

CLUB PROGRAMS

THE CLUB PROGRAM DIRECTOR

In any camera club, small or large, the Program Director holds one of the most responsible positions. The interest value of the programs often determines the success or failure of a club, for they will stimulate or depress attendance at meetings.

In the formation of a new club, the Director will likely set a pattern which will be followed closely in the years to come, and so will establish a continuing standard for the club's success. However, when assuming the office in an older club, the Director must be constantly alert to the need of introducing new ideas, rather than being chained to tradition. Select a person who has a flair for showmanship, is flexible, and capable of removing personal views regarding different aspects of photography and club activity.

To distribute the workload in programming, the Director can appoint one or more assistants. Periodic rotation for this job will infuse the club with new blood, and the apprenticeship which assistants serve will train them for future leadership.

Contests rarely come under the jurisdiction of the Program Director. However, some clubs have an overall program person (who might also serve as a VP) with a separate person handling contests and another person in charge of other programs. Regardless of how they are handled, contests are an important part of a club's schedule of activities and must be taken into consideration when arranging events.

CHALLENGES OF PROGRAMMING

In a broad sense, the organization of club programs has a direct relationship to the size and experience of camera clubs. Within the scope of this document, it is impossible to make suggestions applicable to every club.

Clubs are groups of individuals whose tastes and desires differ, some more than others. Their predominant interests may lie variously in photographic education, technique, competition or entertainment. Some clubs have a high percentage of advanced workers; others have a substantial proportion of beginners. Two seemingly similar clubs may require different program routines. Program patterns vary somewhat between clubs of different countries, as well as between groups in the same country.

A competent Program Director must keep a finger on the pulse of members' wants. These change with times and conditions, the wishes of both majority and minority groups in a club must be given careful consideration, and time apportioned fairly to each. Nothing is more deadly than a monotonous routine. This can result in declining attendance.

Enthusiasm is normally high at the beginning of a club year and the real challenge is to prevent tapering off towards the end of the season. If this becomes apparent by a lower attendance or other signals, an imaginative Program Director should diversify the programs.

Certain types of programs which have been successful should be repeated periodically. Programs of little appeal should be discontinued. The Program Director can discover members' reaction by a questionnaire or general club discussion. Giving members what they want will help lessen membership turnover.

HELP FOR THE NEW OR SMALL CLUB

Few clubs, least of all new ones or those located in small communities, can sustain member interest if they remain too self-contained. Program Directors should be continually conscious that

their members need access to new and different viewpoints. They should provide members with opportunities to compare their work with what is being done elsewhere.

Membership in PSA can be helpful in this respect because it transcends the limitations of regional bounds and enables camera enthusiasts to see, study, and compare technical and picture making standards the world over. High-level educational and inspirational programs by master craftsmen, as well as numerous other services unobtainable locally, are available through the Society as a means of stimulating and encouraging members of new and small clubs to greater achievement. The club Program Director with initiative will see that their club make full use of these programs. The Club PSA Representative should be familiar with all program aids of the Society. They are on the PSA Club Services web site: www.psa-clubservices.org with a Consultants to contact. They are also listed on line at www.psa-photo.org as well as in the Services and Activities section of the *PSA Journal*, in the January, April, July and October issues.

Joint meetings with other clubs are one solution to the problem of small or isolated groups that feel unable to assume alone the responsibility and cost of certain programs. By pooling resources, two or more clubs in the same or neighboring communities can often sponsor an outstanding speaker whom a single club could not afford. In this way many clubs across the country have successfully sponsored outstanding programs on a shared-cost basis.

Another suggestion for varied and comprehensive program planning is affiliation with a camera club council, an art association, a cultural center or a museum organization established in the area. Often these groups organize jointly-sponsored club activities, and provide opportunities for exchange of experienced speakers.

PLANNING AHEAD

An increasing number of camera clubs announce the entire year's schedule before their first meeting. For large clubs, holding two or more meetings a month, this is exceedingly important. It allows these groups opportunity for greater publicity which, in turn, encourages more active membership participation in the club's varied activities.

Some clubs, however, find it difficult or impractical to arrange programs more than two or three months ahead. Many young and small clubs plan by the season; fall, winter, spring, and summer. Every Program Director should plan at least far enough ahead to avoid a last minute scramble for a suitable program, which, all too often proves unsatisfactory.

Well before the club year begins, the responsible member should review available program ideas and material, decide on the general categories, visiting speakers, demonstrations, etc., and finally select the month to which each will be assigned. Thereafter, correspondence, well ahead of time, is undertaken to set up and confirm final arrangements.

When planning a complete schedule far in advance, be flexible enough to take advantage of unusual program opportunities that may become available on short notice. Clubs meeting once or twice a month will probably gather on a third evening to enjoy such a program. Some large clubs, which operate two or more different divisions, often hold one general membership meeting a month at which such special events can be scheduled. In long range program planning, a number of dates during the year can be left open ("Program to be announced") for this contingency.

Clubs announcing the entire year's programs in advance usually provide the schedule on the club web site. Most groups give program announcements at each meeting and a program message in the club newsletter. As a reminder of social events, an E-Blast (group email) to

members is usually good... some members have a bad habit of forgetting dates. While emphasis is normally placed on the "next" event, building enthusiasm for future activities is necessary.

PROGRAM FREQUENCY

Regularly held meetings are essential to a club's efficient operation. Their frequency depends on size, member interest, and the diversity of photographic media of each individual club.

For clubs that have less frequent meetings, informal workshop and study groups, gathered in members' homes between times, are powerful stimulants to less-experienced workers and are excellent selling points when soliciting new members.

Competitions usually take about half an average club's total meetings. Preferably these should be spaced at regular, easily remembered intervals, by assigning the same specific night of every calendar month. For example, regular competitions might be scheduled on the first Tuesday of each month.

* **Monthly:** Clubs meeting once every thirty days have the tendency to cram too many program activities in a single evening. A solution to this is to hold combined print and projected image contests every other month, with interesting programs on the alternate months. This gives such groups five contest nights out of a total of ten meetings.

* **Semi-Monthly:** Many clubs find that holding a combined projected and print contest on one night, and a general meeting program on the other, is a very satisfactory arrangement. This allows for nine contests in eighteen meeting nights. When there are many entries in competitions, coupled with comment by judges (which is very desirable), plan and control the length of meetings. Consider, instead, adding another meeting night to separate the contests.

* **Weekly:** Four (sometimes five) meeting nights a month allow greater flexibility in planning programs. Separate projected and print contests will take up two evenings, giving a total of eighteen competitions out of thirty-six meeting nights. One meeting a month should be devoted to a program of mutual interest value to the majority of members, possibly a visiting speaker. The fourth meeting can be a participation activity such as "Show and Tell."

* **Field Trips:** Outdoor meetings are becoming increasingly popular as club programs. Usually scheduled on a Saturday or Sunday (or both), they can be held at any time of the year, depending on climatic conditions. Some clubs charter buses to visit the desert, while others make trips to the snow regions. There is no "restricted area." Picnics held during the summer, when many groups are dormant will help keep club spirits alive, as well as offering fine photographic possibilities.

PROGRAM TIME

It is important to start all club meetings on time, then to keep them moving smoothly, and finally to terminate them at a recognized time. Cultivate these habits, starting with the very first meeting of the season. Members will come more regularly, and arrive more punctually. Once club meetings acquire a reputation for starting late, some members will take advantage and drift in progressively later as the season continues. Late arrivals always tend to disrupt meetings and disconcert speakers. In most camera clubs, the average meeting lasts two hours. If there is a five to ten minute intermission at the halfway point, limit it to the agreed time. Get members back to their seats promptly.

A timing routine requires the cooperation of all club officials, with the Program Director having an important role in this good management practice. After some experience, draw up a rough time schedule for a well-filled evening's meeting, without running overtime. The President's opening and closing remarks, as well as introduction of speakers, guests, etc., should

be brief. Keep club announcements to a minimum, particularly on special event nights. Business discussions should not take place on program night.

Some clubs must vacate meeting places at a specified hour. Often this limits friendly post-meeting discussions and social amenities which many find a satisfying part of camera club life. One solution is to move to a local restaurant after the meeting where good fellowship may be enjoyed over refreshment.

PROGRAM SOURCES

Experienced Program Directors know where to turn for material but a new director is often at a loss where to begin. With this in mind, here is a list of major recognized program sources.

PSA: Nationally available to PSA-member clubs (e.g., TOPS in Photography). Check the PSA Club Services web site, Club Programs webpage: www.psa-clubservices.org

HOME TALENT: Clubs often do not take full advantage of their own members' capabilities in presenting programs. The more experienced workers can offer talks and demonstrations on techniques and equipment. They can present programs with how-they-did-it commentary.

GUEST SPEAKERS: From this category come the "special events" which enliven club activities by revealing the view-point and activity of people outside one's own group.

Usually the first source tapped is experienced photographers, exhibitors, and judges from other clubs in the same and neighboring communities. Dinner, transportation and in some cases a small fee, will bring these talented individuals to a club.

The second source will be professional photographers. Often they may think they have little to offer but many do. Invite not only the professional portraitist, but those who work in specialized fields. Such knowledge is always broadening to members even though they may not directly utilize what they learn in their own activities.

Camera stores have a close relationship with clubs. Their owners and staff in most instances have excellent knowledge of equipment and techniques and are usually photographers themselves. Camera stores wish to promote their products and by the same token, customers wish to keep abreast of what is new in the industry. Ask store owners to demonstrate new products. Remember to treat all stores impartially.

Most clubs ask their local newspapers to give them publicity, so don't forget to invite the publisher, editor, or staff photographer to the club to offer short talks. Doing this pays dividends and members also learn the part photojournalism plays in photography today.

Artists and art teachers, many of whom are also photographers, can offer fresh insight into another creative medium that will be informative and educational.

PROGRAM IDEAS

Ideas for club programs are limited only by the imagination of the individual. All a progressive Director needs to do to lift a club out of a program rut is read the *PSA Journal* and photographic magazines. If these sources are not sufficient, careful perusal of newsletters from other camera clubs will reveal how they have been successful with their programs. If your club has a newsletter, exchange it with other clubs. Here's a list of program ideas that have worked for other clubs that your club may want to try:

"Gadget Demonstration" - Each member is contacted in advance, asked to bring to the club a personal preference in new gadgets, made, bought, or discovered and to speak for five minutes or so on the gadget and how it helps their photography. This can be used as a complete program, or as an adjunct to another.

"Visit to an Outside Location" - Use as a welcome change from routine meetings. The club goes as a group to a pre-determined place which will present picture-taking possibilities. This can be a dance studio, farm, firehouse, etc. Of course, permission to take pictures should be arranged before-hand.

"Favorite Picture Night" aka "Show and Tell" - Each member is asked to bring two (or more, depending on the size of the club) images on a Travel Drive. Some clubs have members submit these images ahead of time so the person responsible for projection has been able to load them into an appropriate program for showing. When these images are shown, the makers are asked to explain why these are their favorites. A switch on this is to have members bring one or two images that they would never otherwise submit and explain why they like them.

"Vacation Night" - A good program at the start of the season immediately after vacation time. Members are asked to bring a few images on a Travel Drive that were taken during their vacation. Motion picture/video groups use movie or video sequences. These need not be pictorial quality images, but technically good pictures of interest to the makers. Information regarding the photo opportunities in this vacation location should be shared with the images.

"Past Memories Night" - This idea is particularly good if your club is a few or more years old. The members are requested to bring images taken on field trips, model nights, or any club occasion, which show members in action. Lots of fun can be had by reviewing past club activities. If placed in a permanent collection the pictures record the evolution of a club.

"Holiday Party" - Almost every club which has been active any length of time holds a Holiday Party. Most of them feature a Pot Luck dinner, games, grab-bag, and/or gift exchange.

"After Dark Shooting Session" - One or two members familiar with the challenges of night photography are detailed to scout a few spots around town which lend themselves to night photography. The club goes to these places as a group and takes photos under the supervision and guidance of the expert.

"Studio Night" - One of the most popular of them all. If well publicized, it will always draw a capacity crowd. The club should have several "set-ups" with lights, models (appropriately costumed), and mentors drawn from the more experienced members to suggest poses and angles. There should also be still life (e.g., glassware, flowers) presided over by an expert in that field.

"White Elephant Sale" - This can be conducted in several ways. Most popular is to have members and guests bring in unwanted equipment to be sold at auction with the club taking 10% of the selling price. Another method is to have members contribute things from their homes. Everything must be sold, no matter how low the bid, and the proceeds go to the club.

"CD and DVD Programs" - Collections of images, regardless of their quality, can rarely be

considered adequate program material, unless accompanied by some form of instructional commentary.

TYPICAL YEARLY SCHEDULES

To give Program Directors an opportunity to visualize what a complete year's schedule might look like, three examples, which cover different size groups are provided below. These examples are meant to serve only as guides to what constitutes well-balanced schedules for average clubs. With the large amount of program material available, substitutions can easily be made to reflect the club's needs.

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE: Clubs Meeting Monthly

Sept. 11 Opening night. Introduction of officers and announcement of year's plans. Print and projected image competitions.
Oct. 9 Visiting speaker
Nov. 13 ProShow Gold Producer demonstration
Dec. 11 Talks and technique demonstrations by members
Jan. 8 Copying images to a CD, image back-up
Feb. 12 Portrait and/or table-top demonstrations
Mar. 12 Retouching and repairing old family prints using Photoshop
Apr. 9 PSA Program or visiting speaker
May 14 Print competition, Annual meeting and election of officers.
June 11 Banquet and presentation of awards. End of Year contests with comments on entries by visiting judge

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE: Clubs Meeting Twice Monthly

Sept. 9 Opening night. Introduction of officers and announcement of year's plans. Print and projected image competitions
Sept. 23 Describing method for selecting images for club's PSA Interclub entries
Oct. 14 Print competition
Oct. 28 Visiting speaker: Utilizing layers, a how to program
Nov. 11 Print competitions
Nov. 25 Visiting speaker: Enhanced images, using Plug-ins
Dec. 9 Holiday party
Jan. 13 Print competitions
Jan. 27 Portrait demonstration in club room or professional studio, portrait software
Feb. 10 Print competition
Feb. 24 Creating a web photo gallery, the PSA member galleries
Mar. 10 Print competition
Mar. 24 Gadget demonstrations by members, storage of images when in the field
Apr. 1 Print competition
Apr. 28 PSA Interclub Competition judging
May 12 End of Year contests with comments by visiting judges
May 26 Annual meeting, election of officers, and International Exhibit
June 9 Banquet and awards presentation, visiting speaker

EXAMPLE SCHEDULE: Clubs Meeting Weekly

Sept. 16 Opening night. Introduction of officers and announcement of clubs' year plans.
Showing of images taken on summer trips.

Sept. 23 PSA DVD program:

Sept. 30 Nature night, contest and talks by members, review PSA Nature definition

Oct. 7 Print night, contest and talks by members

Oct. 14 Visiting speaker: marine photography, preparing for club field trip to Aquarium

Oct. 21 Photojournalism night, what is a good Human Interest image?

Oct. 28 "Show and Tell"

Nov. 4 Photoshop techniques, cropping using perspective tool, the dodge & burn tools

Nov. 11 PSA DVD Program

Nov. 18 Lightroom, its advantages and learning curve

Nov. 25 Travelogues and photo essays by members who plan to enter these PSA contests

Dec. 2 Print night, mounting discussed, return of prints considered

Dec. 9 Studio night with models

Dec. 16 Holiday party

Dec. 23 No meeting

Dec. 30 No meeting

Jan. 6 Competition

Jan. 13 High-key portrait demonstration by local photographer

Jan. 20 PSA DVD: Digital Infrared

Jan. 27 PSA Conference planning, entering PSA Exhibition, travel to Conference

Feb. 3 PSA DVD: High Density Range Photography

Feb. 10 Club results in PSA Interclub Competitions, new members' work

Feb. 17 Creating In-camera Effects

Feb. 24 Macro workshop, small items brought by club members, on camera flash

Mar. 3 Calibrating your printer

Mar. 10 Photojournalism program by newspaper editor or photographer

Mar. 17 Calibrating your Monitor

Mar. 24 Gadget and technique demonstrations by members

Mar. 31 Nature images, PSA Nature definition and ethics reviewed

Apr. 7 Understanding various print papers, samples, local vendor suggestions

Apr. 14 PSA DVD: Photographing Water

Apr. 21 Field Trip: Night Photography and coffee

Apr. 28 PSA Interclub Competition judging

May 5 DVD: Photoshop 1

May 12 DVD: Photoshop 2

May 19 DVD: Photoshop 3

May 26 Program of images from member's recent club field trip (5 each)

June 2 Annual meeting and election of officers

June 9 End of Year contests, PSA International Exhibition

June 16 Banquet and presentation of awards