

The Media and the Message: Part Two

by David Wray

Have you got an upcoming event that your community would like to hear about? A news release, or media advisory, may be just what you need to make this happen.

By definition, a news release or media advisory is a statement prepared for distribution to the media. They are designed to give journalists information that is useful, accurate and interesting. The main difference between the two types of communication are that a media advisory is intended to attract media to the event while a news release may not necessarily have this as a focus.

Prior to preparing and sending out your news release you should ask yourself five questions:

- ☞ What results do we hope to produce from a news release? Is the news release purely informational, or do we want the media and/or the community to come to the event?
- ☞ What audience will our news release speak to? Will the news release be of particular interest to parents of Scouting-aged youth and/or the youth themselves? Or is the news release aimed at the broader community?
- ☞ Is there anything unusual or noteworthy about the release our organization will issue? A regular pack meeting may not be newsworthy, but if the Cubs spend an afternoon cleaning up the community park and planting Scoutrees it will be.

☞ Is there something about our news release that would catch the attention of the media? There are many other youth organizations that hold interesting activities. What makes our particular event unique?

☞ How will our organization distribute the release (wires, mail, fax, e-mail etc.)

E-mail is the preferred method of distribution. Editors will often “cut and paste” from the news release to create their own news items or community articles.

News releases are easy to prepare and follow a standard outline with a

title/headline; place/date; introductory, middle, and final paragraphs; ending; and contact details. Scouts Canada’s web site (www.scouts.ca) contains templates for major events such as Scoutrees or membership drives, which you can use and adapt for your own purposes.

For Scout-Guide Week, our council prepared a general news release highlighting the fifth annual “Campfire on the Hill”. This event involved over 100 youth from Heritage Area gathering for a campfire around the centennial flame on Parliament Hill. A special feature was the playing of “Ging Gang Goolie” and “Land of the Silver Birch” on the Peace Tower bells by the Dominion Carillonneur.



Photo: David Wray Inset photo: Karen Truelove

Our news release complemented Heritage Area's own Media Advisory which invited a number of TV crews to go up the Peace Tower to see the Carillonneur play.

As a result of our collective efforts, we were invited to appear on the local television morning show "Breakfast @ the NEW RO" where we promoted Scout-Guide Week and the Campfire. Also with us were a Beaver and a Spark who helped the two on-air hosts put up tents, following which we presented the hosts with honorary camping badges and boxes of Scout Hot Chocolate and Girl Guide cookies.

The campfire also received media coverage on the day itself, with a number of our older Scouting youth having the opportunity to be interviewed.

Outline Of A News Release

Format

In most cases, the news release should be sent by e-mail, with the text contained in the body of the e-mail and not as an attachment. Your council office can send out the release for you; this provides a "scouts.ca" e-mail reply address and adds credibility to your release.

The news release should be a maximum of one page. Make it clear and concise. Avoid Scouting jargon

or abbreviations. Remember to spell-check your news release.

Title

- Use capitals and bold letters: "NEWS RELEASE."

Headline

- Headline should be short & snappy.
- Catch the reader's interest. Should include the words "Scouts" or "Scouts Canada".

Place, date

- Identify the place of origin of the news release in capital letters together with the date, in full.

Introductory Paragraph

- Who, what, when, where, why.
- Cover all major points.

Middle Paragraphs

- Add additional details to answer such questions as "who would be interested," "where can one find it," "when will it happen".
- Quotes add credibility and a personal feel to the release. Often a quote will be used by the media. The person quoted should be available for any follow-up interviews.

Final Paragraph

- Summation of the major points, or brief background of organization.

This standard paragraph is found on the Scouts Canada web site.

Ending

- Tells reader that the news release is finished. By convention, use the designation - 30 -.

Contact details

- Tells reader who to contact for more details (name, telephone number, e-mail address). Be sure to send your media advisory to the media several days in advance, and again as a reminder the day before. Follow-up calls also help bring your item to the top of reporters' in-baskets.

From our council's experience promoting Scout-Guide week, we have re-learned an age-old truism: The Media LOVE Scouting! By publicizing our activities, we can show them images of youth (and leaders) having FUN! This makes for excellent coverage and helps us to promote Scouting. An unbeatable combination! ^

- David Wray looks after Communications and Public Relations for Voyageur Council in Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec.

Sample media advisory

From: Beaulieu, Thérèse
Date: February 19, 2004
Subject: Media Advisory - Fifth Annual Scouts Canada Campfire on the Hill

Media Advisory
Ottawa, February 19, 2004

On February 22, Scouts Canada celebrates the birthday of Lord Baden - Powell, the founder of the Scouting movement. In Ottawa and the Outaouais, about one hundred members of Scouts Canada are expected to converge on Parliament Hill for the fifth "Annual Campfire on the Hill".

Where: Parliament Hill
(Centennial Flame)
When: 4:45pm, Sunday
February 22, 2004

Special point of interest for the media: A special invitation to a limited number of TV cameras to go up in the

Peace Tower to see the Carillonneur, Gordon Slater, play the famous Scouting song, "Ging Gang Goolie".

The Carillonneur and Scouts Canada representatives will meet media at 4:45pm at the base of the Peace Tower. The Scouting song will be played on the carrillon, shortly after the 5 o'clock mark.

The Baden-Powell Campfire on the Hill will last about 30 minutes from 5:00pm to 5:30pm.

- 30 -

For further information or to confirm your presence, please contact:

Thérèse Beaulieu
Deputy Commissioner
- Communications
Scouts Canada "Heritage Area"
Cell: 613-xxx-xxxx

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