Hello everyone. Welcome to today’s webinar. Today we’re going to cover: how to pitch your holiday service project to the media and get coverage.

During the holiday season, the media is always looking to tell good stories of people helping people. That’s exactly what Kiwanis does! So why aren’t all of our clubs are getting coverage of their projects? That’s what we’re going to try to help with today.

But to make it clear, we all know we didn’t join Kiwanis for the recognition. We do “Kiwanis” to help people, especially the kids in our community. But it is important to be covered by the media. It helps boost the morale of the club. Media coverage gets members recognition for doing good and it gets the Kiwanis name and mission in front of potential new members. And clubs should always be looking for new members because as municipalities and school districts make budget cuts, kids need Kiwanis to fill the gap.
Today, we’ll focus on five points to pitching your holiday service project. We’ll spend the most time talking about and looking at examples of molding the project to make it a good story.

(advance)
The visuals needed to tell that story effectively.

(advance)
Crafting the pitch to the reporter.

(advance)
Staging the service to make great visuals for the camera.

(advance)
And publishing the story yourself.

If you have a question, raise your virtual hand or write it in the chat box and we’ll answer it. We’ll make all this material available to you after today’s webinar. Let’s get started.
Newsroom are shrinking. Yet the public is consuming more news than ever before. They’re just consuming it in non-traditional ways. So there are fewer reporters, plus a bigger news appetite. That equals reporters who are busier than ever. Every reporter has several stories to write. They have to post to Facebook and live tweet breaking news events. They have to cultivate sources and stay current on current events. Plus, they have to stay on top of their email inbox so they don’t miss a hot tip or an exclusive scoop.
The reporters, editors and producers in newsrooms are bombarded with story ideas all day, every day. Their time is precious, and their tolerance for bad ideas is short—so you need to know what will be most helpful to them.

(advance)

If you’re in a small town, and your club is presenting a check for $1,000 to the food bank, that might be enough to score some coverage. If you’re in a bigger market, like Seattle, a $1,000 check presentation by your club is not going to make the news.

(advance)

Our job as District PR coordinators is to take the good work we are already doing and mold it into a good story that’s easy for the media to cover. The easier you make it for the reporter, the more likely you are to score coverage again and again.
So how do you mold a service project into a great story? Make it about the service. (advance) Make it about the kids you are helping. (advance) Make it about the community. (advance) Don’t make it about the club’s leader. (advance) Don’t make it about Kiwanis. Coincidentally, making a service project about the community will engage more members and get others excited to be involved. There will be an energy around the project that will be unbeatable.

Let’s look at some examples of popular service projects Kiwanis clubs do around the holidays.
How many clubs do a food drive? Too many to count.

Bringing cans of food to a club meeting to donate to the food bank certainly helps people. But it’s not going to get you any media coverage to drive awareness of your Kiwanis club, which is what we are trying to do.
But look at what the Kiwanis Club of Bentonville in Arkansas does to get coverage. They create and distribute 600 food baskets with chicken, potatoes, corn and dessert. They hand out the baskets to people in need.

**Tip 1: Make it about the service!**

This club is serving the community. The media loves stories of citizens helping citizens. So collect the food, then package it and distribute it to families in need. You can partner with the food bank for distribution. Another distribution option is to partner with the school district. The act of serving others is more likely to generate media interest than a box in the corner of a club meeting.

For those wondering, the Bentonville Kiwanis Club is a club of 24 members.
Here’s another example:
Many clubs collect clothing to give to kids to keep them warm during the winter months. This is very important work. We have a box here at Kiwanis International for staff members to donate gently used coats so others can be warm. Most media outlets are going to pass on this story pitch because so many companies do this in their offices. But with some tweaking, and taking it to the next step, you can get coverage.

**Tip 2: Focus the service project on the kids you are helping.**
The Wood River (Illinois) Kiwanis Club does just that. Working with the school district, the club of 45 members identifies children who need shoes. Then club takes those kids shopping.

The people who decide what goes in the paper or on the news love these kinds of stories because of the priceless faces the kids make when they get shoes or coats or whatever.

(advance)
You see it in the picture the paper included with the story. Those little girls faces are priceless. You see excitement and gratitude.

You can do the same thing. If your club is doing a clothing drive, set up a “Kiwanis store,” where kids can browse and pick out what they want. And, it doesn’t have to just be clothes. It can be toys or whatever. Just involve the children you are helping. It’s going to be a little more work, but when the children thank you, it’ll be worth the effort. Additionally, focusing the service project on kids reinforces our core message that kids need Kiwanis.
So now you have a good idea of how to make your service projects more interesting to the media and you’ve probably noticed that the projects we’ve talked about are visually interesting. There is action going on. Things are happening. People are making expressions. Having good visuals is paramount to attracting print or television reporters to a story.

When your club is planning a service project, make a list of all of the visual elements. Does the project involve service? Does it involve kids? What will people be doing? If you are lacking these elements, find a way to incorporate them. You’re more likely to draw the media, plus members will be more engaged in the project and Kiwanis.
Now that you have tweaked your service project to get the media’s attention, you need to tell them about it.

Most PR people will write a news release and send it off to the newsroom. That’s a fine approach. (advance) Make sure your news release has contact information. The contact doesn’t have to be the club president. The contact person should be someone who responds to email and answers telephone calls immediately. (advance) You’ll always want to copy and paste the news release into the body of an email. Many newsroom email servers block messages that contain attachments. Plus, opening an attachment is another step the journalist has to do to get your information. The more steps it takes, the less likely your release is going to be read because, as you remember, journalists are always in a hurry and need information fast.

(advance) Like the projects themselves, focus your news release on the service project, the kids or both. Let’s look at some examples.
What do you think of this one? The headline, which can also be the subject line in the email, says: Kiwanis club hosts food drive. The subhead reads members to collect 300 cans of beans. No need to read anymore. A journalist isn’t going to. It’s not interesting. This release makes it all about the club. Nothing about service. Nothing about kids. (advance) Let’s stamp this “not covered.”
Let’s take a look at this release. Same club, same project.

The headline, which can also be the subject line in the email, says: 300 families to get baskets of food. That is neat. As a journalist, I’m going to open the email and read some more. The subhead reads: families pick up turkey, beans and potatoes for holiday meals on Wednesday. Now the journalist knows that there is going to be an activity and activity equals opportunities for visuals. The journalist keeps reading: The students at Pike Elementary School will have food in their tummies while they dream about Santa because of the Kiwanis Club of Indy. Now the journalist knows there is an event to get images of families and kids. Hook, line and sinker.

This news release focuses on a service project. And, it focuses on kids. (advance) Winner, winner, turkey dinner!

We’ll cover effective ways of writing news releases more in depth in an upcoming webinar.
A news release to the newsroom is just one way of pitching your story, but the best way is to reach out directly to a reporter who has covered you or another Kiwanis club in the past. Send them an email, thanking them for the past coverage and alerting them to the upcoming event. You can copy and paste the news release into that email as well.
Sometimes a reporter will tell you he or she is coming to your event. Sometimes they just show up. You need to be ready in case that happens.

In addition to the visuals you promised in your news release, when you’re planning your project, request all members wear their Kiwanis gear. (advance) If the club members can all be in matching t-shirts or sweatshirts, that’s great. (advance) Take a look at this photo from a service project in Baton Rouge. Everyone is wearing matching Kiwanis t-shirts. It looks good for the camera and it gives a unified look.

But sometimes, it’s not possible for everyone to be dressed alike, but if everyone is wearing properly branded Kiwanis gear, it will be clear in any photos or video that this is a Kiwanis project. (advance)

Also, display Kiwanis banners around the project area so the audience sees Kiwanis in every video shot of the story. It also makes a good backdrop for any on-camera interviews. (advance)

Take a look at this interview the president of the Kiwanis Club of Biscayne Bay did. It’s clear this is a Kiwanis event. She’s wearing her Kiwanis shirt, her Kiwanis nametag and talking in front of a Kiwanis banner. (advance)

This leads to a side note about how important it is for clubs to be current on branding standards. All brand guidelines can be found in the brand guide. You can download it from Kiwanis-dot-org-slash-brand. (advance)

Kiwanis International is also making a custom logo for any club that request it. You can fill out the form at Kiwanis-dot-org-slash-logos. In a future webinar, we’ll talk about the importance of branding and why Kiwanis International is putting so much effort on brand standards. (advance)

By following the brand guidelines, having everyone wearing their Kiwanis gear and having Kiwanis signs around the service project area, you’ll also get great photos for the media and members social media channels.
Even the best pitches don’t attract media coverage. Maybe there were no crews available to cover the story. Maybe the journalist got pulled off the story for breaking news. Or maybe the timing just didn’t work out for the newsroom. That’s ok. Take the news release you wrote and post it on your club’s website and social media channels. Post the photos you took and have your members share the story.

Our job is to present a positive image of Kiwanis in the community to drive awareness of our organization. Sometimes it’s through the media. Sometimes, we have to go around them and use whatever is available to us. Use your club’s own website, Facebook page or Twitter account to broadcast the story. Because members are proud of what they are doing for the community, they’ll share the story to their own networks. When club members are sharing stories and posting pics on their social media accounts of them volunteering, they’re evangelizing for the club and the work it does. There is no better positive public relations that that.
Today, we hope we gave you a foundation on how to get coverage of your holiday service projects. The takeaway points we want you to remember when you design the service project and pitch it to the media are:
• Focus on service
• Make it about the kids
We’d now like to take your questions. Let’s first answer any questions on this topic, then we’ll open it up to any topic on public relations at Kiwanis International.
Thank you for your time today.
We hope this has been productive. You’ll get a survey shortly telling us what you liked and what we can do better.
We hope you’ll join us for our next webinar. It will be on Tuesday, January 3 at noon Eastern time – 9 a.m. Pacific when we talk about finding content within your club that the media will love. We’ll send you a reminder email with the link to the webinar.