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Kiwanis clubs the world over have figured it out: Entertaining, relevant, and interesting meetings keep members coming back for more

By Kasey Jackson

It's 8 p.m.; time for **The Chicago Area e-Kiwanis club** meeting. Immediate past president Charlie Pikscher sits in his office at home in his PJ bottoms. His wife, Michelle, is in the living room watching another elimination round of *American Idol*. A few towns away, Dan Conrod is in his kitchen, baking a batch of brownies.



Members of the Chicago Area e-Kiwanis club meeting online, but they get together several times a month for projects and social events.



It might sound like these Kiwanians are skipping their meeting, but they aren't. In fact, each of them, with a computer nearby, is attending the club's biweekly online chat.

That's right. This club meets online.

"e-Kiwanis was founded primarily by three Circle K alums who all wanted to continue on with the Kiwanis family but wanted something more than the traditional club could provide," says Charlie. "We heard about the idea of an online Kiwanis club from the **Kiwanis Club of Hell, Michigan**, and thought it would be a good idea. We are all busy people, so an online meeting would be easier than a traditional meeting. So the idea was born: an online Kiwanis club that would focus on service, not business."

But don't think these members are slacking at home in front of their computers. Actually, this club, with an average age of 30, might be busier than most.

"We have three to six meetings

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in person each year for elections, installations, and inductions," Charlie says. "But we also have three to five service projects each month all over the Chicago area."

For the most part, an e-Kiwanis chat is business as usual. Aside from the occasional tangent, members follow an agenda used by most other Kiwanis clubs. In fact, to start the meeting, a bell icon appears on the chat-room window. Guests are introduced, and members get down to business. There's even a musical note icon to display if attendees feel like singing *Hail to Kiwanis*.

Members are thrilled with the club's setup.

"We're very proud of our e-club," says Kristin Maloney. "The fact that we can meet in a chat room makes it possible for me to continue to participate in Kiwanis. Because I have two young kids, a traditional meeting is completely out of the question for me."

Making it work

As Kiwanis builds toward its 1-million-member goal, one key way to influence success is through members' satisfaction with club meetings. Though online chats aren't for everyone, many clubs find other ways to make members feel welcome and appreciated. Success begins with an examination of the group's meeting structure and content.

"Club meetings need to begin and end on time, be agendaized, entertaining, interesting educational, informative, and most of all, fun," advises Harry A. Dingwall, **Pacific Northwest District** club administration chairman. (For more of Harry's insights, [click here](#).) "Then, Kiwanians, who might otherwise have other more important and/or interesting things to do, will find, take, and/or make time to attend."

Whether staging educational events, fun outings, distinct fundraising projects, or hands-on service project meetings, countless clubs have found ways to make their members more than happy to attend meetings.

Read further for snapshots from a few of those clubs.

Jacksonville, Illinois

Attend a meeting with this raucous crowd, and be ready for anything. In fact, "the first rule a new member hears when joining is to 'check your thin skin at the door,'" says past president Roger Deem. "Anyone and everyone can be a target of good-natured ribbing, which keeps us all in stitches."

The club keeps things exciting with creative stunts and ovations for guests.

“Anyone who takes the podium for any reason is usually greeted in a humorous way,” Roger says. “Our local parks superintendent—who has been dealing with geese problems for years—is greeted with a variety of honks and quacks.”

In addition to silly intros and jokes, members perform comedy bits. John “The Coach” Heinzman, for example, has dressed in a ball cap and sweatshirt to put the rest of the club through a warm-up regimen.

But Roger is quick to point out that it isn’t all fun and games.

“What I love most is the way the group turns serious and respectful when the topic demands. New-member inductions are greeted with great enthusiasm. And tributes to deceased Kiwanians are given in a room so quiet one could hear a mouse breathe.”



Antics at a Jacksonville Kiwanis club meeting keep members in good humor.

Middle Creek-Family Club, North Carolina

Staging traditional or nontraditional meetings may work for some clubs, but for this active group, incorporating service projects into regular meeting times works best.

“We have our two meetings a month, with one of the meetings having speakers and announcements,” says immediate past president Stacy Lyerly. “Our second ‘meeting’ is actually a service project.”

Meeting agenda vary from volunteering at the March of Dimes WalkAmerica to staging a pig roast for a therapeutic riding program. Attendance always includes families.

“We are a family club, which means the members join as a family,” Stacy says. “We have youth on our board and take part in group decision making



Middle Creek-Family club president Stacy Lyerly works a table during a pig roast fundraiser, held in lieu of a “regular” meeting.

with what directions we want to go as a club. It's quite exciting to see families talking, making decisions together, and volunteering together."

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Attend a "KL" Kiwanis club meeting, and you might discover a new talent. Or walk away with a new hobby. Or feel refreshed.



Kuala Lumpur Kiwanians invite family and friends to enjoy a buffet dinner once a month, where everyone has time to socialize, laugh, and share stories.

ways: delicious food, great gourmet presentation, warm fellowship, and varied topics."

Speakers regularly entertain the Malaysian Kiwanians with talks focused on topics such as ballroom dancing, Chinese brush painting, Feng Shui, plastic surgery, and business card and numerology reading.

The club keeps meetings interesting in other ways, as well. Every month, members invite family and friends to enjoy a buffet dinner cooked by the club's resident chef. This gives members, family, and friends a chance to socialize.

"We enjoy our meetings very much because there's always something interesting, fun, and educational to learn," says Heidi Olivia Tan. "Members feel they are enriched in a variety of

Ridgetown, Ontario

The Kiwanis Club of Ridgetown adds a dash of secrecy to spur members' curiosity and attendance.



From September through June, the Kiwanians usually meet at the Mount Zion Presbyterian Church, but they always schedule one "mystery trip."

"We all get on a bus for a mystery trip arranged by one tight-lipped and creative member," says Barbara Doxtater. "We never know where we're going or when we'll be back, but fun is guaranteed."

And what about July and

During a regular club meeting, Kiwanis Club of Ridgetown members, Key Club members, family members, and Highgate Lions Club members learn to operate a fire extinguisher with the help of Highgate/Orford volunteer firefighters.

member's back yard, while you share the fellowship and work of Kiwanis."

August meetings?

"For a change of pace, our weekly 'summer' meetings are set at a different location each week, based on which member volunteers to host a meeting," Barbara says. "It's great to spend the early part of summer on your lawn chair in a fellow

Koszalin, Poland



An Open Kiwanis Club Meeting welcomes prospective members to mingle with current Koszalin Kiwanians.

Meeting of the Kiwanis Club of Koszalin, Poland, are fairly traditional, says president Gazyňa "Kate" Psiuch. But at least once a year, the club stages its "Open Kiwanis Club Meeting," when members invite women from the community to see what Kiwanis is all about.

"We had 19 ladies at the open club meeting this past year," Kate says, "and some of them became members.

"The meeting is a good opportunity to show many people that there is a Kiwanis club in Koszalin and there are children who need our help. We discuss a lot about education

problems, because it is very important to have educated young people."

Stoughton, Wisconsin

Ask members of the Kiwanis Club of Stoughton when they meeting, and you might need a monthly planner to keep track of everything.

The club recently switched from weekly to two meetings a month. Though that isn't unusual, this is: The two meetings are at different times.

The first Thursday of each month, the club meets at 5:30 p.m. for a potluck, finger food snack. The third Thursday meeting is a brown bag lunch at noon.

The result of the six-month "experiment" is that attendance, on average, has increased 50 percent.

Mason, Ohio

With nearly 100 members, the Kiwanis Club of Mason likes to mix things up. After all, how else could members get to know one another with a group this large?

On occasional "Mix It Up" days, attendees draw their table assignment. This way, no one sits with the same tablemates every week.

"We're all creatures of habit, but 'Mason Kiwanians All Mixed Up' makes for a fresh, invigorating atmosphere," says Rhonda Inderhees, publicity chairwoman. "We never know when 'Mix It Up' day will happen, and that's exactly why it works."

Leisure World, Silver Spring, Maryland

Many speakers and visitors leave Leisure World meetings with the same comment: "You guys seem to have so much fun and are such a happy group."

According to past president Courtney L. Jones, fun keeps the club going.

"We have 85 members, with an average age of 81, so we have to have fun or we couldn't maintain the membership and high attendance percentage we have," Courtney says.

As a key element in the somewhat traditional meeting format, the club's Choraliers arrive early to rehearse songs they will perform during the meeting. The all-Kiwanian musical group's repertoire includes a special song that recognizes and welcomes guest speakers.

"Many comment that it was the first time they had ever been introduced by song," Courtney says.

Stratford, Ontario

One thing sets Stratford meetings part: location.

Situated next to the Avon River, the Kiwanis Community Centre houses the Tom Patterson Theatre, one of four venues used in the annual Stratford Shakespearean Festival. Keeping with the theme of stage, theater, and Shakespeare, the Stratford Kiwanis club often ties the festival into its meetings.



"We often have actors from the festival as speakers, and annually we have the director of Archives and Education speak to us about the upcoming theater season," says Pam

Kiwanians meet at the Kiwanis Community Centre in Stratford, Ontario.

Dawes. "We plan several meetings around the theater and are planning a tour of the costume warehouse—one of the world's largest!"

It isn't all about the theater. According to Pam, making the club meetings relevant keeps members happy.

"The program committee works hard to incorporate speakers and presenters who invigorate, amuse, and inspire," she says. "Their messages are a celebration of Stratford life. They encourage us to reflect on the community and redouble our efforts to give back to its continued well being."