What Makes the News and Simple Guidelines for Press Releases

Take a look at pages 11-18 of the Journalism Merit Badge Pamphlet, portions of which are summarized here.

**WHAT MAKES THE NEWS**

News is information of interest to the audience, information they will care about. New is not information you care about. So, you have to make “your news” catchy or interesting for your audience. Here are some factors to consider:

**Timing**. *When did it happen*? It must be recent or upcoming, or tied to some notable time frame like an anniversary or Holiday, the first ever or the one millionth.

**Proximity**. *How close was it?* People in one community care more about what happens there than what happens in another community a hundred miles away. What is news in Apache Junction may not be news in Surprise

**Impact**. *How strongly does it affect your audience?* A tornado warning has more impact than the fact Mrs. Brown’s cat is lost.

**Fame**. *How famous are the people involved?* If an elected official, a senator, mayor, or councilman, or NFL Quarterback Tom Brady will attend an event, it’s more newsworthy than if the Scoutmaster or your mother will.

**Novelty**. *How unusual was it?* Dog bites man is not unusual and gets little notice. Man bites dog is news. Unfortunately, when an Eagle Scout screws up it is news.

**Conflict**. *Who is fighting whom over what?* People don’t always agree. When they disagree that sparks interest in what is at stake, how sound are the positions taken, and who is on which side of the controversy.

**Human Interest**. *Does the news touch hearts or make us laugh, cry or feel inspired?* Collecting food for the hungry or helping victims of a disaster are often newsworthy.

**SIMPLE GUIDES FOR PRESS RELEASES**

RULE #1: Use the press release as a sales tool. The idea is to communicate a message to customers and prospects, through the vehicle of a print or online article, hopefully adding the authority and credibility of the publication, website and/or reporter to the message.

RULE #2: Have a newsworthy story. To get your message communicated through the publication, you need to convince the reporter/editor that your message (or the story surrounding it) is newsworthy. So, it's got to have appeal to the entire readership of the publication.

RULE #3: Write it like a reporter would write it. If your press release looks and feels like a real article, reporters will often just file it as a story with minimal editing. Therefore, it's up to you to make sure that your press release looks and feels like a real article.

RULE #4: Provide some good quotes.

* If it is for an **Eagle project or other service project**, include a quote from the Scout about why he chose this project or what he learned preparing for the project. Also get a quote from someone representing the beneficiary pointing out how the project is valuable or helpful to it.
* If it is for an **Eagle ceremony**, include a quote from the Scout about the most meaningful merit badge, what he learned from the project or the process of becoming an Eagle, or who inspired him the most in his Scouting experience. Other quotes can come from the Scout’s mentor, Scoutmaster, or charter organization representative. If someone notable – even from the district – was or will be in attendance, include that.
* If it is for some activity or event, such as Pinewood Derby, a Camporee, get some quote from a participant about the fun they had and what happened to them in terms of personal growth; what did they learn how to do or do for the first time. Quotes from kids go a long way.

RULE #5: Contact your top outlets personally. In addition to sending a press release, personally, it’s a good idea to contact the reporters that you really want to cover the story. Send them something personal. You might even want to rewrite the press release to fit their beat.

RULE #6: Be sure to include the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Also, see pages 49-56 of the Journalism Merit Badge Pamphlet for ideas on organizing and ordering your information.