Top Clubs Reveal Their All Aboard the MemberSHIP Success Stories

By Nicole Simmons, Membership & Leadership Development Manager

As members, you are the heartbeat of our organization! Within your clubs, you carry out our mission every single day and are making a difference in your communities and throughout the world. But, imagine how many more lives we could touch if we had even more members. The more Soroptimists we have, the better we are able to increase our collective impact for disadvantaged women and underserved girls!

To assist members in increasing their impact, the All Aboard the MemberSHIP campaign was launched in 2015. Throughout SIA, clubs worked to build membership and add new clubs with a renewed sense of excitement and teamwork.

During our last fiscal year (FY15/16) we saw success by achieving 3,761 new members (an increase of 1 percent over FY 14/15) and 22 new clubs chartered (an increase of 38 percent)!

Curious about how clubs were able to add new members to their rosters? We were too! We asked the top club in each region at the end of the first phase of the campaign to share the secrets of their success. Here’s what they had to say:

**Golden West: SI/Gold Canyon, AZ, USA—57 percent increase in new members**

2015-2016 Club President Melody Higgins shared a number of ways they increased their membership. Monthly articles were sent and published in the newspaper about events and fundraisers, and guests were put on a mailing list and invited to attend. Former members and co-workers were asked to join the club. More focus was given to following-up with prospects, which included building relationships with them first by calling on the phone, meeting for a drink or lunch, etc. before asking them if they were interested in membership. SI/Gold Canyon used a process on their website to receive inquires and then provided follow-up to engage prospects. Their club’s communications team got involved too by sharing
events with details and photos on the club’s Facebook page. Plus, once new members joined, club members implemented a welcome plan and oriented new members by providing mentors and guidance. Finally, the club did an assessment. “This helped us recognize areas to change or improve on,” said Melody. The assessment showed three areas of improvement: being more transparent by providing all members access to club documents like bylaws and the treasurer’s reports; providing more recognition and praise to members; and changing the venue of their meetings to eliminate meal expenses. By conducting the club assessment, the current members were engaged and provided responses to create a healthy club atmosphere.

Japan Higashi: SI/Kokubunji, Japan—33 percent increase in new members
With the help of the Japan Higashi Region Office, 2015-2016 Club President Kiyoko Takada communicated the successful strategies used by SI/Kokubunji. The club held various events, for example, charity concerts, bazaars, and friendship parties in order to attract new members. Additionally, they used the celebration of their club’s 20th anniversary as a marketing tool to promote their longevity in the community. Recruiting new members was taken on by each member who targeted relatives, acquaintances of other organizations and/or communities, former members and charity concert performers. “Each member always looks for potential members who would join in the activities of our club, in her own workplace, other volunteer group, friends, and acquaintances,” said Kiyoko. Additionally, they showed hospitality and took the time during their club meetings to explain the proceeding so new members could easily understand and follow along.

Japan Minami: SI/Miyazaki-Higashimoro, Japan—43 percent increase in new members
SI/Miyazaki-Higashimoro communicated their recruitment strategy with the assistance of the Japan Minami Region Office. The club’s recruitment approach was to talk to potential new members directly one-on-one and produce a club brochure that introduced Soroptimist and the club’s activities. The club created a slogan to boost membership that incorporated their milestone anniversary: “Celebrate Our 20th Anniversary With 20 New Members.” Prospective members were welcomed to attend monthly meetings as a guest so they could get to know members and see the club atmosphere. The club also relied on public awareness. “We used the radio. We were on the air and had a good opportunity to introduce our activities,” said 2015-2016 Club President Reiko Murata. Additionally, the club’s charity concert involved many people in the community and local companies, which resulted in six new members! Once new members joined, they were welcomed at several parties and events throughout the year. The club also considered new members’ time by encouraging them to get involved and participate with the club as much as their personal schedule would allow.

Midwestern: SI/Fremont, OH, USA—20 percent increase in new members
SI/Fremont took the approach of inviting friends and business contacts to meetings. Then their membership committee made certain to follow-up with each prospect, who then became members in the club. 2015-2016 Club President Paula Heckel noted, “Very simple, no formal event or marketing campaign. [We did] conduct a club assessment at the end of 2015, and based on the
feedback, began implementing some changes. Those changes involved concerns over financial obligations (did not raise club dues and budgeted funds to support service projects); the need for stronger visibility in the community (participated in community events, updated their website using the SIA web template, and became more active on their Facebook page); member recruitment (each member is encouraged to bring guests and a committee member follows-up with them); and promoting a friendlier club atmosphere (mixed up seating arrangements and included teambuilding activities at meetings).

North Atlantic: SI/The Adirondacks, NY, USA—24 percent increase in new members
“Our members are our best resource in recruiting new members. Our monthly meetings are attended by guests of members, and by women who have heard about us and are interested in what we do,” said 2015-2016 Club President Alice Crotty. She also reported sharing the All Aboard the MemberSHIP campaign emails and information sent by SIA headquarters with the club’s membership committee. Another strategy SI/The Adirondacks used was to welcome guests by offering each one a packet with information. Packets contained details about the club, specifically highlighting their many projects and programs and how prospects could get involved.

Rocky Mountain: SI/Cody, WY, USA—29 percent increase in new members
Sometimes, all you need to do is make a personal ask. That’s just was SI/Cody used as its strategy to target new members— they asked any and everyone they knew to come to their annual recruitment lunch and to their after-hours recruitment events! According to 2015-2016 Club President Lynn Anglesey, “We are out in the community and involved in a lot of projects.” By doing hands-on work, this led to more prospects becoming interested in Soroptimist. She also noted while not every prospect who came to an event joined, they indicated they may do so in the future. Regardless, each learned about SIA’s mission and made connections with members. SI/Cody also honored and recognized their seasoned members for their service and practiced engaging new members right away. Committee chairs personally reached out to each new member and most of them participated in one or more projects.

Finally, we also want to celebrate the Korea Region, which we recognized during the first phase of the campaign for having the region with the highest percentage of new and charter members (+250 to be exact)! During SIA’s 44th Convention, 2014-2016 Governor Ohran Choe’s shared the following regarding their success.

Korea Region—41 percent increase in new and charter members
2014-2016 Governor Ohran issued a challenge to add five new members to each existing club and made personal visits across the region to clubs that had showed little recruitment activity to encourage growth. The region also chartered SIX new clubs such as one with North Korean refugees and one with three generations of mothers, daughters, and granddaughters. Governor Ohran noted newly chartered clubs maintained a sister/mentor club and focused on our Dream Programs. Member engagement was also highlighted in the Korean Region. Governor Ohran encouraged clubs
to have fun and meaningful monthly meetings in order to attract new members. Orientation and leadership training was provided and members were encouraged to share their experiences with each other. Various nationwide events were organized such as a charity golf tournament, mountain climbing, concert, and a bazaar and auction. These events helped raise funds and provided opportunities for members to strengthen bonds with each other.

All in all, these above strategies helped unite and build camaraderie among current members while also attracting new ones throughout SIA. Congratulations and thank you to all of our clubs for recognizing the importance of recruiting new members and adding new clubs!

While we are closing out the second phase of the All Aboard the MemberSHIP campaign and on the cusp of the third phase, think about how your own club can use one or more of these strategies to recruit members or even start a new club. Perhaps you will have a best practice to share at the end of the campaign!