

Zonta Club of Sanibel-Captiva

Strategies to strengthen and improve our image in the community

By Sue Layton Denham, chair, Communications and PR (2010-2011)

Several years ago our club realized we needed to freshen up our image on the islands. It was not a negative image; we just were not that well known, compared to other service organizations such as Kiwanis and Rotary Club. The business community and general public seemed unaware of who we were or what our contribution was.

Our club is in a distinct community made up of two islands, Sanibel and Captiva, and our membership is comprised of women who live and/or work on the islands. For most of our fund raising and some of our service activities, our principal audience is our immediate community; our principal media access is through three weekly island newspapers (two of which are free), which print virtually everything we send, and occasionally our local NPR affiliate, WGCU-TV and radio.

A few years ago, we started telling our story more frequently, with stories on our service projects as well as our fund raising. Typically we submit articles to the local newspapers at least 40 weeks out of 52. We describe service projects and our activities, making sure they sound like fun. Some strategies include:

- Joining the Sanibel-Captiva Chamber of Commerce and attending their twice-a-month events;
- Creating t-shirts with various versions of the Zonta logo, and wearing them around the islands;
- Submitting articles and photographs of service projects (when appropriate) and speakers at our program meetings;
- Submitting articles about the grants we make to local organizations and the funds we contribute to Zonta International;
- Publicizing our attendance at District and ZI conferences;
- Submitting articles about induction of new members or installation of officers;
- Starting a highly visible Friday “Happy Hour” at a local restaurant where members gather to socialize and enjoy getting to know each other;
- Even when not entirely “on mission,” supporting local events and functions, such as planting a tree at the Sanibel School on Arbor Day.

As a result, our visibility and fund raising ability have increased dramatically. Supporting the annual home tour, A Peek at the Unique, is a must-have for many businesses and individuals on the island, due we think to this improved visibility and the event’s growing success. From its inception in 2002, net profits from The Peek have increased every year, from around \$10,000 to \$70,000.

The other chief benefit of our new image has been keeping our membership strong. We have twice won the Rosa E. Fiol Award for net membership gain during the past few years. When we lose members, it is usually only due to ill health or relocation. Our club attracts women who see our good works in action and want to be involved. The friendships, fun and sense of purpose we share are portrayed as publicly as time permits, and this has resulted in the image of a club that is strong, effective and “the place to be.”