local print media access in advance* to a feature home. Face-to-face, presentation-type meetings with pictures and background information helped attract the attention of the local newspaper, The Peninsula Gateway. A little luck didn't hurt, either. A color photo of one of the Altrusa members decorating a home for the event won the older of the two weekly papers and its photographer a national award. It made the front page.

Get to Know Your Media

A visible event with visual appeal is a good start, but requires constant contact and the recognition that the news media has its own needs. Newspapers are like any business. They need to make money and gain public recognition just like Altrusa clubs do.

So, Gig Harbor's Altrusa club *developed an advertising partnership* for the event that successfully met both needs. Altrusa budgeted significant dollars to pay for advertising and also traded out a home sponsorship worth \$600 for additional advertising. Result: Altrusa got ads donated and the newspaper made some money while getting recognition for their community participation. Win-Win.

Altrusa also *kept in touch with the features writers at the paper*. Like many small town papers, personnel changes regularly and rapidly, so it requires watching the bylines to keep up with and maintaining a good relationship. When changes happen, *the club reintroduces itself to the new reporters* with basic information about who the club is and what it does. It is something that can happen over a cup of coffee or an office visit.

The advertising partnership has added influence from the paper's editorial perspective, as well. As soon as Altrusa granted the paper sponsor status, the editors paid more attention to the club on the editorial side. That meant a feature status for teaser stories that makes it to the front page of the main section of the paper or of the local news/feature sections on the week of the event. And as long as the club continues to maintain the relationship, the paper will proceed on a status quo level, covering the club activities as they continue to happen.

While broadcast media does not exist on a local level in Gig Harbor, The *News Tribune*, Tacoma's daily newspaper, has an advertising grant program that offers free event advertising on a grant application basis. This has been helpful in promoting the HarborFest event outside the immediate area. Altrusa is also a constant presence in their community calendars and free notices.

Getting the Little Things Right: The Process

Public recognition is not always about media or events. It is a constant process and it requires consistent attention by each member, year after year. *It does not happen overnight.*

Partners. Altrusa of Gig Harbor has found ways to partner with the local Kiwanis Club and enlist them in the club's work as well as getting involved in theirs. The club talks to the city through their Community Relations department, and keeps contact with Police and Fire by supporting their events and drives. The club maintains membership in the local Chamber of Commerce, giving it an advantage for promoting any and all of the club's efforts through that very large and influential business community organization. And the most gratifying part of this is the event is gaining support from members of other local Altrusa clubs who volunteer on the day all in the interests of helping support their fellow Altrusans. In addition the more the club participates in the work of its community partners, and assists in their efforts, the more help those partners give Altrusa. *Networking is an ongoing process, not a one-time event.* Not every promotional effort is a big broad effort.

Identification. Every member of the Gig Harbor club has a blue fleece Altrusa vest, and when even just a few members attend local events and meetings as a group, they are very visible by wearing their vests. Because of the vests, members are constantly asked about Altrusa and what the club does. The outgrowth of it has been a significant increase in interest in membership. It is translating into four to five new members this Fall, taking the club from nine to 14 memberships...that's over a 50% increase.

Involve Everyone. While the promotion and community relations efforts are ultimately the responsibility of the president, *every member has a key part* in making them work. Depending on their talents and their interests, it may be an active part, such as chairing a committee related to community relations, or it may simply be by wearing their vest or their pin; by remembering to talk about their involvement in the club with other groups; by remembering to invite guests to club meetings, events and parties; by watching out for partnership opportunities with other groups and bringing them to the club's attention; and by involving others in helping with their own activities and events.

PROMOTIONAL RULES TO LIVE BY:

1. Make a plan and stick to it.
2. Be consistent and constant over the long range...years, not months.
3. Find a feature event to gain media attention and keep them involved. Operate it over the long run, so that the community looks forward to it and anticipates it.
4. Build relationships with community groups and make them partners in your efforts.
5. Build an identity that allows people to recognize you.
6. INVOLVE EVERY MEMBER and let them know their responsibility to the entire effort.

The outcome of increased visibility is increasing membership. That is Altrusa's immediate and critical goal, and without a thoughtfully planned and energetically executed Community Relations effort, neither increased awareness nor increased membership will happen.

Next Month: "Part Two, Building Your Club's Image"