

San Diego Suburban Newspapers

La Jolla Light • Del Mar Times • Rancho Santa Fe Record • Carmel Valley Leader • Solana Beach Sun

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Tips for getting publicity

The idea at the San Diego Suburban Newspaper Group is to make it as easy as possible for you to get into the newspaper.

Just remember to include The Five *Ws*: Who, what, where, when and why.

- **Who** you are: The name of your organization
- **What** you're up to: Is it a bake sale, a dress ball, a gala or a chili cook-off?
- **Where** you're up to it: The address, including the town.
- **When** you're doing it: The time, including a.m. or p.m. and the date, including month.
- **Why** you are doing it. Who will benefit from the event and why anyone should care about it.

We're more concerned with content than style, so if you're not a great writer, don't worry about it.

Here are a few more tips for making sure your message gets through to readers.

- **Include a phone number.** Include a phone number. Include a phone number. Obviously, we can't emphasize this point enough. Even if your press release covers all the bases, an important question may remain. And if we can't get an answer from you, we can't publish it.

More: Your press release may suggest a picture opportunity or a larger story, and if we can't reach you, we can't act on the idea. You might have missed a chance to go from a short paragraph in a list of upcoming events to a photograph on the front page.

If you send a photo for publication with the press release, tell us what's going on in the photo. Include the names of the people in the photo, when it was taken and where. And, if the photograph would like to get credit for taking the photo, tell us. Be sure to include his or her name, and the fact that we should credit that person.

The contact number doesn't have to be published' it can be for our use only. If that's the case, say so. It's also helpful to the public to have a number they can call for the information, so if you can provide that number, please do.

- **Tell us as soon as you can.** Sometimes we're the last to know, and if we'd known earlier, we might have been able to do more with the information. It's frustrating for us to hear of that great story or photo possibility when it's too late to do anything about it.

That, of course, also includes the great possibility that's starting in five minutes. We'll sure give it a shot, but there's a good chance all our reporters and photographers will be tied up with other matters. Unless you're calling to tell us about something that's on fire, we'll probably have to give you the lecture on telling us as soon as you can.

A good rule of thumb is to give us the information a couple of weeks in advance, more if you're selling tickets and need advance reservations. That gives us time to publish it (perhaps more than once) and to consider story or picture possibilities.

- **Assume we just fell off the turnip truck.** We're not clairvoyant, and if the information isn't in your press release, we can't automatically surmise it or assume it.

Tell us whether it's a.m. or p.m.

Tell us what town it's in.

Tell us whether it's street, drive, road or avenue.

Tell us the important stuff like whether visitors are welcome and whether there's a price. You'd hate to have readers expecting a freebie when it will actually cost a couple of bucks.

- **Keep it brief.** Include only the information that will be important that will be important to the public. The fact that Grace Smith will furnish a punch of passion fruit juice mixed with lime sherbet and 7-Up is critically important to Grace Smith, but the person who might be persuaded to attend the meeting would be more interested in the fact that you're talking about drug abuse among teenagers.

- **If there's a critical date, tell us.** We usually publish notices a couple of days before the event. If there's a reservation deadline that's well before that date, make that information prominent.

- **Put it in writing.** We love to talk to you on the phone, but there are hundreds of you and the margin for error is immense. Besides, we'd get cauliflower ear.

- **Use one sheet for each release.** When you list your next 29 critically important events on one sheet, that sheet will be handled no less than 29 different times, by as many as four different people.

Remember the Basic Law of Paper Shuffle: The chances of a piece of paper being misplaced increase in exponential proportion to the number of times it is handled and filed, multiplied by the number of people who touch it. We could statistically project the odds against your 29th meeting getting the publicity it deserves, but we don't have a calculator with that many digits.

- **Please type or print.** We stress that you do not need to be a typist nor own a computer to be successful publicist. We don't want a computer standing between you and our newspapers. But, we need to be able to read it, so print as legibly as possible. If you write it in longhand, the a's can look like o's and the u's can look like n's, and if the t isn't crossed, it's an l, etc.