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WSPRA Hosts Luncheon at WASB Convention

Wednesday, January 21, 2004

Noon to 1:00 p.m.

Hyatt Regency Hotel

333 W. Kilbourn Ave., Milwaukee

Lakeshore Room

Cost: \$15 per person

Need a break from your busy convention schedule? Join members of the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association and take time to relax and enjoy lunch at the Hyatt Regency Hotel — connected by skywalk to the convention center. One free annual membership to WSPRA (a \$50 value) will be awarded to a lucky luncheon guest! This luncheon is open to all conference attendees.

Lunch includes cup of soup, croissant sandwich, pasta salad, dessert and hot beverage.

You may register for the WSPRA Luncheon through the WASB Web Site, www.wasb.org/convention/conv2004/regform04.htm or call the WSPRA Office at 608-257-3220 and ask for a WASB Convention Booklet. The WSPRA luncheon registration deadline is January 12, 2004. ❖



WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

Don't Be Afraid to Tell Your Story to Anyone Who Will Listen

■ Chris Preisler, Oconomowoc Area School District

For many of us in school public relations, relying on the local media to help tell our story is a vital way for us to communicate with our publics. The local media, whether a newspaper, radio station or even television station, can be a district's best friend.

However, there can be an initial fear of dealing with the media. Picking up the telephone and making a call to an editor or reporter can be like making a cold call in sales — you just don't know what the reaction is going to be from the person on the other end of the call. Many of you responsible for dealing with the media may feel intimidated by calling a reporter or editor to pitch a story idea. The truth is, getting your story told can be fairly simple with some practice and patience.

The first thing to do is get to know the media outlets that cover your district. How many times a week does the local newspaper come out? How much news does the local radio station deliver daily? What are the deadlines reporters are working on? Answering these simple questions can save you a lot of wasted time when pitching your story. It will do you no good to call the local newspaper on Tuesday to tell them about an event happening that afternoon if their deadline was Monday. Create a media list that you can use to make contacts when stories or photo opportunities arise. Get to know the editors and reporters who cover the district. This will help you anticipate questions that might arise or stories the editor or reporter may be comfortable covering.

After you have your media list put together, identify story ideas in your district that you think might be of interest. Gather all the information about the event or

project and make sure to get the key information from the contact person. When gathering the information remember to think like a reporter and ask the same questions they would ask. You may not have the answers to all the questions the reporter or editor may ask when you are making your pitch, but if you have the basic information your chances of getting another five minutes of the writer's time are good. The last thing you want to do is make a reporter wait while you rummage through a pile of papers on your desk or run down the hall to the superintendent's office to ask a question looking for basic information. Being prepared when making the telephone call is half the battle.

Donna Frake is a reporter with the *Oconomowoc Focus*. She says having the information available with the first telephone call adds credibility to the story idea. "If you can tell me in the first five minutes of a telephone conversation the basic facts of the story chances are you will get my attention," Frake said. "If I start asking questions and you sound like you have not done your homework than I am thinking the story just isn't work covering. You should cover the important points of a story — the who, what, where, when, why and how. Try to identify right away what the hook is and why the story would be interesting to the readers."

Remember to try to make your pitch to the reporter or editor so they have plenty of time to plan for the story. "If you can, it is great to give no more than two weeks notice but no less than a week," Frake said. She added that there may be times when there just isn't a lot of advanced warning and that shouldn't mean you don't make the phone call to the newsroom.

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From the President . . .



Janay
Wittek-Balke, APR

Hello WSPRA Members!

For more than a decade WSPRA has earned the distinction of being a Blue Ribbon Chapter. This year is no exception! Thanks to the hard work of members like you we once again have received this stamp of recognition from the National School Public Relations Association. Blue Ribbon Chapter status is given to NSPRA state chapters for efforts to work toward national school public relations mission, goals and objectives. Chapters are required to submit documentation of a number of yearly projects that support public relations efforts in schools.

Specific examples of WSPRA's activities include:

- ◆ WSPRA's Image Builders or Breakers
- ◆ the fall conference
- ◆ newsletter workshops
- ◆ presentations at WASB conferences
- ◆ the negotiations presentation
- ◆ the negotiations handbook
- ◆ crisis assistance given by members to other districts and agencies
- ◆ presentations made by WSPRA members to a multitude of audiences
- ◆ WSPRAgram articles

WSPRA is an unique and outstanding state chapter comprised of a diverse membership. I believe our diversity drives our continued success and achievements.

Congratulations WSPRA!

Don't Be Afraid to Tell Your Story (continued from page 1)

"If something happens where there is no advanced warning and you may only have hours before the event or photo opportunity, you should still give the newsroom a call," Frake said. "There may be rare instances where the reporter can accommodate your request. If not, you may be asked to submit a photo or a press release on the event. Either way there is a good chance you can still get your story told."

It is also good to remember that when you call the reporter, it is polite to ask if he or she is on deadline or in the middle of another story. If you call and talk for five minutes without letting the reporter get a word in edge wise while he or she is on deadline, you not only have wasted your time and the reporter's time but chances are the next time you call you may not even get five minutes. It is not only polite to ask for a moment, but will go a long way in helping establish a positive relationship with the reporter.

Now that you have the reporter's ear, make your pitch. Let the reporter know that you have a story idea that you think will be of interest to his or her readers. Invite the reporter or editor out to the school to learn more about the program or teachers the story is centered around. Most of all, sound excited about the story idea. If you're not excited then why should the reporter get excited or believe that his or her reader's would be excited?

Once you have a reporter or editor that has agreed to do the story, it is time to lay the groundwork for the interview. Make sure the teacher, principal or whoever the story is about knows that he or she may be contacted by a reporter. Give them three or four key messages that you want them to deliver during the interview. Remind them that even though a specific question may not be asked about those key messages, they need to be conveyed at some point during the interview. It may be helpful and make the interview go better if you are available along with the person being interviewed.

Keep in mind that not every story idea, no matter how good it sounds to you, will end up in the newspaper or on the five o'clock news. Your pitch may come on a day when the newsroom is overwhelmed with a number of big stories. Don't be afraid to pitch a story again a little later and in a slightly different way. If you think it is a good story it probably is.

Remember that reporters and editors are always looking for story ideas. They will probably be appreciative of the fact that you are calling to let them know what is going on because it makes their job a lot easier and will help build a solid relationship during all types of situations.

"It's a relationship that needs to be respected in that newspapers and other media outlets are great sources to bring attention to the great things that are going on in the public schools. But you should remember the other side of that is the media is also, from time-to-time, going to have to cover the stories that may not always put the district in a favorable light. Public relations people need to be as up front, honest and available in those situations as they are when pitching the feel good stories if you want the relationship between the district and the reporter or editor to work."

Remembering these tips can make getting your story out and told as easy as 1-2-3. ❖

Conference Overview

■ Janay Wittek-Balke, APR, Franklin Public Schools

The weather is crisp, the view is spectacular and you always leave with something you can take back to your district and apply immediately to make your job a little easier!

Sound wonderful?

For those who attended the 2003 WSPRA Fall Conference none were disappointed. Conference participants enjoyed the sanctuary of the Heidel House Resort in Green Lake and two days packed with sessions on marketing and image to media relations and "No Child Left Behind." Each year WSPRA honors award winners at the President's Award Luncheon. This year over 90 members entered their best work in the Spectrum Awards. Also recognized at the luncheon were the President's Award, Honorary Lifetime Member and the Holtshoppole Scholarship Winner. ❖

Holtshoppole Scholarship

Each year WSPRA presents one member with the Holtshoppole Scholarship in memory of Allan Holtshoppole. The Holtshoppole Scholarship provides one member with the registration fee to the fall conference. The criteria for the award includes someone who demonstrates community involvement in honor of Allan's passion to bring the community into the schools.

Pamela serves as the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent for the Columbus School District. She is very involved in the community representing the district on a variety of advisory boards and organizations. This year Pamela implemented an electronic newsletter to reach out to parents and the community and created a newsletter sign up on their web site. ❖



Pamela Zander, 2003 Holtshoppole Award winner, pictured with Janay Wittek-Balke, President

Nancy Hewes Awarded Honorary Lifetime Member

Nancy Hewes, School District of Janesville, was presented the Honorary Lifetime Award for 2003.

Nancy is a frontline volunteer and supporter of WSPRA. Not only has she served on the Board of Directors, but she stepped forward to assume the role as the first chairperson of the WSPRA Crisis Communications Response Team. In this role she pulled together resources, organized WSPRA's first crisis response team and provided training for its members.

Although she is no longer working directly in the area of community relations, she is undoubtedly sharing key messages about not only the School District of Janesville but about the importance of public education to us all. ❖



Nancy Hewes pictured with past-president Mary Ellen Marnholtz

2003 President's Award

Each year the past president recognizes someone who helped them succeed in the position of president. This year the honor was presented to Mabel Schumachuer. Mabel, now retired from the Fort Atkinson School District as the former Director of Instruction, is a loyal WSPRA member. She currently serves as the secretary to the board and is the informal historian for WSPRA. Amanda Brooker, past president exhibited her appreciation for all that Mabel has given to WSPRA with a glass heart symbolizing Mabel as the heart of WSPRA. ❖