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at the conference. WSPRA also presented a check to Carol and George, Jr. to be used in a memorial to George Tipler, who passed away on October 16.

Tipler contributed greatly to the fabric of Wisconsin's public education. He was a member of the Winneconne School Board for 25 years before serving as the first Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. In that capacity, Tipler recognized the critical role that school public relations plays in public education and encouraged the formation of the Wisconsin Association of School Public Relations in 1967. His support of public relations activities was critical to the growth and success of this organization. ❖

**SPECIAL EDITION:****WSPRA 2006
Annual Fall Conference
Wrap Up Inside**

WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

**Why 'Marketing' Isn't a Four-Letter
Word (Part 2)**

■ Mary Ellen Marnholtz, Wausau School District

Editor's note: This is the second in a two-part series on the place marketing has in school district strategic planning. Mary Ellen Marnholtz, a school pr veteran and WSPRA president-elect, discusses practical solutions to bringing marketing to your school district's planning table.

In the last edition of *WSPRAgram*, we discussed branding, key messages, and celebrating success as key ingredients to a marketing program. This month, we continue to share more tips on how to market school districts in the face of growing competition.

Creating Ambassadors

A great strategy for marketing your schools is to turn your community members into ambassadors. An especially effective method is to establish a Key Communicator Network. People love to be in the know, so do some homework and identify the different publics in your community. That may include business leaders, members of the faith community, senior citizens, parents, governmental leaders, members of service organizations, etc. Plan a special session where representatives of these publics are invited to a meeting with the district level administrative team. In the Wausau School District, the Community Resource Committee (CRC) meets three times a year with the administrative team. Each meeting includes time for feedback, informational presentations, an issues discussion, and a homework assignment for feedback at the next meeting. CRC members like being involved in the process and because the meetings are held only a few times a year, the schedule is manageable for even the busiest members. E-mail reports from the meetings and E-Flash Updates keep CRC members in the loop on emerging issues, creating another group of ambassadors in the community who are armed with the "right stuff."

Infusing Quality Service

More people quit frequenting a business because of a negative personal experience with staff than any other reason. In today's competitive environment, that can happen in schools too. That's why it's extremely important to make sure that everyone understands the importance of quality service—particularly those on the front lines in your schools.

Take a few minutes now and look at the curb appeal of one of your schools. Is your grass cut? Is there litter blowing across the sidewalks and parking lot? Is there appropriate signage? Do parents and visitors know how they are to enter your campus and what direction their cars are to travel? Are there adequate, well-marked parking spots for visitors? Is your entrance inviting? Is the office clearly marked and easy to locate? These are just a few of the site review questions that you should ask yourself about your school's appeal — and you haven't even made it past the office door!

WSPRA offers exceptional training in quality service through its *Image Builders or Breakers* workshop for frontline staff. The workshop can be tailored to meet your district's needs and can help your staff develop quality service standards that can help you market your schools every day. For more information about *Image Builders or Breakers*, contact the WSPRA Office at 608-257-3220 or check WSPRA's website at www.wsprra.org.

Schools and marketing really do go together. It's important as educators to recognize that marketing helps build support for our schools, and that schools with community support are better places for children to learn. That, after all, is what we are all about in the first place. ❖

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WISCONSIN SCHOOL PUBLIC RELATIONS ASSOCIATION

From the President . . .



Dorreen
Dembski

The new mission statement for WSPRA was approved at the annual conference. I'm excited to share it with you.

WSPRA, the State's leader in school-community relations, will expand the capacity of its members to provide effective communication management for the purpose of strengthening educational opportunities for all students.

We all know that a mission statement is only as good as the results it produces. Your WSPRA Board of Directors is very proud of its recent conference. The feedback told us that participants truly did expand their understanding and ability to communicate effectively.

The mission statement also focuses on the purpose of strong communication management in schools: to strengthen educational opportunities for all students. I'll use an example to illustrate our point.

Imagine you are a member of a group – any group. Then imagine you come to meetings, and several other members are sitting at the table with you. One of the members never says hello, never acknowledges your ideas or input, is not really a participant at all, and worse yet, is sometimes rude on the phone when you call.

Now imagine that this same “team” member comes to a meeting, and is suddenly happy and smiling and polite. “What’s up with that?” you wonder. Then it comes: the ASK. The member needs the team’s financial support for a new idea. Now, really – would you feel like supporting that person’s request? I don’t think so!

Yes, the example is a bit extreme, but here’s our position: effective,

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Communication Critical in School Violence Situations

■ Joseph Quick, Madison Metropolitan School District

The recent spate of violence in schools nationally and in Wisconsin re-emphasizes the need to have a clear crisis communication plan in place. If you have a crisis plan, make sure it’s operational, re-assess it to make sure you’ve covered everything, and communicate with staff and students about expectations and responsibilities.

When assessing your district’s crisis communication needs, consider the different “audiences” you have – parents/students/community, staff and the media. Each group has different needs and all must be met in a crisis.

Depending on where you live, you might already have regular contact with members of the local print, radio and television media. Developing relationships with the media, regardless of your district’s size, is something that is critically important to establish before a crisis arises. Like any relationship, establishing trust long-term helps get you through difficult times and can assist you with reporters in a crisis.

Reporters need to know that confidentiality laws govern school personnel’s ability to provide some information. Making sure reporters know that you have limitations might eliminate a potential conflict in a crisis. Consider giving reporters a copy of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Wisconsin statute 118.125, state law that protects student privacy, so reporters know your constraints. Local school boards also have policies related to FERPA and 118.125; reporters would be wise to know the local interpretation, too.

Safety for their children is one of the most important concerns parents have when sending their children to school. Use your school newsletters to review your safety policies. Let parents know that their children’s safety is of paramount importance to you as well. By talking about safety, parents and the community will know it’s important. This reassurance will be critical when a crisis arises.

Using your district’s web site should be a new tool in your crisis communication quiver. On Election Day in Madison, a bomb threat required the evacuation of a high school and required election officials to set up a make-shift polling place outside the school. Naturally, the media was all over the story given the keen interest in the election. A “crawler” across the top of the district’s home page on the web site let parents and community members know the students were out of the school and safe.

The district also used “Infinite Campus” technology to make automated phone calls to contact the school’s parents providing accurate information about the bomb threat and evacuation. Letters to parents discussing the crisis and the district’s response were prominently placed at the top of the web site under “Recent violence in schools – information for parents.” District security officials, the communications director and other administrators are reviewing the current practices and evaluating what can be done to improve communications in the future.

In Green Bay, a courageous student came forward to tell an associate principal at one of the high schools that another student might be considering harming people at the school. A swift intervention, coordinated with the police, prevented a possible tragedy. Green Bay’s School/Community Relations Manager Amanda Brooker said, “One of the most important things we did was constant communication with parents, the community and the media.”

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Brooker also said, “We worked really hard to release any information that we could to the public. Our key message was relationships with kids. The trusting relationship between the student and the associate principal was the key to averting a crisis. We stuck to our message about relationships and our partnership with the police. That was important.”

Brooker’s final thoughts are sobering, but important. “Even when things go right, it’s still a crisis. It’s not over the next day,” she said, explaining that any act of violence in schools across the country still generates media contacts. ❖

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proactive, strategic, and sustained communication efforts over time increase the likelihood that your school district will develop sustained community support. Community support strengthens educational opportunities for all students.

Effective communication doesn’t start and stop. It is a strategic component of ongoing district operations. The messages and methods may, no should, change but communication itself doesn’t stop, only to be resurrected when schools need something again. It is ongoing.

Did you recently win a referendum? Congratulations! Now, what is your next communication step? How will you continue to communicate about the wise investment your community has made in its schools?

Are you facing difficult budget reductions or a referendum loss? What communication strategies will you use to demonstrate the needs, successes, and challenges of your schools? It’s not always the easy stories that need to be told, sometimes you must also tell the hard stories, too. Through your communication efforts, your community will come to know that you are focused on your students’ success.

WSPRA is here to support you in your efforts to expand your capacity to effectively communicate and thereby strengthen educational opportunities for all students. Thank you for your continuing relationship with WSPRA. ❖

Practical Communication Tips: Take Pause and Listen

Sending information is one side of the effective communication equation. Listening and receiving information completes the formula.

In your busy day, how can you listen to the many people you serve? A very easy idea is to host a chat! Parent chats, staff chats, community chats, any chat. Make yourself available on a regularly scheduled basis, and at different times of the day and different times of the school year. Publicize the date, the time, and the place. Bill it “Staff Chat with the Superintendent” or “Parent Chat with Principal Jones.” Do come ready to share key messages about your District’s current needs, successes, and challenges. However, encourage two-way conversation. You may have one, five, or 20 people attend. It doesn’t matter how many people come. It matters that you take pause and listen. ❖

WSPRA Institutes George Tipler Scholarship

■ Mabel Schumacher, Ph.D., WSPRA Executive Director



The Wisconsin School Public Relations Association (WSPRA) recently instituted the George Tipler Founders’ Scholarship in honor of George Tipler, retired Executive Director of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. The scholarship, a one-year membership to the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA), recognizes Tipler’s contributions to the formation and growth of the Wisconsin School Public Relations Association.

Criteria for the scholarship are an individual who is currently a non-member of NSPRA, who has demonstrated a dedication to school public relations issues, and has exhibited a desire to grow professionally. The first recipient of the scholarship was selected by George Tipler. According to Tipler, Jane Grinde exemplified all criteria for the selection. Grinde has worked tirelessly in public relations as an employee of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards and currently in her position at the Department of Public Instruction.

A special ceremony was held on Monday, October 2, 2006, at Tipler’s home to allow him to present the scholarship plaque personally to Grinde. Present were Carol Shapiro, Tipler’s daughter; George, Jr. and his wife, Carol; former State Superintendent Burt Grover and wife; Jane and Jon Grinde; Patti Welch, WSPRA operations coordinator and Mabel Schumacher, WSPRA executive director, and her husband.

The first annual Tipler scholarship was presented at the WSPRA conference at the Bridgewood Resort and Conference Center in Neenah on November 9, 2006. Daughter Carol and son George, Jr. attended the ceremony at the Bridgewood Conference Center to participate in the presentation of the scholarship and plaque during the annual President’s Luncheon

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