

Boy Scout Roundtable Breakout Session

White Horse District, Garden State Council

January 10, 2017

“How to Pitch a Story to the Media”

Special Presenter – Andy Polhamus- ajpolhamus@gmail.com,

Content Editor at Helio (featuring Medical News), former reporter at South Jersey Times/NJ.com

Note – Anything is blue is a link that can be used as a further reference or example.

What makes a story? Newsworthiness is broken down by a number of factors: importance, prominence, human interest, conflict, change, proximity, timeliness, magnitude, relevance and unusualness (Source: [Stony Brook University Center For News Literacy](#)).

- This simply means a story should contain a hook that will interest the general public.
- An annual fundraising sale is not news (though you can include local journalists in your announcements). But a scout who restores a veteran’s memorial, park or historic location? [That’s news](#). [Here’s a slightly different example](#). Nothing is guaranteed—we’ll get back to this.* Location, audience, etc. are all things a journalist has to consider.

Who am I talking to when I want to pitch a story?

- Your message may go directly to a reporter, but more likely, if it’s an email, you’ll be asked to send your inquiry to an editor or a general account used by a media outlet’s entire staff. Don’t be discouraged! All news organizations use these accounts to assign stories. If they are interested, your story will find its way to the right person.
 - For a more direct line of communication, call and ask to speak with the person who covers your town (but don’t waste their time or your own).
- Journalists get a bad rap in 2017, but the vast majority are locals, not the people you see on MSNBC or Fox. They are overworked and underpaid, like teachers. Also, like teachers, they live in your area and care about their neighbors.
 - *If you get turned down or rejected, it’s not because they don’t care. It’s probably because they are busy. What this means is that you should keep trying.

How can I obtain coverage for my event/story/issue?

- Be prepared: contact multiple outlets explaining your story in as much detail as possible.
- Include dates, full names and ages, explanations of the groups or charities involved, the goal of the project and photos if possible. If you can give your outlet a week or two of advance notice, you are MUCH more likely to get your story covered. **Be brief but thorough.**
- Tease your story by giving the journalists a preview. No need to write it yourself immediately. If the paper or TV station can't make it, that's when you'll want to do the leg work.
- Cast a wide net: News outlets WANT you to contact them. Don't be shy about getting in touch with everyone who makes sense: NJ.com/South Jersey Times, Courier-Post, The Burlington County Times, The Press of Atlantic City, The Philadelphia Inquirer, CBS, ABC, NBC are good places to start. Smaller outlets, including NJPen.com (Camden County), The Sentinel of Gloucester County, The Collingswood Retrospect and even your own township (if the story directly relates to your local government or schools) should also be on your media list. **All outlets have publicly listed contact info.**
- Ideal advance notice is 5 to 14 days. Don't worry about calling back to remind them as the date gets nearer.
- For events that are local, shoot for media coverage first. When you're on the road, be your own journalist. Take some pics and write a few paragraphs.
- [Many news outlets have community pages where they post submitted articles.](#) Don't be afraid to try this if you cannot interest anyone in writing a story.
- DIY: Use social media to go directly to the audience. Most towns have homemade, unofficial pages where people post gossip, complaints, fundraisers and small news items. Journalists follow these too, and it may be one more way of getting yourself noticed. You'll also be interacting directly with the people most interested in your cause. Get involved!

Further notes by Mike (that Andy said):

- When talking to reporters, assume that they know nothing about Scouting, because they might not. Terms, ranks, and references are not always clear to the reporter or to the reader.
- Once a reporter covers one of your events, write down their information in a handy spot and keep going back to that reporter in the future. If they covered you once, they'll likely do it again.
- Use your town Facebook pages and groups (official and unofficial) to spread word about what you are doing.

- Don't limit yourself to just reaching out about Eagle Scout Projects or Eagle Scout Ceremonies. Cave exploring, whitewater rafting, backpacking... these are all exciting and different!

Other Topics Covered After the Presentation:

- Klondike Derby is coming up! Register NOW if you haven't already.

What do we do with 18+ Scouts?

- Identify when help is needed – Klondike.
- Alumni campouts
- Merit Badge Counselors.
- Mailing list – keep an alumni mailing list, can help financially and with manpower.
- Order of the Arrow → January issue of Scouting, using OA to keep Scouts and young adults involved.

Way to keep older scouts and young adults → AT Backpacking for ones at a certain number of events

Facebook GROUP for alumni has been really useful for Troop 48. Keep a separate page as the official mouthpiece.

Future Meeting Ideas →

- Getting new Scouts hooked – what do you do to get them hooked and assimilate them? Set them up for success? Advancement?
- How do you deal with uniforms/get Scouts to wear the uniforms?
- Smartphones as TOOLS – what cool apps are there that are useful? (This should be a recurring topic at least once a year)
- Bylaws.

Email from Ron after the meeting with some great information:

Pat, Mike,

Thanks for arranging Andy to talk about the press. I was looking on the GSC website and Scouting.org to see if there was any supplemental info about writing a press release or reaching out to the press. Although I remember something used to be on the GSC site I can no longer find it...just a generic link <http://www.gardenstatescouting.org/gsc-news> It does offer to help with writing a press release. National's site has a link to a marketing website <http://scoutingwire.org/marketing-and-membership-hub/> which has social media guidelines.

However, as I was poking around scouting.org I noticed the landing page for the Boy Scouts page has changed. Take a look. There's a new resource site <http://troopleader.org/> and several YouTube channels listed (scroll down to "video"). It also lists the programresources.org site I mentioned earlier. Neat stuff. It's a shame they don't promote it well.

Regards,
Ron Lewis
Scoutmaster
Troop 70
Cherry Hill, NJ

Next Roundtable - Tuesday, February 14, 2017 @ Glen Landing Middle School at 7:30 PM

Topic: Initiating New Parents - How do you transition Cub Parents into Boy Scout parents? How do you mine talent for the benefit of the troop? What do your parent packets look like? What do your parent meetings look like?