Nothing in Washington, D.C., lasts forever. Administrations change. And staffers and students come and go. But one Kiwanis club is thriving amidst this constant sea of change.

“D.C. has a large population of young professionals and almost everyone is a transplant looking to meet like-minded people,” says Amanda Guelzow, president of the D.C. Metro Young Professionals Kiwanis Club, which turns 10 this year. “However, the fact that many young people are transient or at a stage of life where life can drastically change from year to year—graduate school, promotions, marriage, relocating, etc.—means that some people may only be involved for a short time or when their schedule allows.”

So how do they do it? They tailor the club to fit the needs of its 25- to 35-year-old members: Instead of a typical monthly meeting, they have happy hour meet-and-greets at bars and restaurants. There are no attendance requirements. And since they do so much of their communicating via email and social media, business meetings are only held quarterly, often on weeknights and generally with no program.

“Our emphasis is really on getting people engaged with service while meeting new people and building friendships in the process,” Guelzow says. “Projects are hands-on, widely promoted and require little commitment in advance, but offer a meaningful experience for volunteers. Afterward, we’ll usually go out to socialize over a meal to help people continue to get to know each other.”
About one-third of the members have previous Circle K or Key Club experience, but many find the club through their social networks. Happy hours are advertised on Meetup.com and social media, and people are encouraged to bring friends or co-workers.

"We try to maintain a casual, inviting atmosphere and almost always have first-timers attend to see what we are all about," Guelzow says. "We never pressure anyone to become a member at their first event, but instead invite them to join us at an upcoming service project or other activity and get to know other members."

A weekly e-newsletter keeps people in the loop regarding upcoming events — usually around two to three volunteer opportunities each month with a variety of causes around the city.

"Our general philosophy is to offer hands-on service projects and socials that are convenient to young professionals in the working world," says Troy Dibley, club secretary and past Circle K International president. "We know members will show up when we plan exciting and worthwhile events."

The model has worked well for the club, which averages around 30 members each year and has established two large-scale annual projects (co-sponsored by the Kiwanis Club of Northwest Washington): a Halloween Carnival and a Spring Carnival, which provide fun, educational events for underserved children in the area. They’re a favorite of members and also attract new members who come to volunteer at the event.

"We’re fortunate to have a core group of dedicated members who have provided continuity in the club for many years," Guelzow says. "But we are always actively recruiting members and future club leaders."
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