You’re committed to service.
You’re devoted to your club.
How can you do more for children?
Grow. Here’s how.
It’s a simple fact. The number of children who need help is growing. Kiwanis clubs need to grow, too, to keep up with the demand. Here’s a look at three real growth strategies with astonishing results. Check them out. Then try them yourself.

REACH OUT TO YOUNG PEOPLE

KIWANIS CLUB OF CALGARY, ALBERTA
GROWTH: 41% IN ONE YEAR
TOP TIP: LET VOLUNTEERS SERVE BEFORE ASKING THEM TO JOIN

The Kiwanis Club of Calgary, Alberta, is one of the first Kiwanis clubs—the 147th, to be exact. Yet—with a couple exceptions—members in the 89-year-old institution are younger than 30 years old. And in the past year, borne on this youth movement, membership grew by more than 40 percent.

Previously, club leaders had expressed a common lament: It’s a wonderful group with great programs and killer projects, but where can the club find new members?

The secret, according to club president Cory Johnson, is innovative recruiting. Members began looking at where they were devoting their service. The club owns and operates Kamp Kiwanis Calgary, a residential summer camp focused on underprivileged or disadvantaged children and their families. The camp employs counselors and other staff who have two things in common: youth and a yen for helping children. But young adults may have preconceived notions of Kiwanis clubs and need to be convinced that they can be Kiwanians.

“Often when you ask people to join Kiwanis, they’re wowed,” says Cory, who himself followed the path of camper to camp employee to Kiwanis member. “They think the commitment is a bit too much. We see how passionate they are about the camp and the kids, so we ask them to join the Kamp committee. We know they’re interested in doing something for the kids.”

Once prospects come to Kamp meetings, they get involved, meet the Kiwanians, and talk about different ideas. Then they’re hooked.

“We find their passion and get them in,” Cory says.

Because dues may be prohibitive to young people who have limited incomes, the club learned to be flexible, even offering a subsidy during the first year of membership.

“After the first year,” Cory says, “all of the new members have paid their dues on their own. By offering the subsidy, we’ve removed all barriers for membership.”

—Cathy Usher

DISCOVER NEW PEOPLE

KIWANIS CLUB OF UPLAND-FOOTHILL, CALIFORNIA
GROWTH: 33% IN ONE YEAR
TOP TIP: MAKE EVERYONE FEEL WELCOME

Members of the Upland-Foothill, California, Kiwanis club could not have pictured such a script. With its roster consistently listing 42 to 46 members for about 40 years, the club suddenly hit a growth spurt. A 33 percent spurt.

In addition to just having more people at meetings and service projects, the club’s demographics diversified. Members’ ages now span from 25 to 90 years old. Fifteen members are women, and 15 are younger than 50. They represent European-American, Chinese, Armenian, Colombian, Mexican-American, Philippine, and African-American cultures.

Membership development co-chairman Phil Lovelady credits a focus on club organization, meaningful service projects, and fellowship. But there also was a moment of inspiration. Phil remembers attending a diversity forum at a Kiwanis convention, and when he reported the experience at a club meeting, a fire ignited.

“One of the first things we did was to recognize the diversity that already existed within the club—and celebrate our differences,” says Upland-Foothill Kiwanian MaryAnn Payne. “We have a broad definition of diversity. We have people of different ages, gender, professions, income, as well as ethnic backgrounds.”

Prospective members are invited to three club events before they are asked to join. So they already have experienced a meeting, a social function, and a service project before club leaders meet them for lunch and a conversation about membership. The talk, MaryAnn says, alternates between personal interests (family, job, and such) and Kiwanis.

“It’s very important in these talks to be honest about expectations,” she adds. “We leave judgments at the door. We may tease sometimes, but you have to be sensitive to differences. We try to keep it light and keep it fun.”

And fun is an important element of Upland-Foothill club meetings and membership retention.

“People like to go where they have a good time and feel welcome,” says president Philip Board.

“We spend our substantial service...
funds wisely and have been involved in some wonderful stories of giving in the community,” adds Phil. “Because of this, we have attracted movers and shakers in the community who want to be where the action is.”

—Barbara Klemt Boxleitner

JUST ASK

KIWANIS CLUB OF MAGIC CITY, BARBERTON, OHIO
GROWTH: 52% IN FIVE YEARS
TOP TIP: SEEK BUSY PEOPLE

Industries shut down. Families move out. And Kiwanis clubs in the United States Rust Belt wish they could find a spell to conjure new members.

Yet, in the midst of that struggling region is the thriving Kiwanis Club of Magic City, Barberton, Ohio. How did it grow from 53 members in 2003 to 74 in 2007?

It wasn’t magic, says club president Dennis Liddle.

“I really believe our success comes from the pride our members display,” Dennis says. “When you are a member, you really feel like you’re part of something good. It’s not difficult to ask people to join your organization when you are as dedicated as our members are.”

So, it’s as simple as it sounds: They tell people. And they ask them to attend meetings.

It also helps that membership is a focus at each meeting, says member Dick Smith. “We’ve discovered that people who already are busy in the community make good members. We seek them out and invite them to our special prospective member meetings.”

And many of those guests already have a connection to the club and community, adds Elizabeth Wilson: “Most of our members come to us through a connection of family relationships, coworkers, and neighbors.”

She lists fathers and sons, an aunt and niece, siblings, cousins, not to mention one member’s barber, business owners’ clients—friends asking friends.

It all comes down to asking.

—Shanna Mooney