

How YOU Can Make a Difference
By Chuck Timanus, National Director of Public Relations

Mr. Timanus began by asking how many members serve as chapter public relations officer and then said, You ALL are involved in public relations, whether you are the P.R. officer, a chapter president or vice president – you are a walking advertisement for NARFE. And that’s what public relations is. Public Relations is advertising. The basic difference, simply put, is this - advertising costs money and public relations is free.

And so, for the sake of our discussion this morning, we’ll examine each aspect and see how NARFE can use P.R. and advertising to our benefit. Let’s look at the hard part, and that’s advertising. I say it’s hard because as any public relations person will tell you advertising takes money. And to be honest with you NARFE has done a lousy job in this area. At all levels – local, state and national.

If we had spent money letting federal employees know and retirees know who we are and what we do back in the fifties and sixties we wouldn’t have federal retirees, people that you know, people you worked with for 30 years, say to you, ‘How come I never heard of NARFE when I was working for the federal government?’ If you hear it once, you hear it 20 times a year, right? That’s old news! Now we have to play catch up!

So, we spend money – and I can guarantee you it is not a lot of money – trying to tell feds and retirees who we are. Whether we’re talking advertising or public relations, the goal is very simple: get a specific message to a specific audience. Every person in this room knows what advertising is. You pick up a newspaper, turn on your radio or television, drive down most any highway, and you see advertising. Fast food places, automobile makers, huge petroleum corporations, airlines, department stores, breweries, all spend millions and millions and millions of dollars each year to convince you that their product is better than their competitors. In the past decade or so we’ve even seen ads for doctors and hospitals and even lawyers.

If everybody else understands that you have to spend money to make money, why don’t we? So what message do we have for our audience? That NARFE is the only organization dedicated to protecting and enhancing your benefits – benefits that you earned. And to help in this fight you have to join us. You know, this sounds like a no-brainer to me, but obviously it isn’t because we don’t have as many members as we should. There are 2.3 million retired federal employees in this country. Think about that – 2.3 million. Ten percent of that group would double our membership. But, I do know that advertising works.

Let’s look at the numbers. From 1998 to 2001, we spent just under \$750,000 on advertising. That sounds like a lot of money; it’s not, believe me. We spent money on radio and television, we did Internet, newspapers; we did outside ads. The money spent was directed by the National Executive Board (NEB) at that time, in each one of our ten regions. The ads generated between 85,000 and 100,000 responses from federal retirees, and some current, asking for more information on NARFE. Anyone want to guess how many of these 85,000 to 100,000 people joined? Three thousand. For those of you who are mathematically challenged, that’s four percent. So there’s got to be a reason why the other 96 percent didn’t join. If this were a membership seminar, we could look at them. But, it’s not so we won’t talk about that.

After a few lean years at headquarters, the NEB has increased our advertising budget over the last couple of years. I can thank Dick Ostergren for that this last year -- he has been a great addition to our headquarters staff. President Fallis came in basically preaching that we

have to spend more advertising money, so I can't complain about the leadership at the national level.

Last fall for the first time ever, this association ran ads in a national publication – *USA Today*. And the fact that my son works for *USA Today* isn't the reason we ran the ads; it just seemed like the best vehicle. We paid about \$150,000 for eight ads over a four-week period – late October, early November, right at the height of the election. In fact we had a great four-page ad in the edition the day after the election. These ads, which offered copies of our “Ten Worst Mistakes Federal Retirees Make” and the Second Edition, “Son of the Ten Worst” generated between 1700 and 2000 responses. People wanted a copy of the publication. Not bad, not great. We got seven new members. **But**, hundreds of thousands of retired federal employees and current federal employees saw the name **NARFE** - many for the first time. So, that seed has been planted. If you see a McDonald's ad you don't run out and buy a hamburger, but if you're driving down the road and you're hungry, you remember McDonald's. It's called saturation advertising. That's why you hear a McDonald's ad every half hour on the radio. The idea is if you tell the message often enough people are going to remember it.

This year we've run ads in *Newsweek* and if you do a lot of traveling in June, a lot of hotels have a publication called *Travel Host*. If you're traveling sometime this month look at the June issue, we have an ad in there. Again it's information – it says who we are and we're hoping to touch people who have never heard of us.

We are also running ads on federalnewsradio.com, a new on-line radio station based in Washington. It's available to anybody with a computer. If you don't know about this organization, this is where Mike Causey networks, and Mike has always been one of our champions. Any advertising, on any level, national or local, isn't going to be worth a hill of beans if we don't do a public relations job. And that is to tell people about us. And, I'll be honest with you, if we don't toot our own horn, nobody else will. And that's why public relations should be the task of every single NARFE member. If we believe in this organization, and you wouldn't be here today if you didn't, we're the ones who are going to have to tell people about it. That's what I'm hoping to help you with this morning.

Each one of you has been given a copy of our PR handbook. This is a first for me because I guard these things with my life. We don't print that many, but there are a couple of things you should know about it. The old name of the Association is on the cover, it's dated June of 2003, **BUT**, it's the same information that's going to be in the next one we publish. So, I'm trying to get rid of some of these. And, since Helen and Mike wanted me to come and talk, I couldn't think of a better organization to take these home with you. Now **you** have it. Because ***it is my belief every member has got to take an active role in public relations.*** What I hope you'll do is that you'll look at some things in this book and find some information that will help you.

For the sake of our discussion on public relations this morning, let's agree on a couple of points. One is that NARFE has two audiences. There is an internal audience and an external audience. **The internal audience is easy - that's us, our members. I want to go over some of the key pages that I think will help you reach the internal audience and the external audience. The internal audience is the people who are members of NARFE, and I have to be honest with you we have to do a better P.R. job with our own members. That's why we lose members. It's the work that NARFE does on behalf of everybody who draws a federal annuity. It should be the key thing, but obviously it's not.** I don't want to step on Dick's toes, but in the speech that he's going to read, later, that I wrote, he's going to tell you that we

lost 32,000 members last year for non-renewal of dues – **32,000 people decided they didn't need NARFE anymore.**

Now, I know the circumstances – people, as they get older, go to a home or their kids take over their finances, and when that NARFE bill comes, they don't pay it because they don't know what NARFE is. But, that doesn't account for 32,000 people. **These people made a conscious decision in most cases that they don't need NARFE anymore, and that's our fault because we're not doing a good job promoting the benefits of NARFE membership.** And, if we don't then all the recruiting successes are wasted.

Then how do we get the word to our own members? **The best way, I am convinced, is the chapter newsletter. I know putting out a newsletter is not easy; I know it's not inexpensive.** There are some chapters in California that put out some really dynamite newsletters. But a newsletter can be anything from a 16-page with color pictures, to one page front and back folded three times and stapled. It doesn't have to be *USA Today*. **And as more members will not or cannot attend chapter meetings, they become more and more disconnected with NARFE. I know that every member gets the magazine. The magazine, if you read it cover to cover, has a lot of stuff that we're doing, but on the local level the newsletter is the way to go. And, that's why we emphasize chapter newsletters.**

Now, Chapter 11 in this Handbook, pages 39 and 40, talks about newsletters. We try to help. **On our website there is a template - you can create your own newsletter right on-line and then print it out. If that's of interest to you, go to our website; click on the section titled Chapter and Federation Development and on the right-hand side you'll see Newsletter Tips. Go to that – it's going to help you.**

As important as newsletters are, however, there is something that is even more important and that is personal contact. **If you know a member who has become inactive or is on that second notice list of their dues being delinquent, call them. Find out why. If they are personal friends of yours, go knock on their door. Let them know you care and that you want them to stay a member. It's important to NARFE that they stay a member—and it's important to THEM that they stay a member. That's what internal public relations is. It's NARFE members dealing with NARFE members.**

Now, let's look at the external portion just for a minute. We'll have some real fun here. **Because if we really care about this organization, if we care about its message and its mission, then we should want to tell people about it. And, that's what makes it fun. It's not easy, but it can be rewarding.**

Pages 4 and 5 of the P.R. Handbook talk about some ways that you drum up public relations for your chapter in your community; things that you can take part in; contacting the media. That's not an easy thing to do. You know, you think you have the most important message. When I was working for the hotel/motel association we did a lot of neat things. Did anybody contact us? No! The only time they called us was during Sweeps Week when some station in Indianapolis, Indiana took an ultraviolet light into a hotel room and found the yucky stuff on the blanket then they called us. Guaranteed! Every Sweeps Week, every year.

When I worked on the Bicentennial Commission one of my tasks was to contact magazines and solicit them to do an article on the Constitution. A true story: I called the Association of Airplane Owners and Operators. And I talked to the editor about doing something about the Constitution. He listened, I made my pitch, he listened - dead silence. I said "What do you think"? He says, 'Well, we don't do stories about ships'. I should have been more specific and said —you know, the printed one.

What I hope we could do with this P.R. Handbook is help you write press releases; contact your local media, your newspapers, your radio stations. Mike Pringle, who is the P.R. Officer for your Federation, and I have become best friends on the phone and on e-mails and he has gone out and really worked to get his P.R. Committee. Mike has set up the committee and he's done everything that he can to get them the information that can help them to do their job. We do what we can. If you want to find out what media are in your area you can go to our website on the Legislative page, there's a section there to click on, type in your zip code, and immediately it will show you every media outlet in your area. Send them a press release. If you live in a small town, you probably know who runs the newspaper or you know who runs the radio station. That's the best part of small town America. The best, most time-proven method I've found of getting information into a newspaper or onto the radio is to make a personal contact with somebody at the paper and if you don't know somebody, here's an idea for you. Invite them to speak at your chapter. Newsletters from all over the country come across my desk everyday and Santa Cruz had the TV weatherman come talk to them last month. They now have a contact.

I'll tell you something about media people. They have egos the size of balloons. They think they have the most important jobs in the world. If you invite them to come to your chapter then you tell them YOU think they have the most important job. And, you're interested; you want to know how a newspaper is put together. You want to know how a reporter goes out and gets a story. I think a weatherman would be a fascinating chapter program. There are tips on Chapters 4 and 5 in the Handbook that will help you in your P.R. efforts and include how to write a press release. That's on pages 24 and 25. As I was looking over the Handbook in preparation to come out here to talk to you it struck me that what we're dealing with is not rocket science. Chapter 8 tells about community and public service. It says "Do good and tell about it". That's what public relations is. If we don't toot our own horns nobody else will. Chapter 10 tells about becoming a polished public speaker. Speak to other organizations and tell them who we are. It isn't easy sometimes, but it's rewarding.

Chapter 12 tells about the Internet and how you can use it.

For a few minutes; let me tell you how we can help you at headquarters. **The best thing I can do for you is help you pay for it through our matching funds program. Matching funds program was created by the P.R. Department and approved by the NEB in 2000. If you want to do a project dealing with P.R. or membership recruiting, Whatever money you put up National will match. If you have \$300 I'll give you \$300. Now you have \$600 to play with.** There are some Federations, including this one that will kick in a couple hundred bucks if it's a good project. If you have \$300 and the Federation gives you \$200 that's \$500 and I'll match that. Now you have \$1,000. If a chapter or Federation want to spend money to promote NARFE or to recruit members, that's what we're there for.

Let me tell you what some matching funds have been used for. Federation in Maryland participated in a Senior Expo in Baltimore County and signed up 24 new members in two days. Chapter in St. Mary's County Maryland and another in Central Pennsylvania printed laminated place mats with a NARFE message and got restaurants in their area to use them. Chapter in Detroit spent \$100 for a booth at the National Association of Postal Supervisors convention and signed up five new members.

The North Dakota Federation is great. There's nothing else to do in North Dakota. I can say that because we lived in South Dakota. There's two seasons—there's winter and July. North

Dakota spent about \$200 for a booth at the state NAPUS convention and got 20 new members. We helped the Fargo chapter – they spent a couple thousand dollars a year on various program. They've grown from 350 members to 570 members in three years. We helped a chapter in Minot, North Dakota host a series of information meetings at federal agencies. They had six meetings and recruited 32 new members last year.

Matching funds don't have to be spent for a specific event. The chapter in Fredericksburg, Virginia – a couple of times every year they spend a hundred bucks or so to send out mail to prospective members and they tell us that every time they do a mailing their numbers increase by ten.

Last year we assisted three chapters in California as well as the Federation. You come up with a program, you determine how much money you can spend; whatever you're willing to spend, we'll match whatever you've got. Membership recruiting and retention can help you, too. They have a tabletop display you can borrow and take to a fair. They have pamphlets and brochures to take. We'll also give you some guidelines. We're here to help.

If you have questions or want to share something that maybe will work in other parts of California to get members, let us know:

Joan Renner, Chapter 748, Indian Wells Valley, their chapter has just joined Habitat for Humanity. They are now the can collectors and they get ten percent of whatever they collect. They call themselves "Play it Again Can". Last year at the State and National Conventions they contacted Collette Vacations; they have four trips planned and they will get five percent of that money.

Joanna Kim Selby, Chapter 1282, Albany. She's glad to know that matching funds are available. Another thing about the successful stories in the different areas, perhaps you could share that information with us. We can bring it back to our chapters and use it.

Chuck Timanus: In the Quarterly News we try to talk about the things the chapters have done in outreach. If you have a specific program you want to run by us, just let us know.

Herb Richter, Chapter 0004, San Diego, a retired letter carrier and a member of the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC). He finds it difficult to convince the letter carriers that this is their organization that they started and they can't seem to want to come into this program. So, if you know any way I can do this I would appreciate it.

Chuck Timanus: We discussed this yesterday at Mike's PR meeting and it's like anything else in public relations, what works for one doesn't work for another. The problem is that most of the people you worked with in San Diego probably aren't there any more. So if you call up the president of the local union and say you want to talk to them about NARFE, they probably don't know who you are. Keep trying – sooner or later you'll find a sympathetic ear either at the post office itself or at the Letter Carriers Union. The closer they get to retirement and hear about WEP and GPO the more they'll want to hear from you. If you want to do a mailing or send flyers to the union members, that's what matching funds are for.

George Duda, Chapter 53, Santa Rosa. They've had some problems with their newspaper, the Santa Rosa Press Democrat. They point out that we're a self-serving organization. They'll take our money for ads. We put ads in the senior center now. Unless you get into things like Habitat for Humanity you're really perceived as serving yourself. That's what we do. But, it makes it hard to get advertising in some of the major places without paying for it.

Chuck Timanus: There's no hard and fast rule. **I would invite the Editor of the newspaper to speak to your chapter. Also, when you send them releases, don't necessarily**

talk about NARFE doing NARFE things, but NARFE doing something like Alzheimer's things, because everybody who has Alzheimer's, or knows someone with Alzheimer's, is not a NARFE member. So, if you need to get NARFE's name out there, hold a fundraising event where the money goes to Alzheimer's and I'll guarantee you they'll advertise it because it's something that's going to affect not just NARFE, but the whole community.

I have a friend in the Peninsula Chapter in Virginia. This woman is great. She's probably one of the most obnoxious people you've ever met and bugged the hell out of the local newspaper to the point that not only do they run her stuff almost verbatim; they put her on their Citizen's Advisory Board that looks over what the paper does to keep her out of their hair. And, it works. She's a great spokesperson for NARFE. Sooner or later you'll find someone sympathetic to what you're doing. It may not be the Editor; it may be a reporter. And, I suggest you get the Editor of the paper to come speak to your chapter. Let him toot his horn about his paper. He might even assign a reporter to cover the meeting.

Bob Fletcher, Preston Chapter 10, Pasadena - a question was asked in relation to the letter carriers. We had a speaker from the Letter Carriers Union yesterday and I said to him, the unions are afraid that we as an organization are trying to steal members, and we're not. Now, what can we, or you do to convince the national bodies that we're not out to steal because we need to put that across in order to let us in to the local levels to be able to promote us.

Chuck Timanus: You point out the things that are of as much concern to them as to us. Things like Premium Conversion, WEP and GPO and tell them that we're the organization that is fighting for them while they're working and, more importantly, once they retire. If you're a union person or if you work for a federal agency you know that once you walk out the door you're history.

Thea Max, Chapter 352, Paradise. As a prior union steward for Letter Carriers of America our union membership only meant to people that there was somebody in Washington that was looking out for them, in my opinion. I didn't have anyone in my shop and at one point I represented a lot of Northern California and I didn't have anyone in that area that was dying to go to union meetings. It wasn't a social thing, it wasn't a membership thing, and this is the same thing we're facing in this organization. Maybe those in the room who didn't belong to unions in their federal service don't understand there's none of the federal unions that you have to join. It's an open shop. In other words you don't have to join the union but everybody in my office of 60 some employees did join the union because there was that feeling. And that's the feeling we have to create when we speak of NARFE. I talk to people about the only lobbyists you have now – they are the only people who are in Washington for you; they are the only people that you can go online and relate to with your problems; there's a website that is absolutely magnificent called postalworkers.com. They have a service that downloads every paper in America with every postal problem that could possibly go on. And they're working employees. But, this is the only website that we can go on as retirees and see what's happening with our retirement. **I also feel that the news magazine that you send out from Washington D.C. is one of our greatest assets.** I have thought for a long time, how much would it cost NARFE to mail it to every post office in America and it would be thrown in the swing room. You have no idea how boring a swing room is when you're waiting for your tires to be changed, and you're waiting for your mail to be ready and you grab any magazine that's laying there. **Get those out there, not only to postal workers but to all the other federal employees. That's one of our greatest assets and all of you who get it, wherever you worked before, walk down there and leave it for the current employees. Do that every month.**

Chuck Timanus: That was no question that was a filibuster.

Unknown delegate: Yesterday the gentleman that spoke to us from the postal union stated that we represent our retirees just as much as we do our employed people. They believe that. Furthermore, they're not the only ones. I have a very good friend that retired from Social Security and her union says the same thing. We have a hard problem convincing members of the union and the union is saying "We represent you as retired persons as much as we do the employees," when we're saying "Well, we are." I don't know how we're going to get past that. The Federal Times might be considered.

Chuck Timanus: What we're going to do in the Federal Times before the year's over is advertise the pre-retirement seminars, because I think it goes to the people that would be putting on the seminars.

Unknown delegate: I'm a retired postmaster, also. At every state and national meeting we have NARFE is invited and is there. I'm also president of the Retired Postmasters of California and a lot of our postmasters are active in NARFE. Working with that Postal Coalition - that's seven postal organizations working for our benefit and lobbying. **That is an inroad working with them, getting their confidence. We do it from our end, but each one of us needs to talk to the people who we're still associated with; the ones that work – the carrier, the airports, everywhere. We have to use what we have and each one is a committee to go and get it done. But all of us are still involved with some of the people that we worked with and we should use that.**

Chuck Timanus: Yes, I agree with you 100 percent.