

## Ideas to Help Retain Members

~ Jeff Harris  
State Public Relations Officer

At the January Board meeting, ABATE of PA's Board of Directors voted to set a goal of increasing our membership level to ten thousand members by the end of 2006. One major area of concern discussed was our organizations membership renewal rate. As much as 25% of some chapter's members are not rejoining ABATE when they're membership expires. Fortunately, the size of our organization has not suffered due to the increase in new members being signed up. To help us retain our existing members, and thereby assist in the real growth of our membership, I am dedicating this month's column to present "Idea's to help retain members".

- Reach out! Contact your members to remind them that their membership renewal is due. Some chapters mail postcards, other's send e-mails and make phone call's. Don't let them just walk away!
- Establish a telephone tree. Contact each member prior to upcoming meetings, rides and special events. Keep your new members informed. Take the initiative to contact them personally. The extra contact will help make them feel that you value their involvement. Maintain regular e-mail or telephone contact.
- Develop a welcome letter from the president for all new members
- Communicate our organizations successes to members regularly. Due to the passage of our helmet bill, many feel that we are in maintenance mode, and are no longer actively pursuing a legislative agenda.
- Send a special letter of thanks to first-time renewals. The first two years produce the most dropouts. Focus hard on the first renewal.
- At your chapter meetings, you should identify and recognize members with the most tenure. This helps send a message that people stay in our organization a long-time.
- Recognize new members and renewals in your chapter report to this newsletter and at your meetings.
- During events, your officers should try to spend extra time with new members. Establish a strong mentoring program. Ask the new members for their opinion on topics of discussion. Keep them involved!
- Look for any opportunity to recognize member's contribution and reward achievements. Ensure that all members are active to their level of comfort.
- Even though lobbying for legislation is serious business, try to keep your meetings fun! A non-threatening and friendly atmosphere is essential. Solve any conflicts promptly.
- Have educational sessions to bring new members up-to-speed.
- Have guest speakers at your meetings. (Local Representative/Senator; Bike shop owner; gold club sponsor; recipient of charity funds; etc.)
- Display names of the ten "Most Wanted" non-renewals at meetings.
- Send cards to members when appropriate (birthday, sympathy, etc.)
- Schedule interclub social activities/rides between neighboring chapters.
- Re-invite inactive members to your meetings/events.
- Establish a regular social hour before/after meetings. Take some time to get to know your new members. Invite spouses to attend. Supportive family members are important to active involvement.
- Have an annual chapter awards ceremony to reward achievements.

- Include networking tips in your chapter newsletter or new member literature. Networking is an important benefit of joining. Not only will you meet future riding buddies, you'll also meet some excellent mechanics and sources of bike parts!
- Use testimonials from members who aren't active but still feel membership is valuable. Ask those who are not active but continue to renew to contact other inactive members and convince them to also renew.
- Encourage input from your members regarding your chapter's community activities. Ask new members for their ideas — they may have some fresh, exciting thoughts, and asking for their input will show that you are interested in their opinions. Don't let activities and fundraisers become stale. Make sure that your chapter's activities are still relevant for your community and your members. Periodically try something new.
- Involve new members in activities immediately. Have them participate in an event as soon as they show an interest. Get them working on a goal so that they will feel needed and important. Ask them to co-chair a committee or coordinate a small activity in the early stages of their membership.
- Encourage them to grow into future officers
- Periodically ask long-term members what their interests are, as these will develop and change over time. Assign responsibilities based on their interests, and give them increasing responsibilities to challenge them and keep them motivated.
- If all else fails, use guilt - "If you quit our organization will fail"

Remember that the best time to retain members is BEFORE they show signs of dissatisfaction. Make sure members know you care about them. If they start missing meetings or are becoming less involved in activities, give them a call to find out why before it becomes a chronic situation.

I'd also like to thank those who helped make my first L&L workshop presentation a success. Thanks to Jayne and Charles for insight and encouragement in performing my role as your Public Relations officer. Special thanks to all attendee's who participated in our workshop discussions. I learned a lot from you all, and returned home from the L&L seminar feeling refreshed and motivated!