

Getting the Word Out!

By Jed Daughtry
Piedmont Lions Club (South Carolina)

It's not too difficult to get your press release published. Generally, all you have to do is stuff your copy in an envelope and mail it to the newspaper. Newspapers want to print your story. There are a few things that must be done before you put your press release in the mailbox. Follow the hints below and read your story in the news a few days later.

First, find out where to send your press release. It's not too difficult. There is probably a newspaper of general circulation in your area. For example, I live in the Greenville area, and our "big" local newspaper is the Greenville News. Moreover, there are probably more local newspapers as well. You may already subscribe to some of them. Sometimes, they are free at local shops. Their addresses and phone numbers are in the telephone book. Look for the address and phone number of the newspaper itself. Some may also list e-mail addresses. Get the editor's name or the name of the person editing the section where you would like your article to appear. Now you know how (and to whom) to address your envelope. Step one is done.

Second, learn the proper format for a press release. It's simple. It has the following elements:

- The words "Press Release" centered, in large, bold, ALL CAPITAL letters. For those of you with computers, use a font such as Arial Black, size 18 points.
- Under that, centered, bold, all caps in slightly smaller letters, type "For Immediate Release." Again, use a font such as Arial Black, 14-16 point.
- Skip two lines. Next put the contact information. Starting from the left margin, type "For further information, contact: (Your name; your club name, your title, and your daytime phone number)."
- Skip two lines and type your headline. Put it in all bold, all capital letters. Make it grab the reader's attention.
- Skip two lines, then put your location, a dash and write your article. Use Times New Roman 12 point or some other serif font of the same size. For instance...

Piedmont—Piedmont Lions Club President M.O. Howard, Jr. presented a check...

- If your press release has more than one page, put "–more–" (the word more between two dashes) at the bottom of each page. When you finish the article, you have to let the editor know that this is the end. Put "–30–" (30 between two dashes) or "####" centered about two or three lines below your last sentence.

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That's what it takes to make the press release look professional for the newspapers. If you have a computer, you can create a template to do this so you don't have to recreate it each time. Putting a Lions Club logo in as a graphic is a good way to look professional and to get the attention of the editor. Some word processor programs have a template for press releases. Word Perfect for Windows 8 has a good press-release template. Now that you have done all this preparation, you don't need to do it again. Some updating may need to be done, but the bulk of the work is over.

Now, all that's left is the writing. Books tell you that newspaper writing is done by the inverted pyramid. This simply means that the information goes at the beginning and the rest of the article put in decreasing detail order. It is very important to get the attention of the reader immediately. For example, compare the two sentences below.

“Lions Club President Jones awarded the annual Citizen of the Year award to Mrs. Smith at the October meeting.”

“Sally Jones, single mother of three honor students, retirement home volunteer, and golf team coach, was honored by the Mobile Lions Club yesterday.”

Surely the second sentence is more interesting than the first. Now you can tell about the president giving her the award, her reaction, etc. Do it in descending order of importance. Newspaper editors tend to put in articles according to available space. They also tend to trim an article from the bottom up. This is why using the inverted pyramid is important.

You're almost ready. Edit your copy. Check for grammar and spelling errors. Then have someone else check it, too. My wonderful wife is excellent at this and reads everything before it goes out. Don't worry too much about it. The newspaper won't let you embarrass yourself; however, don't neglect this step. The well-written, neat and error-free copy tends to make it into a newspaper more quickly. Editors are like the rest of us; if someone else will do the job for them, they like us better.

If you have Internet access, I strongly recommend this site: <<http://www.press-release-writing.com/content-basics.htm>>. I wish I had known of it sooner myself. If you want a sample of a previous press release, e-mail me at <jedserl@aol.com> or write me at Jed Daughtry, 17 Piedmont Ave., Piedmont, SC 29673.

Now neatly fold your press release and stuff it into the envelope. Don't forget the stamp!

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