

Showcase

Family matters A focus on families—and serving children—helps a Virginia club grow

In the early 1990s, when Marvin Leslie joined the Kiwanis Club of Marion, Virginia, the club boasted between 60 and 70 members. Yet those numbers steadily dropped over the years, stabilizing most recently around 40 members. This past year, Leslie, who was his club's membership growth chairman, decided it was time to reverse the trend: He'd stage a growth campaign centered around a special informational dinner event and summer social.

It wasn't a new idea. Leslie learned about the strategy during a Capital District workshop and came away with a plan, plenty of sample materials and ways to tweak the formula to fit his club's needs. The plan was basic: Send letters to prospective members inviting them to a special dinner meeting, follow up and stage a social dinner meeting.

"What was different for us was that we included spouses and significant others in the invitation," Leslie says. "That, in my opinion, was the most significant aspect of our success, because the decision to affiliate with a civic organization—or really anything—is often a family decision."

The invitation stressed two points:



PHOTO BY MIKE C. NICHOLS

New members say they join the Marion Kiwanis Club because they're inspired by its dedication to serving children. They're impressed by club service projects, such as stuffing kids' backpacks with nutritious snacks.

1. The club helps children and youth in the Smyth County area.
2. They were being invited to join fellow members of the community who have a shared interest in serving the community.

"We didn't ask them to respond," Leslie says. "The next step was to have members follow up with the people they had recommended."

Of 50 invitations mailed, 15 prospective members—plus their spouses

or significant others—attended the special dinner event.

"We had a great speaker and talked about our service projects, such as our Snack-in-a-Pack program that provides nutritious snacks to underprivileged children," Leslie says.

Six new members joined. That boost, combined with another two members who joined prior to the event, gave the club an 18 percent membership increase.—*Amy Wiser*

Planning to grow

3 months out: Ask each club member to provide the names and addresses of three prospective members.

1 month out: Send a letter to prospective members, explaining what your club does and that you will be inviting them—and a

guest—to an informational event.

10 days out: Ask club members to follow up to answer questions and gather RSVPs.

Event day: Encourage guests to ask questions, take materials home, read through them, complete the membership form and join.



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