



Working with the Media: A Guide for Volunteer Organizations and Commissions

This publication provides information about public relations, rules for working with the media, and communications tools, as well as sample letters to the editor, op-ed pieces and news releases.



A Guide for Volunteer Organizations and Tree, Environmental Advisory, Planning, and Other Municipal Commissions

Introduction

Many municipal tree commissions and volunteer organizations benefit their communities by working on trees, streams, parks, and open spaces, but news of their successes and needs often fails to reach the public. By working with the media, including newspapers and radio and television stations, these organizations can deliver important messages to the public. Because the media can exert enormous influence on peoples' attitudes and actions, a well-planned public relations effort can focus public attention, raise awareness and support, and favorably affect funding and other policy decisions.

The media's main functions include reporting the news, commenting, and editorializing. The average daily newspaper, radio, or television station in the United States carries four kinds of news: national, regional, state, and local. National, regional, and state news typically comes from large wire services, such as the Associated Press, and syndicates. Local news involves local events and may be generated by local public relations and publicity sources using news releases and

other tools.

Local news is truly local in nature: it involves and reaches local government, community organizations, businesses, and residents. Your public relations efforts will achieve the best results when local editors and reporters are familiar with your organization, are accessible to you, and are interested in your local news angle. Maintaining good relationships with these reporters and editors is important, and takes work on your part.

In the newsroom, many activities and issues are ignored. Every day, reporters discard a bulk of news releases for one major reason: the stories have no local interest or angle. That's why it is important to carefully craft your message to increase its local appeal to a particular medium. You must look for something that sets your actions or news apart from competing stories, and that stresses the impact of your efforts on a local neighborhood or municipality.

For example, if you are planting new trees downtown, think about who will benefit from the trees (local businesses and shoppers), how they will benefit (attracting shoppers to the area, increasing shopping there, boosting revenues), who will be involved in the planting (volunteers from schools and businesspeople), who supported and funded the planting (borough council and local businesses), and the need to plant and manage trees in other parts of the municipality. These types of local angles and interests will help get your story in the news.

When you communicate with the media about trees and other natural resources, be sure to provide important facts and relevant resources. If you don't, reporters may not be interested. Such facts and resources might include:

- how many trees are removed each year
- the cost of damage to trees from storms
- statistics about accidents and fatalities resulting from poor tree care
- how many acres of open space are being lost in development
- how many miles of streams are damaged
- how many people are involved in tree care and who they are
- information about budgets, donations, and peoples' efforts
- names of people who can be interviewed

Benefits of Street and Park Trees

According to recent figures, 75 percent of the U.S. population lives in cities and towns. Again and again, scientific studies have demonstrated that trees provide a number of economic and other benefits for our communities. These benefits include:

- Adding natural character to the places we live.
- Providing colors and beautiful shapes and forms.
- Screening harsh views.
- Creating feelings of relaxation and well-being.
- Providing privacy and a sense of solitude and security.
- Shortening post-operative hospital stays when patients have a view of trees.
- Producing enough oxygen each day on a single acre for 18 people.
- Absorbing enough CO₂ on an acre over a year to equal the amount produced when a car is driven 26,000 miles.
- Reducing mean summer temperatures 3 to 10 degrees and lessening the need for air conditioning by shading and cooling our homes and urban places.
- Storing about 13 pounds of carbon annually, reducing the “greenhouse effect” or global warming.
- Reducing soil erosion and the amount of storm water.
- Encouraging people to linger and shop longer (customers have proven willing to pay higher prices for goods in business areas landscaped with trees).
- Increasing productivity—people working in businesses landscaped with trees are more productive.
- Increasing property values—healthy trees increase a parcel's value up to 15 percent, affecting home prices and municipal taxes.

Benefits of Parks, Open Space, and Greenways

- Open space, parks, and greenways increase property values up to 20 percent, affecting home prices and municipal taxes.
- Progressive companies recognize the benefits of healthy employees. Planned parks and open spaces attract companies to places.
- Planned open space, greenways, and parks attract tourists.
- By conserving open space rather than allowing intensive development, municipalities may reduce costs for public services such as police and fire, road maintenance, and education.
- Open space provides opportunities for family activities not dependent on age or skill levels.
- Open space preserves beauty and historic landscapes.

Communication is important

Communication is essential in building a favorable image for your organization and your issues. The abilities, service, contributions, and needs of your commission or organization mean little when people do not know about them.

Public Relations

The goal of public relations is to favorably influence peoples' opinions. Good public relations uses a communications process that promotes peoples' understanding of and support for issues and activities. Successful public relations is hard work. It requires good writing skills, the ability to work well with people, a good visual sense, and the courage and initiative to contact and speak with a wide variety of people, including reporters and editors.

Good public relations is a prerequisite of political success: political success requires public support, and good communications helps develop that support. To be successful politically, you must identify and communicate with the people who are interested, have the power to influence outcomes, and are affected by your issues, as well as the general public.

Taking the time to plan for a public relations effort is essential. Questions to ask as you plan include:

- Who are we reaching now, and what new people do we want to reach?
- How do people perceive us?
- What do we want to tell them, and how do we want to tell them?
- What actions are we asking people to take?

In short, your planning should identify the desired outcome of your public relations effort.

Remember that public relations means more than just working to get your news stories covered by newspapers, radio, and television stations. While the media are important, there are many ways to reach people without depending on a news organization to deliver your message. Your public relations effort can include identifying and communicating directly with organizations, volunteer groups, and community leaders and officials through personal contacts, correspondence, postcards, and newsletters.

Truth and honesty are essential in public relations. Efforts to influence public opinion must be based on good character and responsible performance. There are so many good, positive stories that there is simply no need to embellish your story or be untruthful.

In public relations, offense is more effective than defense. In other words, the best public relations efforts work proactively to create a good public image for an organization. Public relations is not as effective when relegated to the role of defensive action.

When defense is necessary, however, silence is not the best tactic. Silence may be golden, but it will not change the opinion of the public or leaders, and it may confirm a negative perception in the minds of many. Prompt and honest admission of a problem or mistake is often the most successful action. If your public relations effort involves defending your organization or dealing with a conflict, don't react too hastily or without careful thought. Do your homework to gather all important information. Visualize how your response will look in print or on air and think about the reaction that it will cause. This type of preparation will provide dividends in how you are perceived and treated.

Rules for Working With the Media

The media can be a powerful tool in public relations. Good public relations includes a process of building good relations with local reporters and editors through persuasive, honest communication and education.

Many municipal commissions and volunteer organizations are unrealistic in their understanding of and dealings with the media. It's not enough to convince the media that an issue or program is valuable or noble—you must convince them that it is news-worthy. Some commissions and organizations receive good and frequent publicity because they are able to give the media good reasons to cover them.

The media are often faulted for not picking up a potential story, but this may happen because the person or group supplying the story did not understand the rules of the media game.

Good media relations are built on communications, trust, and cooperation. A newspaper editor or television news director will look more favorably upon commissions and organizations they are familiar with and know are easy to deal with. Cultivate your relationships with the media.

The more familiar and comfortable reporters and editors become with you and your organization, the more likely they will be to publish stories about your work. Remember to maintain your good rapport with people in the media, even when you're not actively promoting an event or issue. In short, become their "source" for interesting and reliable information.

Reporters are always looking for story ideas. Increase your chances of being covered by knowing and working with local reporters. The more familiar you are with reporters and their work, the better your chances of having them cover your organization. Know the names of reporters who cover issues and stories of interest to you. Introduce your commission or volunteer organization by sending a pitch letter (see example on page 21) and calling and asking for a meeting to discuss your issues or projects. Award and recognize reporters who have contributed to your efforts.

Always remember that you are competing with other stories for both time and space. There is generally more news and information each day than can fit in the newspaper or on a TV

news broadcast. Also, news must be timely. You must ensure that your story is more interesting than competing stories for an editor to grant the space needed to print it. Provide facts and figures. If a controversy exists, educate the media about it. Controversy makes for a more interesting story.

There is a glut of information and news. The stories we see, hear, or read in the news have withstood a drastic process of elimination, and newsroom trash cans are full of unused correspondence. Editors determine what is news and what is not. Public relations material, such as a news release, will be used some of the time, not used at other times, and can undergo considerable editorial change. If your story doesn't appear in the news, or isn't exactly what you wanted, don't go away mad or give up—continue to communicate with editors and reporters.

However, be careful when dealing with stories you feel were unfair or provided misinformation. Remember, reporters can make honest mistakes. Call the reporter directly and use phrases such as, "I'm sure that wasn't your intention, but I felt that your story..." or, "I enjoyed many parts of your story, however..." Tell them nicely if you are planning to write a letter to the editor with your opinion about their story.

The print media consists of more than daily newspapers. It includes nondaily press, such as county, neighborhood, or ethnic papers; magazines and newsletters, such as those published by the borough and township organizations; and trade publications, such as the newsletter for the Pennsylvania Planning Association. Be sure to identify and use media opportunities both large and small. Local weekly newspapers are generally well-read in most areas.

Gaining the attention of one medium is an achievement, but your message will be more effective if carried by others, too. You can use orchestration—pitching a story effectively to a variety of media outlets—to increase the likelihood of your story being picked up by newspapers, television, and radio. When orchestrating information it is important to understand the deadlines of the different media you are using and to provide news advisories and releases (see examples below) so that each type of news organization has ample time to cover your story. To help increase coverage when pitching your story to television stations, always let them know that their competition and local newspapers are interested.

What Is Newsworthy?

- New information that affects the public interest (new legislation, proposed tree removals).
- Local leaders' or officials' involvement.
- Material that deals with a current issue or offers distinct perspective or unique solution.
- Events connected to nationally recognized days like Arbor Day or Earth Day.
- Events with good photo opportunities, like volunteer work (tree planting other volunteer efforts).

- Unique agreements between groups, including public-private or conflicting interest groups.
- Situations and conflicts and methods of solution. People—and the media—are typically more interested in conflict than harmony.
- Human interest.

Get To Know Editors and Reporters

- 1 Visit with them face-to-face.
- 2 Hand-deliver important stories.
- 3 Provide tips, ideas, and stories that are of interest to specific editors and reporters.
- 4 Provide detailed information, such as the people who are involved and affected, people who are willing to be interviewed, and residents who are willing to provide an opinion.
- 5 Provide knowledgeable and reliable information.

Communications Tools

Public Relations or Communications Plan

It is important to think ahead and develop an annual communications plan based on the activities and issues that will be important in the next year, your personal relationships with editors and reporters, and your knowledge of the requirements and interests of the media you want to work with. Successful municipal commissions and volunteer organizations plan to place at least two positive pieces of publicity in the local media each year. The following steps are critical to producing an effective communications plan:

- Identify the events and issues you want to promote or communicate about over the next year.
- Describe the event or issue well, including any solution, support, or local action.
- Decide which medium (print, radio, television, web) is most important to use.
- Determine which editors or reporters would be most important to contact.
- Identify other people who should be informed (elected officials, other organizations, influential individuals).

Tools that can be used to implement your communications plan include a press list, pitch letters, media advisories, letters to the editor, editorial-opinion pieces, news conferences, news releases, captioned photographs and photo opportunities, public service announcements, and paid advertisements.

Use every medium possible every time you use one of these tools. You never know what medium may be more interested in what story. Your story may fit as a side story or with one of related interest. Also, working with as many media outlets as possible increases your practice with and awareness of the

media.

Better Communication

To communicate more effectively:

- Kill the jargon.
- Use simple, powerful words.
- Use dramatic facts.
- Discuss important benefits.
- Call for action: what do you want people to do?

Jargon

- green infrastructure
- canopy cover
- urban/rural interface
- sustainable
- impervious surface
- storm damage mitigation
- tree maintenance

Powerful Words

- nature, trees, parks, clean air, clean water
- trees, leaves, shade, living things
- growing places, changing neighborhoods
- many years, renewable, successful, children
- life, flowing water
- repair, safe, fun
- care, safety, increased benefits

Press List

A press list identifies all the media you intend to send news releases and other materials to. Both print and broadcast media should be included. Identify media, editors, and reporters who are sympathetic to your interests. The list should include postal addresses, office and cell phone numbers, fax numbers, and e-mail addresses.

Pitch Letter (see example below)

A pitch letter is used when you are requesting something other than straight news coverage, such as editorial support, a feature story, or an interview. A pitch letter should be written to the editor, producer, or reporter you want to work with, so it is important to be aware of their interests and responsibilities before sending the letter. Remember to include your phone number and e-mail address.

The lead sentence of the pitch letter should be compelling. Don't begin by introducing your organization or issue—instead, open with an interesting statistic or fact that makes the recipient want to keep reading: "Three miles of Spring Creek were threatened by development last year." Keep the letter as short as possible and enclose relevant background

material, such as brochures, pictures, or biographical information. Attach a fact or statistical sheet summarizing any pertinent and important facts. Provide a realistic estimate of how long an interview will take. Make follow-up calls a week or so after the letter is mailed to continue your communication process. If there is interest from a print medium, ask if a photographer will be assigned.

Media Advisories (see examples below)

Media advisories are used to invite the media to cover an event or activity. Advisories are usually sent to the city and photo editors of newspapers and to the news assignment desks of radio and television stations a few weeks before the event. They include a simple who, what, why, when, and where in outline form, as well as suggested photo possibilities. Attach a fact or statistical sheet summarizing any pertinent or important facts. Follow up advisories with a telephone call a few days before the activity to find out who is coming. When working with the print media, ask if a photographer will be assigned. If you expect media representatives, be prepared to greet them and direct them to the action. Keep in mind that radio and newspapers can do interviews over the phone if they are not available at the time of an event—offer this to them as an option in the advisory.

Press Kits

A press or media kit should be prepared for major events such as a groundbreaking, large volunteer effort, or award ceremony—and distributed to selected editors and reporters ahead of time. It is a folder of information and materials about the event, its significance, and the people and organizations involved. Both expensive and simple kits can be used, but the event's news value, not an expensive presentation folder, will determine the amount of coverage it receives. Label the outside of the folder with your organization's name, address, and contact telephone number. Kits can contain:

- a news release on the event
- a fact sheet with important or interesting facts or statistics
- organization brochures or fact sheets
- biographies of key people involved
- a schedule of events listing locations and times
- business cards
- captioned photographs

For many municipal commission and volunteer organization activities, a simple press release and schedule of events will provide enough information.

Letters to the Editor (see examples below)

Letters to the editor should be brief, concise, and informative, and not based on too much emotion. Organized groups of people, as well as individuals, can be engaged to send letters to the editor. Letters can react to news or editorials, policy or new legislation, or decisions and actions of elected and other officials. A letter to the editor also can clarify important points and positions, correct misinformation, present your organization's position, tell people about your efforts, and encourage their involvement.

Editorial-Opinion Columns or Op-Eds (see examples below)

Op-eds are columns written by community members for a newspaper's editorial page. Op-eds allow you to express your own views and opinions. They usually provide the following information:

- a focus on a single issue
- a clear idea or opinion presented in the first few sentences
- support for your idea or opinion using information understandable to your community
- a forecast of the results of future scenarios that surround your position
- a conclusion with proposed solutions
- suggestions for those who want to help or act

The most important point is to hold the reader's attention. Use a bold opening statement or opinion, such as "Not preserving open space is hurting our municipality" or "Public trees need maintenance to be safe." The column's sentiment should be forceful and strong and the concept easy to understand. Use supporting opinions and facts throughout the column. Try not to over-generalize—newspapers need facts. If you use a sentence like "Trees are our most important resource," you need to explain why using facts.

Don't be afraid to be forceful, clever, or use humor in your writing. Imagine you are writing an important letter to a friend. Be conversational. If you are working hard on an op-ed piece for a paper but don't know the editor in charge of the editorial page, you're not working hard enough. Contact, discuss, and cultivate your ideas with editors and work with them on drafts of the piece if they prefer.

Television and Radio

Television and radio reach more people than the print media, and also can be used to provide a visual and audio impression of your issue or project. Contact television and radio stations for events by using a news release or media advisory and follow-up phone calls, as you would for newspapers. Also, it is important to get to know the local news directors, reporters, and people responsible for public affairs coverage and public service announcements. Use the community calendar available on most cable television systems to announce meetings and events.

When working with television, choose either action-oriented, visually engaging events or a human interest story. If your organization's work has provided significant benefits (such as increased public safety, increased beauty, volunteer and educational opportunities, increased quality of life, or increased tourism and visitation), a feature story could highlight these and your organization.

Radio stations are often looking for material and news. They can be used to announce upcoming events and meetings and to engage in conversation and debate. When working with radio stations, offer engaging speakers and topics. When using radio to announce upcoming stories and events, use four-sentence introductions placed on separate sheets for each event. These sheets are called "reader sheets."

Preparing for News Interviews

Find out how long the interview is expected to last. You can assume that the interview will be taped and edited, but ask to make sure. Occasionally reporters will line you up for a live interview.

Research your topic. Find out if there have been other stories on this issue and be aware of what was printed and who was quoted. Understand that the television and radio reporters are looking for a 10- to 20-second sound bite, so have one or two ready, but don't expect to read them from a script.

Have statistics available that you can refer to and provide to the reporter.

Ask if there is a preferred setting or background for the interview. If the weather is nice and not too windy, outside is usually better for television. If the topic is about something like open space, go to the open space for the interview and pictures. Consider what type of pictures and sound will bring the story to life for the viewers.

Dress professionally, but make sure that you are comfortable. Avoid light-colored clothing, especially white for a television interview. White causes there to be less light on your face, and it looks better when your face is well lit and in contrast to a dark shirt. In addition, avoid shirts with fine or high-contrast stripes, because these can interfere with the television picture.

Check a mirror before a television interview or picture to make sure you don't have food or something else on your clothing; the reporter will not always notice.

If the interview is inside, turn down any background music or noise ahead of time.

Have many interview options available, but don't be offended if the reporter doesn't want to use some of them. You need to understand the time hole that the reporter is trying to fill with your story. Remember to find out how long the piece will air. If the reporter only needs one sound bite and 40 seconds of pictures, don't exhaust yourself coming up with different ideas. The reporter won't have time to use them. The pictures and the stories you are sharing are both important for television.

For radio, the interview content is what is important.

Newspapers will be looking for a good story and a picture that best exemplifies the theme of the story.

Relax and enjoy yourself. This is an opportunity that many people would love to have.

Feature Stories

Feature stories document a person or event that is unique or important. Although commissions and volunteer organizations can write feature stories, the best approach is to use your personal contacts, pitch letter, and news releases to inspire a reporter or editor to do a feature story on your organization or an important issue or project.

When thinking about feature subjects, concentrate on local people and their personal stories. Someone in every volunteer organization or on every municipal commission has a compelling story to tell about an issue or opportunity, but most reporters will never find out unless you tell them.

The vital part of any feature story is an interview, and the key question you should look for in any interview is "Why?" Why do you enjoy working with volunteers? Why are trees and parks so important to us? Why is conserving open space important? Why are you concerned about your local creek or river? You should also consider a sidebar or "story within a story" in addition to the feature information. This story tells about an interesting connection or person, and often explores a human-interest angle. Reporters have long recognized that people care about other people and enjoy reading about them.

If a reporter decides to do a feature on a subject you have recommended, be prepared with background information on the nuts and bolts of the organization, issue, or event. For features, taking pictures is almost guaranteed. When features are being written by reporters from daily newspapers, they will always bring along one of their own staff photographers to take pictures, so make the photographs count.

News or Publicity Release (see examples below)

The news release is the most common way to communicate news to the print and broadcast media. News releases are typically 1- or 2-page documents that inform the media about important news or events. News releases can be used to state your position on a particular issue, describe a project or work you are engaged in, publicize recognition you or your organization have received, provide supplemental information on an issue, or announce additions of people or other changes.

The most common question asked about news releases by editors is “who cares?” In other words, why is the information you are offering important? News releases must contain a news or “today” angle: why do people care today? The best news releases tell a compelling, interesting story quickly and stylishly. If you do not have a professional writer to prepare a news release, tell your story simply and clearly. Often, busy editors won’t look beyond the title or first line, so make the lead sentence count. Consider the following examples of catchy titles or lead sentences:

“Tree commission plans to remove 60 dangerous trees.”

“Volunteers work to repair damaged stream.”

“Developer works with municipality and homeowner group to conserve open space.”

Information in the news release should flow from the most important facts to those of lesser significance. The opening paragraph or paragraphs should include the most important facts and answer the “five W’s”—who, what, when, why, and where. They should be accurate, concise, complete, and interesting. Avoid expressing personal opinions or making editorial comments. Keep the story brief and to the point, and use short sentences and paragraphs. Always be accurate when writing releases. Make sure all facts, such as dates, times, places, and spelling of names, are correct. If opposing viewpoints or controversy exist, include a summary in the news release. Controversy makes for a more interesting story.

It is true that “names make the news.” Feature the names of speakers, leaders, officials, and sponsoring organizations. Using quotes from people can also be quite effective. If you use quotes, provide contact information for the people quoted so reporters can contact them. If possible, include a “story within a story” about an involved or affected person: “Bob Miller, age 82, has been a member of the tree commission for over 45 years” or “Sharon Gold has fought to conserve open space for the last 25 years.”

Ideally, the release will attract reporters to the event or to call you for more information, but releases should provide enough information so that a story can be written even if the reporter does not follow up. Re-releases should have a “hook” or “news peg”—something new or unique that makes readers sit up and take notice.

Releases should be distributed by mail, e-mail, and fax about two weeks before any event. Send it to the editors and

reporters you have developed relationships with. You may also want to follow up with telephone calls. Many organizations are active with releases, preparing one every month. Although this may be difficult, it helps keep the media aware of the organization and what it is doing.

A news release should never contain typographical errors. Stylebooks, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, *The Associated Press Stylebook*, and *The New York Times Stylebook* provide guidelines for spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage. In general, use the following style recommendations when writing releases.

- Capitalize formal titles when they are used before a name, but not following a name: President Jones or Chairperson Smith, but John Maple, chairperson.
- Months containing more than five letters with a specific date are abbreviated: Feb. 9. Months standing alone and the days of the week are capitalized and spelled out: The tree planting will be in May; There will be a rally for the park on Thursday.
- In general, numbers from one to nine are spelled out and numbers 10 or greater are written numerically, except at the start of a sentence.
- Numerals are used for the days of the month when they follow the names of the months. Write March 17, not 17th.
- Use a.m. and p.m. in lower case with times: 9 a.m., 2:30 p.m.
- Use Ave., Blvd., and St. with a number address. Always spell out street names: 125 Irvine Ave., 250 Tulip St., a park at 519 Front St.
- On the first reference, give people's complete names, and use only last names for subsequent references.
- Do not use courtesy titles such as Mr., Mrs., or Miss.
- If listing a speaker, award winner, or member of an organization, always include the person's name, title if relevant, and where they live: Sharon Davis, a nurse and resident of Brookline, will be recognized by the Pittsburgh Tree Commission.

General News Release Format

Include at the top or bottom of the first page: the full name of the commission or organization; address, city, zip code; contact person phone number and e-mail; and release date—indicate “For Immediate Release” or specific release date (“For Release After May 4, 2003”).

Use an attention-getting, powerful headline in bold print or CAPITAL LETTERS.

Begin with a catchy sentence. Outline the story and provide an overview in the first few sentences.

Briefly explain the event and why it is important from a news angle.

Include a quote explaining the event's importance, followed by credentials to establish the expertise of the person being quoted.

As a general rule, try to keep the release to one typewritten, double-spaced page. No release should be more than two pages long.

Use 8 1/2" x 11" paper. Type on one side of the paper only. If the release continues on to a second page, write "more" at the bottom of the first page. Number the second page.

Leave wide margins and start your release about a third of the way down the page to give editors room to make notations.

Be concise, clear, accurate, and informative.

At the end, include a brief background paragraph about your organization and message.

A "Facts Page" or "Statistic Sheet" can be attached. It should describe pertinent and important facts about the issue or opportunity.

End with the symbol "###" or "30."

Send original copies; do not send photocopies.

News Conference or Event

A news conference is a way to release major news to all the media simultaneously. They are most often used to announce political decisions, general emergencies, and developments in stories and issues that have already attracted broad community attention. If you're considering holding a news conference, the first questions to ask are what is the subject, is it worthy, and will media be interested enough to attend? Media interest can be hard to predict accurately, and news conferences should be used sparingly. When used, choose the site and time carefully; they must be convenient to invitees. Midmorning between 10:30 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. is best and allows reporters to visit the office before the conference. In general, reporters do not want to work overtime. Find out the working hours of the stations you are targeting. The conference can be combined with lunch or refreshments.

Remember to identify other events that may conflict with your conference. If local reporters must choose between your news conference and another major event, they will select the option they think will be most interesting to the largest number of people.

It is important to take care of the details. Send invitations one to two weeks beforehand. Be brief and stir interest by detailing the reasons for the conference and why it should be attended. Send the invitees simple news kits containing a basic press release that summarizes the subject and participants of the conference, an agenda, any photographs related to the subject, and a data sheet if the subject is scientific or complicated. The news kit should identify a contact person reporters can follow up with. Have extra news kits on hand at the conference. Remind invitees about the conference by telephone one to two days before the event.

If possible, hold your news conference at a location with good photo opportunities. Make sure adequate parking is available. Have someone greet each member of the media, record their names and the media outlet they represent, and provide them

with name tags.

Photographs and Opportunities

A good photograph or photo opportunity helps your communication efforts and heightens the impact of your story. It provides an important image of your organization or issue. Don't rely on the newspaper for a photographer—if there is a strong visual component in your event, arrange for someone to capture it with a camera. You will have more success being assigned a photographer from the newspaper if you request one at least two weeks before the event. Work with the person taking the pictures; you know best who and what should be considered.

If you provide photographs to media outlets, they must be in focus and captioned. A caption should be brief and simple and identify the people and activity. The full name and title of people being identified should be provided from left to right. When taking photographs try to avoid the "grip and grin"—a pose where two people are shaking hands over an oversize check or some other object, often surrounded by dozens of unidentified people. Arrange for a scene where people are active or working. Take photographs close enough so that the frame is filled. Check to see if the media you're working with have photo editors; if so, remember to send advisories and releases to them also.

Public Service Announcements (PSAs)

A public service announcement (PSA) is a free radio or television message similar to a commercial. PSAs air during commercial time, usually in off-peak hours. Producing a PSA can be relatively simple for radio, but difficult for television. Both radio and television PSAs require written scripts, but television stations often require a fully produced videotape. Consultants are most often used to produce television PSAs. Contact the television and radio stations in advance to determine their requirements for a PSA submission.

PSAs should be simple and to the point, focusing on a single issue or event ("Support Altoona's shade tree commission because..." or "Take part in Johnstown's Stoney Creek volunteer restoration program because...").

In general, the heading for a PSA script should include the organization's full name and address, the name and telephone number of the contact person, start and stop dates for events, and the length of the script in seconds. Give radio stations a choice by providing 10-, 20-, 30-, and 60-second versions of your message.

Organizational Publications

You should use newsletters, brochures, flyers and program announcements, position papers, fact sheets, annual reports, and posters to publicize the good things your commission or organization is doing. Completing an annual report and providing it to elected officials and as a press release to the local media is very important. An annual report should provide information on accomplishments, funding and other resources, difficulties and concerns, plans for next year, and the resources those plans will require.

Personal Contact

Use planned and consistent personal contact with elected officials and municipal managers, speeches to service and other organizations, telephone contacts, correspondence and solicitation, testimonials, and displays at fairs and other events to promote understanding of and support for your organization.

Advertisements

Even though you pay for it, advertising guarantees that your message will be placed. Design your advertisements to motivate interested people to follow a course of action. You have control over the script, images, the days the ad will run, and the section of the paper it will be placed in or time of day it will be run. Commercials, print ads, billboards, transit placards, buttons, t-shirts, and bumper stickers are all advertisement opportunities.

Samples

In this section you will find examples of letters to the editor, op-ed pieces, news releases, pitch letters, and media advisories. Please feel free to use these samples as templates for your effort. You may copy these examples and change them to meet your needs.

Using the Internet

The Internet allows you to bypass traditional "gatekeepers" in the print and broadcast media (editors and producers) and provide your message directly to people. Here are some tips to keep in mind when using the Internet as a public relations medium.

- If your group has a Web site and e-mail address, include them in all press releases, media advisories, letters to the editor, and other documents intended to reach the public. Having a Web site to visit or an e-mail address to write to makes it easier for an interested person to contact you.
- Your Web site reflects directly on your organization. Be sure that it is professional and represents you accurately. The entire world can visit your Web site, so make sure it is free of embarrassing errors.
- Ask visitors to your Web site to provide their e-mail addresses if they want to become more closely involved or

just keep up to date with what your organization is doing. Send the people on your e-mail list a monthly update to make sure they remember your group and what it is doing. Consistent and timely communications convey the impression that your group is highly organized and efficient.

- Send news to your e-mail list as necessary, but do not flood recipients' inboxes with superfluous or unimportant items.
- Post news releases, media advisories, and similar documents on your Web site. It makes them accessible to visitors to the site, and also can provide a useful archive that documents your past activities.

Sample Letters to the Editor

Getting a Plug for Your Organization

To the Editor:

I read with great interest your article, "Trees Seen as Messy and Dangerous by Residents," on July 5, 2005.

Because of the many benefits that public trees provide, the Greensburg tree commission has been working hard to plant, maintain, and remove public trees along the streets of our town, often with limited funding and people. Our efforts to improve the many benefits and reduce tree risks would be expanded by the help of other volunteers, especially those knowledgeable about trees. We need help with tree plantings, simple tree maintenance, and organizing projects. The support of citizens and elected officials to fund the removal and pruning of risky trees on an annual basis is also very important, but has been lacking in the past years.

We look forward to continuing to make Greensburg's community forest both safe and attractive. The continued and increased support of residents and elected officials would make this work much easier and pave the way for success.

Sincerely,

John Maple, Greensburg Municipal Tree Commission

Expressing an Opinion

To the Editor:

John Oaks' story provided an in-depth look at the issue of open space and greenway conservation in this area. Many studies have demonstrated the aesthetic, recreational, social, economic, and health benefits provided by these passive undeveloped areas. There is also the thought of leaving a pleasant and healthy place to live for those who follow.

I encourage not only our planning commission and local developers, but also our residents and leaders to become involved in conserving open space and greenways in our fast-growing area. Strong public and official support of planning for, regulating for, and funding for open space conservation is needed.

As we wait to act, opportunities for open space conservation are lost to development and land prices continue to escalate. If we do not act soon to plan for and fund open space

conservation through referendum or bond issue, much will be lost for ourselves and those that follow.

Sincerely,

John Maple, Greensburg Municipal Tree Commission

Sample Op-Ed Piece

WE NEED OUR OPEN SPACE

By John Maple, Greenville Environmental Advisory Commission Chairperson

Today, “growing greener” is a hot topic in Pennsylvania, but planning and providing for the many benefits of open space in growing municipalities is not new.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Frederick Law Olmstead wrote that open space provides people with places for recreation and, because it serves great numbers of citizens regardless of age, sex, race, or class, enhances social democratization. He and others demonstrated these ideals in their designs for New York’s Central Park and other spaces during the America’s City Beautiful Movement.

But beauty is only a small benefit of open space. Planning for and conserving open space in our fast-growing area has many benefits that must be understood by both leaders and citizens.

Most people recognize open space as places left undeveloped, or mostly free of structures, such as Walnut Creek and Sunset Parks. Some people recognize the importance of public access. People often talk about fishing, walking, hiking, biking, water and air quality, beauty, quality of life, solitude, peace, and a connection with nature as benefits provided by open space. They rarely mention the economic and health benefits that open space provides. These well-recognized benefits are often ignored in discussions of open space.

The ability of open space to raise property values and attract people and progressive businesses is well documented. Planned open space systems, such as Cleveland Metro parks, are used as major marketing tools by business and real estate interests. Many studies have shown that open space helps people exercise, relax, reduce stress, stay healthy, and recover more quickly from illness.

Many people believe that land-use planning is not working to conserve open space in growing areas of Pennsylvania. Municipal autonomy in planning and zoning and a lack of cooperation among municipalities are often identified as problems with both land-use planning and open space conservation.

A common question is, “Why don’t Pennsylvania municipalities work more closely on open space and other land use issues?” Things that happened in the past, historical friction, conflicts, grudges, feuds, personality conflicts, and the traditional autonomy of Pennsylvania municipalities are common answers. Regardless, high-quality natural environments and high-quality human recreation experiences require large-scale and connected open space. To obtain this, large-scale planning and funding is required. This type of scale

happens only with cooperation among municipalities, businesses, and others.

It seems that there have been many open space efforts in this area, all done separately. An overall strategy among municipalities that would plan for, create, and maintain a connect-ed and shared system of open space that would benefit and be enjoyed by many of us, regardless of the municipality we live in, is lacking. As one concerned person said, “We can’t be members of such a flat society here. Once I walk past a municipal boundary, I don’t fall off the edge of the world.”

We will be making a mistake if future open space results only as a residual of current development. The green infra-structure of open space should be planned for and financed in development and growth, just as the Federal Highway Commission and PennDOT plan among municipalities for the gray infrastructure of highways, and as local governments plan for utilities, roads, schools, and other public assets.

Citizens and leaders must make an effort to better understand the many benefits of open space, the benefits of municipalities working together to plan for and acquire open space, and the possibilities of taxpayers using bond issues and referenda to ensure nonregulatory open space conservation.

Better-informed people would be able to rationalize the trade-off between open space conservation and development, intrusion into private property rights by government for planning and zoning, and the expenditure of both public tax dollars and private donations for open space conservation.

The understanding and support of citizens and leaders for open space is important, especially given the force and velocity of development in this now-attractive area and the uncertain status of open space that provides us, and the people who will follow, with a consistent sense of this place and the comfort of living here.

Sample News Releases

News Release

GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, TREE COMMISSION
CHAIRPERSON, 000-8564

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CELEBRATE ARBOR DAY

Trees are important to (name of municipality). Without them, (name of municipality) would not be as attractive, healthy, or happy. Please join the (name of commission or organization) for our Arbor Day Celebration at (date, time, location). Also, celebrate Arbor Day in a personal way by planting a tree yourself in your yard or at a school. This is an act of optimism and kindness, a labor of love, and a commitment to natural resources in (name of municipality) and in Pennsylvania.

It has been more than 100 years since J. Sterling Morton founded Arbor Day in then-treeless Nebraska. Morton called for the planting of trees and shrubs to prevent the loss of

valuable, newly cultivated soil from this windy prairie. As a reporter for the Nebraska City News, he glorified the many virtues of tree planting to his readers and persuaded landowners to plant trees for the good of people now and in the future. Arbor Day was named a legal holiday in Nebraska and April 22, Morton's birthday, was selected as the date for its permanent observance. Morton was proud of the success of Arbor Day and noted, "Other holidays repose upon the past. Arbor Day proposes for the future."

By Pennsylvania legislative act (P.L. 143), approved June 19, 1941, and amended on April 11, 1961, the day designated for Arbor Day is the last Friday in April. The legislature also designated the week of Arbor Day as Dr. Joseph T. Rothrock Memorial Conservation Week. During this week, citizens are encouraged to consider through suitable activities the broader subject of the conservation of natural resources from which the wealth of Pennsylvania is derived.

###

NEWS RELEASE

GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, TREE COMMISSION
CHAIRMAN, 000-6216

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(NAME OF MUNICIPALITY) RECOGNIZED FOR
COMPLETION OF COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROJECT

Since 1991, a nonprofit organization known as the Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council, which advises the state Bureau of Forestry and provides leadership to a statewide program, has provided over 700 municipalities and volunteer groups in the commonwealth with \$1.5 million in grants to plant more than 175,000 trees. Last year, the (city/borough/town-ship) of was one of a number of communities that were awarded a council grant and planted about (number of trees) trees throughout the community.

The Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council also provides communities with technical assistance through a partnership with Penn State Extension. Extension urban foresters meet with shade tree commissions to help them develop planting projects, implement tree inventories, and perform tree maintenance. In conjunction with Penn State and local organizations, the council sponsors many educational workshops and conferences throughout the year and distributes Urban Forestry News, a free newsletter, and Sylvan Communities, a magazine written by and for council members. Membership in the Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council is open to all who wish to support the planting and care of trees and natural resources within Pennsylvania communities.

###

NEWS RELEASE

GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, TREE COMMISSION
CHAIRMAN, 000-6216

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OUR PUBLIC TREES ARE IN NEED OF HELP

Imagine our town without trees. It would be a sterile landscape of concrete, brick, steel and asphalt. Luckily, we are surrounded by trees, including street trees, yard trees, and those in parks, open green spaces, and undeveloped forest land. But just because we are surrounded by trees doesn't mean they will be there forever and we can take them for granted. Our community trees are facing many problems, such as a lack of species and age diversity, increased stress from the man-made environment and a lack of proper maintenance, all of which are leaving them in a state of decline.

As a partial owner of the community forest, you should be asking yourself, "What can I do to help?"

"One of the best ways to address the problems facing our community forests is through our shade tree commission," says (name of person with title or name of commission). "Our tree commission provides stability and guidance to our community tree program."

By forming and empowering a tree commission, our community has placed the responsibility for important community decisions in the hands of unpaid volunteers with designated powers. Our tree commission has various responsibilities, including the following:

- Advising community leaders and staff on administering public trees.
- Stimulating and organizing tree planting and maintenance.
- Developing and implementing tree inventories, management plans, and street tree ordinances.
- Lessening liability by annual inspection for dangerous trees.
- Settling community disputes caused by tree removal, planting, or maintenance.
- Seeking expert technical assistance.
- Educating our residents about tree care and involve them in volunteer projects.

Falling trees, raised sidewalks, roots in sewers, and other tree-related problems are both common and expensive. Many of these problems are caused by poor tree selection and planting. In many cases, poor-quality trees or wrong types of trees for a particular site are planted in the public right-of-way by homeowners or builders. One important duty of our tree commission is to help eliminate tree problems and costs by ensuring that the right tree is planted in the right spot, and that it is properly maintained.

Other common duties of our tree commission include:

- Making sure hazardous trees are removed in an orderly fashion.
- Preventing needless and unwarranted tree removals.
- Ensuring appropriate tree replacement.

- Ensuring proper tree pruning and maintenance.
- Meeting requirements for grants and Tree City USA designation.
- Creating an attractive, safe and healthier environment.

Our tree commission provides tremendous benefits by helping to plan and manage a valuable resource—our trees. As Margaret Mead once stated, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

###

NEWS RELEASE

GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, TREE COMMISSION
CHAIRMAN, 000-6216

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

STOPPING TREES FROM HURTING PEOPLE: ANNUAL SAFETY INSPECTION OF STREET TREES

The (name of municipality) Tree Commission spent all day (date) inspecting street trees that were dead, dying, or otherwise potentially unsafe. Every year, the commission identifies trees that should be removed to prevent injuries to people and damage to property. The Tree Commission's recommendations for cutting down trees will not become final until a public hearing on (date and place). Letters to affected property owners and a published announcement will invite input from anyone who wishes to ask questions or make requests about proposed removals. Removal work usually is done during fall and winter. Most of these trees will be replaced next spring.

“Some of the trees that were found to be unsafe would appear healthy to an inexperienced person,” says (name), chair of the commission. “The extent of decay in branches, trunk, or roots sometimes was difficult to ascertain, and was not always apparent from outward signs. All trees were carefully investigated to determine whether removal of large branches or the entire tree was warranted. In some cases it was decided to save trees for the present and keep them under observance for another year.”

The (name of commission) promotes the health and longevity of trees in various ways. They prune young trees while branches are small to minimize pruning wounds where decay can start. Mulch placed around trees improves soil moisture and root growth and reduces injuries from lawn mowers. These tree care practices enable trees to live longer and remain safer while providing beauty, shade and economic benefits for all to enjoy.

###

NEWS RELEASE

HAMPTON NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, HAMPTON NEIGHBORHOOD
ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT, 000-8564

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HAMPTON NEIGHBORS PLANT MORE TREES

On May 25, 2005, the (name of association) will sponsor the planting of 30 trees in the Hampton neighborhood. This is the fourth tree planting the commission has funded in the last five years. The commission was assisted by a grant from (name of any granting organization) and donations from (names of any donors).

As in the past, volunteers from the community are asked to help with this tree planting. The planting will begin at 9:00 a.m. at the corner of Hampton and Plankert Streets. Planting holes will be dug and volunteers are needed to place the trees in holes and cover their roots with dirt. Volunteers are also needed to water and mulch the newly planted trees. Refreshments will be served and there will be opportunities for younger and older children to participate. Please help by bringing a shovel and rake marked with your name.

“Trees provide our neighborhood and municipality with many benefits. Without them our community would not be as attractive, healthy or happy,” says Mayor John Ash.

“My family and I had so much fun at last year's tree planting,” says Jody Elm, community resident. “It felt really good to help our neighbors and other people in town.”

The Hampton Neighborhood Association encourages individuals, families or clubs to consider helping the residents of the Hampton neighborhood plant trees. “We will be moving our tree planting efforts to another neighborhood next year,” says John Maple, president of the Hampton Neighborhood Association. “Everyone will eventually benefit from each others' help.”

###

NEWS RELEASE

GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, TREE COMMISSION
CHAIRMAN, 000-6216

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HERE'S AN OLD SAW: DON'T HIRE JUST ANYONE TO PRUNE YOUR TREES

A local group devoted to preserving trees in our community is urging property owners to use caution when hiring individuals to work on their trees.

“When it comes to pruning trees, you get what you pay for,” warns (name of person with title or name of commission). “An honest, fair and experienced arborist may charge a bit more, but in the long run your trees will look better and remain healthier.”

Homeowners should call an arborist if:

- The tree has dead wood in the structure, or if storm damage, cracks or broken limbs are present.

- They are planning construction projects and would like to save particular trees.
- The tree or its roots need to be pruned.

An arborist is a tree specialist trained to work on trees in a proper and safe manner. Most qualified arborists will take out ads in the Yellow Pages, or you can call the county Penn State Extension office and ask for a recommendation.

Hire arborists who are members of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). Many arborists are certified by the ISA, which means the arborist has passed a professional skills test and has at least several years of experience.

Beware of doorknockers. Unfamiliar work crews or people who approach a house looking for work should never be hired to work on trees. An advertisement in the Yellow Pages tells you the person has some experience and has been a member of the community. Always get a written estimate for any work you want done.

Ask for proof of insurance. At minimum, tree services should carry liability and workers' compensation insurance. You can be held responsible if uninsured workers are injured on your property.

Ask for local references. Once a tree professional provides local references, contact the former clients and go inspect the work. Be sure to get bids from two or three arborists.

Have a written contract. Any contract should contain a start and end date, a detailed description of the work to be done, a description of cleanup, including ownership of firewood, whether stump grinding is included, and a total cost estimate, including tax.

Make sure they use correct equipment. Certified arborists never wear climbing spikes to prune trees. They should use ropes, rope harnesses, or a truck equipped with an extendable bucket.

Don't be fooled by a good deal. Never pay in advance. Also, be wary of anyone who seems eager to remove a living tree, unless it poses a hazard. You may be able to get a better price if you schedule in advance. You can also get together with neighbors to offer a larger job to bidding tree services.

###

NEWS RELEASE

GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, TREE COMMISSION
CHAIRMAN, 000-6216

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TAKING SOME OFF THE TOP IS GREAT FOR HAIRCUTS,
BUT BAD FOR TREES

Getting a bad haircut is just a temporary condition—the hair grows back none the worse for wear. But removing the entire canopy of a tree, a practice called “topping,” has much more lasting and sometime fatal consequences.

“Topping trees is not pruning,” explains (name of person with title or name of commission). “It is indiscriminate, drastic cutting and a reduction in the tree's energy-producing factory, the canopy.”

Cutting the central trunk and tops of main branches severely weakens a tree by removing both leaves and stored carbohydrates. Topping also reduces a tree's ability to generate food and energy by photosynthesis. “Topping is really the ultimate in tree abuse. It's usually done by unqualified and unknowledgeable tree cutters,” says (name of person).

Several conditions can be caused by topping trees.

Unsafe Structure. Topping trees leaves large wounds that are open to decay and insects, ultimately weakening the tree's structure.

Decline in Health. In addition to losing the leaves' ability to produce food, topping causes the tree to use valuable food stored in the trunk and limbs.

Decline in Value. Topping destroys the tree's form and symmetry. Altering the shape, structure and health of the tree by top-ping means a large ornamental tree can lose thousands of dollars in value.

“Most homeowners top trees because they see other trees that have been topped, or they fear a large tree may blow over onto a house or garage,” says (name of person). “A topped tree with damaged and weakened structure is much more likely to blow over than a healthy tree.” (Name of person or name of commission) offers a few tips on avoiding the decision to top trees:

- Plant the right tree in the right place. Don't plant large trees like oaks, tulip poplars and sycamores under power lines or near buildings and signs. Choose smaller tree species for small areas or sidewalk planting.
- Prune trees when they are young. Trees should be pruned when they are three to five years old. It promotes good structure, saves money and causes smaller pruning wounds.
- Prune correctly. All tree pruning should be in accordance with the maintenance guidelines of the International Society of Arboriculture. For more information about this society and its recommendations, call 217-355-9411.
- Hire a qualified arborist. Get three bids from local tree services. Be sure to contact references from the arborist's past work. Ask to see proof of liability insurance and workers compensation insurance.
- Why pay for an inferior service that destroys your tree? Find a qualified arborist who knows proper and safe tree care techniques. In tree work, taking the lowest price isn't necessarily good. In some cases, you get what you pay for—destroyed trees.

###

NEWS RELEASE

CENTRE COUNTY OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION
ASSOCIATION—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT,
000-6216

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KEY TO EXCELLENT COMMUNITY IS OPEN SPACE

"As our community becomes concerned with development, sprawl and zoning issues, we should not forget the value of open or natural spaces within our municipality," says (name of person with title or name of organization or commission). "On a practical level, open spaces can improve water quality and availability, recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat. Open spaces also generate feelings of quiet, beauty, solitude and freedom for individuals who use them."

The term "open spaces" means large connected areas within a municipality that are planned for and remain undeveloped. Examples might include a city park, a natural wetland, a meadow or an area bordering a creek or river.

"The benefit of open spaces to a community includes increased property values and an enhanced community image for its citizens and visitors," says (name of person). "Open spaces can provide protection for historic landscapes as well as providing people with a sense of permanence so opposition to change in other parts of the community may be lessened."

Open space planning will become increasingly important to a community as it grows and develops. The scale of open space is important when planning for growth and development. "It won't work if a small residential lot is left undeveloped so three trees and a couple birds can live there," says (name of person). "So more residents can benefit, we must plan for and fund open space creatively within the context of the entire municipality."

Planning for open space cannot work without an effective land-use planning process, the commission notes. "Our zoning and subdivision ordinances must be written so they can implement the philosophies of open space conservation expressed in our comprehensive plan," says (name of person).

"In order to prepare for including open spaces in our municipality, we should establish a natural resource inventory that identifies important resources for the entire municipality and a comprehensive plan supported by zoning and subdivision ordinances that considers and supports the use of open space.

"We should also consider municipal partnerships to establish open space plans collectively and to distribute the expense of acquiring land or properties to be used for open space.

Multi-jurisdictional alliances work if there is strong leadership and careful planning, adds (name of person). "The longer we wait, the more unchecked growth will occur, which makes it much more expensive and difficult to acquire land to use for open space."

###

NEWS RELEASE

GREENSBURG ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY
COMMITTEE—Date

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, ENVIRONMENTAL
ADVISORY COMMISSION CHAIRMAN, 000-6216

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DEVELOPERS, BUILDERS SHOULD PRESERVE TREES DURING CONSTRUCTION

"When planning a new subdivision or commercial development, building a single house, or even adding to an existing home, native or historic trees can be preserved in the landscape without incurring major added costs," says (name of person with title or name of commission). "In the past, builders and developers usually bulldozed a site and planted new trees to create a landscape. Developers and builders should recognize the great value of preserving groves of trees, historic or unique individual trees and riparian areas."

(Name of person) points out that preserving existing trees adds value to properties, makes new or existing homes more saleable, and allows sellers to ask a premium price.

"Tree preservation also provides psychological well-being by offering places for children to play, wildlife habitat and areas where homeowners can walk and relax," says (name of person).

Homeowners should discuss tree preservation with contractors or carpenters before signing a contract. The homeowner also should hire a qualified arborist to assess the health of existing trees, make tree removal recommendations, and suggest precautions to preserve existing trees during construction. Tree preservation means giving trees and the soils that support them enough space to remain healthy while construction occurs around them.

To protect trees from nearby activity, the (name of organization) recommends using chain link fencing. Most trees, particularly old and large trees, should be fenced at the edge of the tree's canopy or drip line. A good rule of thumb is to protect the largest area of roots and limbs you can.

To prevent soil compaction, make sure no large or heavy equipment is parked near the tree. Builders should never store any materials near a tree.

(name of person) says, "Developers and homeowners should address tree preservation through a two-part process."

- 1 Before construction. A certified arborist, landscape architect or forester should work with the property owner to assess tree health and value and make decisions on which trees to retain or remove. Once a retention/removal plan has been made, all trees slated to remain should be fenced, and those designated for removal should be cut down.
- 2 During construction. Homeowners should constantly communicate with workers, making sure unplanned impacts do not happen.

It's very important to monitor tree-root health during construction. If roots are in the path of building foundations,

sidewalks or roadways, workers under the supervision of an arborist should take a shovel and expose the roots and then cleanly cut roots that are more than 2 inches wide.

Tree preservation takes time and effort, and you have to hire one or two more people to help create the development or home. In the end, though, you are preserving an asset that will pay dividends over a lifetime.

###

Sample Pitch Letter

John Oaks

Editor, Greensburg Daily News

100 Front Street

Greensburg, PA 22222

Dear Mr. Oaks:

For the past four years, the Greensburg Tree Commission has been planting street trees in different neighborhoods of Greensburg. To date, we have planted 120 trees for many reasons, such as the economic, health and aesthetic benefits trees and other natural resources provide our residents. Also, tree planting provides an excellent opportunity for people in this community to meet and work together on positive projects. Our past tree plantings have been very successful, attracting both adults and children from throughout the community.

This year we are planning to plant 30 trees in Greensburg's Hampton neighborhood. The planting will begin at 9:00 a.m. at the corner of Fairmount and Plankert Streets, on Saturday, May 25. Planting holes will be dug and volunteers will actually place the trees in holes and cover their roots with dirt. Volunteers will also water and mulch the newly planted trees. Refreshments will be served and there will be opportunities for young and older children to participate. Also, as in past years, Mayor Johnson will provide a brief welcome at the beginning of the tree planting.

We would very much appreciate your coverage of this year's tree planting. We expect that there will be some good opportunities for photographs and dialogue with excited and happy residents.

Also, as you may be aware, every year the Greensburg Tree Commission struggles to fund not only our tree planting projects, but also the removal and pruning of older trees. It would be a great assistance to us if we could meet with you at your convenience to discuss the commission and its work. We believe that street and park trees are crucial to the health and welfare of our town and its people.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at 000-8546 if I can provide any assistance to you or a reporter who may be interested in this year's tree planting event or our tree commission.

Best Regards,

John Maple

Chair, Greensburg Tree Commission

Sample Media Advisories

ADVISORY ADVISORY ADVISORY

GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION TO HOLD ANNUAL NEIGHBORHOOD TREE PLANTING

TO: GREENSBURG DAILY NEWS, GREENSBURG COLLEGE COLLEGIAN, WKRP TELEVISION, WTTP TELEVISION, WTRE RADIO, WWWK RADIO

CONTACT: JOHN MAPLE, CHAIRMAN GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION, 000-8546

NEWS ADVISORY

WHAT: HAMPTON NEIGHBORHOOD TREE PLANTING.

WHEN: SATURDAY, MAY 25, 2003. START AT 9:00 A.M. WITH WELCOME FROM MAYOR JOHNSON.

WHERE: GREENSBURG'S HAMPTON NEIGHBORHOOD AT CORNER OF FAIRMOUNT AND PLANKERT STREETS.

WHO: MAYOR JOHNSON, GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION, LOCAL VOLUNTEER ORGANIZATIONS, NEIGHBORHOOD AND COMMUNITY RESIDENTS.

DETAILS: THIRTY TREES WILL BE PLANTED BY COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS IN HAMPTON NEIGHBORHOOD AS PART OF GREENSBURG TREE COMMISSION ANNUAL TREE PLANTING PROGRAM.

EDITORS: COVERAGE IS INVITED: EXCELLENT PHOTO OPPORTUNITY.

PRESS ADVISORY PRESS ADVISORY PRESS ADVISORY

January 15, 2002

Contact: John Maple, Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry, 999-000-2793

or Ann Leaf, Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council, 999-000-2795

Photo ops.....

Story ideas.....

Interview opportunities.....

Give us a call.....

Ever hear of the term "community forestry?" Like to find out what it is or learn more about it? Interested in doing an interview or writing a story? Many people throughout our region are managing or beginning to actively manage the trees in their boroughs and townships, along their streets and in our parks. These trees are no longer an afterthought but are widely recognized for their value in city beautification and aesthetics; helping reduce water runoff; improving the air quality in towns; and a variety of other social, natural resource and economic benefits.

Towns like State College, Huntingdon, Holidaysburg and Lewistown, among others, have met criteria for the national

designation of Tree City USA. Places like Allensville, Mifflin, Harris Township, and Altoona, are active with tree- and park-related projects in their communities.

There is definitely a project or community within your area that would be a great story idea. We can help you with that: overview stories, human interest, statewide stories, local interest, and unique angles. Some possibilities include:

- 1 Mifflin Library Project—a partnership to develop an arboretum and an outdoor classroom.
- 2 Altoona and State College Tree Commission—active volunteer groups working on numerous interesting and unique ways to improve the quality of tree and park care within their communities.
- 3 State of Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry Partnership Coordinator—About a year ago the agency hired a person to increase partnership urban forestry opportunities with schools, companies, and other agencies.and there are some great projects in progress! Like the one in Huntingdon, and the one at Spring Mills Elementary School.
- 4 The Harris Township Working Together Project—a number of activities geared at improving the community of Harris Township.

Give John or Anne a call at the numbers listed above for:

More information.....

Interviews.....

Story ideas.....

Or any help and assistance we can provide.

-END-

NEWS ADVISORY

JAMES WILDE FOREST PRESERVE ASSOCIATION—Date

CONTACT: JULIE SANCHEZ, 000-1212

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local efforts to save green space are working

On Tuesday, January 5 at 10: 30 a.m. in Boalsburg, about a dozen members of a community land conservation group will gather to celebrate the third anniversary of the James Wilde Forest Preserve.

Attendees, including the State College Mayor Bill Williams, will announce plans to expand the preserve by 50 acres and gather support for additional efforts.

We want to share with the community the many benefits of green space and how a local group is working preserve it.

In attendance will be about a dozen members of the James Wilde Forest Preserve, residents of the area and municipal and state officials. A list of attendees who are willing to talk is available to reporters.

This preservation effort is similar to those occurring in College and Ferguson townships. Contact information for these efforts

can be provided to reporters. This is an issue that's present in many municipalities throughout your news area and the state, affecting thousands of families.

The James Wilde Forest Preserve is a nature area with walking trails that was established in 2000. After this year, 150 acres will be protected for the enjoyment of residents. It is named after the founder, James Wilde, who died in 1999. His family members, who live near the preserve, began the project as a memorial to Wilde, who loved the place and dedicated his lifetime to the conservation of our natural resources. The preserve is within walking distance of 400 homes and easy driving distance for Center Region residents.

Contact Julie Sanchez for more information about the story and to confirm your attendance if possible. (W) 000-1212, (H) 000-1234, (C) 000-9890

James Wilde Preserve News Conference

Tuesday January 5, 10:30 a.m.

110 Oak Street in Boalsburg, Pennsylvania

Prepared by

Bill Elmendorf, assistant professor of community forestry, School of Forest Resources, Penn State, Dan Kincaid, district ranger, USDA Forest Service, Wayne National Forest, Athens, Ohio, John Clay, media consultant and reporter, CBS WTAJ Television, Altoona, Pennsylvania, Eston Martz, former executive editor, College of Agricultural Sciences, Penn State

Prepared by Penn State with guidance from the Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Council and support from the Pennsylvania DCNR Bureau of Forestry. For more information, contact the Pennsylvania Urban and Community Forestry Program, School of Forest Resources, The Pennsylvania State University, 108 Ferguson, University Park, PA 16802; 814-863-7941.

Authors

William Elmendorf, Ph.D.

Associate Professor

wfel@psu.edu

814-863-7941

extension.psu.edu

Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences research and extension programs are funded in part by Pennsylvania counties, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Where trade names appear, no discrimination is intended, and no endorsement by Penn State Extension is implied.

Please visit extension.psu.edu/alternate-format-request to request this publication in an alternative format accommodation due to a disability.

Penn State is an equal opportunity employer and is committed to providing employment opportunities to all qualified applicants

without regard to race, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, or protected veteran status.

© The Pennsylvania State University 2025

Code: ART-4748

View Online: [Working with the Media: A Guide for Volunteer Organizations and Commissions.](#)