

# WAYS TO ADVERTISE YOUR SOCIETY

To enable an astronomical society to survive and thrive requires the influx of new members. New members bring new ideas, new energy, and new enthusiasm to your society. There are many ways to reach out into your community to attract new members. Here are some ideas:

## **Business Cards**

Have business cards printed with the society name, two local telephone numbers, a local address, and the monthly meeting time and place. Include your society's Website URL and e-mail address. Put them out at meetings and encourage the members to keep a few in their wallets to hand out when someone sounds interested.

## **Society Brochure**

Write a one-page description of your society or create a society brochure. Describe your society, its goals, its members, the benefits available to members, etc. The Astronomical League has free camera-ready, offset reproduction ready, logo sheets available for your brochures and stationery. There are 10 logos to a sheet, ranging in size from  $\frac{3}{4}$ " to 3". You can also download a copy of the League's logo from the AL website. For logo sheets, contact the [Executive Secretary](#).

## **Newspapers**

*Community Affairs* — Contact each local newspaper. Talk to the people in charge of community affairs. Get their names, their department address, etc. and ask them exactly how they want club announcements for publication written. Write the announcement for them. Write it so they can drop it in the paper without having to rewrite it. (If one community affairs writer always starts with the day and date an event is held, write your announcement to begin with the day and date.) Be sure to put a contact person's name and phone number on the bottom of each announcement. Keep it short: who, what, when, why this is important. Some newspapers want monthly announcements of meetings; some will put the same announcement in every month unless you call them to cancel it.

After they print something about your society, write them a letter. Tell them how many people came to your meeting because they read the announcement, how many joined, how many mentioned reading it in the paper. (If you can assure community affairs writers that they are providing information people want, they will keep printing your material.)

*News Desk* — Contact each local newspaper's news desk. Write them a letter first, explaining the society's purpose and membership. About a week later call them and discuss it further. Offer one of your society members as a resource for upcoming astronomical events. Get the names of the news editors so you can call them before events such as meteor showers, eclipses, etc. If you have photographers in your society, get them

to take a few generic pictures of people looking through telescopes. Keep these to give to the news desk before an event.

## **TV Stations**

*Meteorologists* — Call your local TV weather departments. Get the names of the weather department's head meteorologists. Give them the name and phone number of one of your experienced amateurs (preferably someone who can speak off-the-cuff). Offer to keep all the meteorologists posted about upcoming events, such as blue moons, eclipses, meteor showers, etc. Invite them to your next meeting as a guest. Be specific, not just a "come if you can" invitation. A meteorologist mentioning something on the air about your society can generate lots of guests.

*Live Interviews* — Call your local TV news department. If they have an on-screen interviewer, talk to that person directly. Ask what kind of interviews are preferred — out-of-town special speakers, award recipients, etc. Get an approximate lead time for scheduling your interviews. If they do any interviews for the society, write them afterward. Emphasize how many people commented on the interview to you, how many interested people showed up at your next meeting, how many people said they didn't know the society existed until they saw it on the program.

If your interviewees are unaccustomed to speaking on camera, be sure they know they will be more effective if they answer questions with about two sentences. There will not be time for details. At most, they may get a 20-second spot, and the interviewer will determine the interview questions. If the interviewer asks how many meteors can be seen an hour, they should give a short answer. For example, they might say, "About 20 to 30 an hour if you are in the country, less in the city lights." Warn your interviewees not to put in a plug for dark skies in the city at the same time.

A week before the interview, send a letter to the interviewer. Tell the interviewer about the interviewees, why the subject is important, why the viewers will find it interesting. Promise to have the interviewees in the studio 45 minutes before air time. Suggest to your interviewees that they wear solid color clothing (no tiny stripes which shimmer on TV scans), and lapels (which are easy to clip mikes onto). Avoid shiny earrings, rings, or pins. Avoid any earrings or bracelets that jangle.

**Note:** TV stations are particularly interested in eclipses, comets, and meteor showers. Arrange a pre-event interview on a morning show so that competing stations will see it and request prime-time interviews or live coverage of the event.

Special News Events: Example, Paint a Sundial on a Parking Lot

One tried and true method for getting news coverage is to combine an event with a school. For example, paint a sundial on a school parking lot. Directions for painting a sundial that uses a standing person as a gnomon are available from McDonald Observatory, Ft. Davis,

Texas. (© 1980 Exploratorium, Recipe No. 134) Suggested paint: Industrial Polymer Coatings, Inc., P.O. Box 2023, Madison, Mississippi, 39130. Three colors are recommended. Yellow, red, and black are good choices. Notify the news media that this is a photo opportunity for education and there will be students, teachers, and parents in attendance. Paint the sundial before the event and just add a few details while the camera rolls.

### Organizations Where Potential Members May Be Hiding

*Civic Organizations* — Call your Chamber of Commerce. Ask if they have a list of organizations and if your society can be listed. Get the list of organizations' addresses from the Chamber. Send each organization a few business cards, call their president, offer a short program, or whatever. Just so everyone knows your society exists.

*Public Library* — Ask your public librarian if you can leave a few brochures on the library's pamphlet stands. Notify the librarian how many people are attending your meetings because of brochures picked up at the library.

*Welcoming Groups* — Call your local Welcome Wagon or Newcomers' Clubs. Ask if you can send them some of your brochures and business cards to display on their sign-in tables or offer a 10-minute program.

*Educational Organizations* — Call local PTA's and PTO's. Ask them if they have a sign-in table where you can leave a few brochures.

*Other Clubs* — Call the Photography Club, Mensa, 4-H, etc. (Scientific groups are good bets; for example, the American Institute of Chemical Engineers.) Ask to make an announcement at their next meeting. Invite their whole club to visit you at some specific time and place when you have an exceptional speaker planned.

*Religious Organizations* — Senior Citizens are especially interested in new experiences. Can one of your members give a 10-minute talk about constellations to identify in the sky? Ask the seniors to come to one of your general meetings for starters. (Be aware that some seniors do not drive at night and some have limited eyesight.)

### Public Places

*Malls* — Mall shows, with astrophotos, book and telescope displays, slide presentations and demonstrations are a rich source of new members. (You will need proof of club liability insurance to do this.)

*National and State Parks* — National and State park officials are usually anxious to sponsor educational programs for their visitors. Often they provide the publicity, the security, and an appropriate site. They usually waive entrance fees for your society members. A park program is an excellent way to reach many potential members since many park patrons are already interested in nature.

*Elementary, Secondary, and High Schools* — Call the head of your high school physics department. Offer to give a short description of astronomy today to the advanced classes – or all classes. Offer to help them write proposals to buy telescopic equipment for their departments. Notify science teachers that the society exists and would be willing to do short star parties on weekend evenings. Be sure to tell them what to expect from you (good views of the moon, distant galaxies, colored double stars, etc.) and what you expect from them (no lights, consideration for your society members' equipment, security arrangements if necessary.) Inviting parents/siblings is important. If the teacher is enthusiastic, you can offer a 20-minute program one week, a notice of the star party (to xerox and distribute), and a follow-up program if necessary. Do talk about rain dates. Be careful not to overload your membership with star party commitments. One rain date is reasonable. Extending rain dates for months ties society members down to a commitment for which they lose enthusiasm. At the beginning of each year, ask your members to vote (e.g., –no more than one school star party per quarter, and never during a new moon).

*Universities* — Call the local university physics and chemistry departments. Ask if they will mention your society to their classes. Offer to come and make a short presentation. If the university has chemistry or physics clubs, offer to make your presentation there.