

Norman Spivey

Chapters and Verse

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AT THE END OF MY LAST COLUMN, I challenged you to consider how you might be of service to NATS. As promised, here are a number of specific examples of success throughout our Association. These ideas were culled through a survey I conducted with chapter presidents last year. I was particularly interested to know things such as: what is working—how successes in your chapter might help and inspire others; what issues you struggle with as a chapter; how leadership is identified, and how the membership is reached out to and involved.

I learned that while many of us share common challenges—busy schedules, geographic distances, funding needs, lack of participation, and a resistance to changing the way things have been done in the past—there is a broad structure of support for members and their students, creative ideas for fundraising, and thriving networking already taking place across NATS.

Some chapters are able to provide financial support for participation in NATS programs—to students who advance to our national competitions, or member teachers who are chosen for the Intern Program, for example. One chapter gives a senior scholarship to be used for participation in summer programs or for further education, and another gives extra prizes donated by community sponsors (head shots, sound recording, theater tickets, hair salons, tuxedo rentals, and the like).

For some chapters, fundraising can be as easy as putting out a scholarship fund box at events. Other chapters hold ticketed programs that feature singing with receptions. The ideas range from raffles following student winners' recitals to "NATS Cabarets" and "High Tea and High Cs." Local teachers sing on many of these programs, and students and SNATS groups are also often involved—either as servers or as additions to the programs. One chapter raised entry fees, which helped its financial stability tremendously. Members were concerned about a possible decrease in attendance, but participation actually went up, so with their growth they are now able to sponsor additional events.

In terms of networking and reaching out to members, I have had heartening feedback. "The camaraderie between our members and between our students at events," comments one teacher, "helps reinforce our group dynamic and strengthen our network—the students inspire each other."

One chapter developed a program of mentoring new teachers—in music theater and/or classical techniques. Other chapters are working to increase the understanding and respect for different vocal styles. A roundtable series devoted entirely to repertoire was instituted in another chapter as an oppor-

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tunity for the more experienced members to mentor newer teachers, and for all teachers to share discoveries.

Several chapters talked about their success in staying connected via social media and enhancing Internet presence. Some have annual mixers that include several brief presentations with a Q&A session. Others hold end-of-year luncheons featuring advanced student winners in concert. Another has a brunch at a member's house that includes a chapter meeting. Members bring guests, and because of the party-like atmosphere, it tends to be well attended and productive. Members in one chapter started a singer's book club. They meet to discuss articles in the *Journal of Singing*, and "in spite of the difficulty of scheduling, all agreed that it was positive, supportive, enlightening, and infinitely useful in processing and absorbing the information."

One chapter started an artist series that provides members with an opportunity to exhibit research and performance. Another offers open recitals each semester. These help students prepare for juries and auditions, and for some students it is the sole opportunity they have to get on stage as a soloist.

Neighboring chapters sometimes collaborate to bring in clinicians. And not to be outdone, two adjacent chapters went so far as to consolidate into one. They feel the transition went well and that they are stronger and more enriched because of it.

Of course, chapters are also engaged in the day-to-day work of improving service to members through the updating of handbooks, clarifying mission and vision, the standardization of documents and audition forms, making materials accessible online, and, importantly, recruitment.

Many chapter officers are "constantly on the lookout for leaders in our area and encouraging members to be involved," trying to "include at least one newer member on a committee to bring in outside ideas and help get them involved." Leaders realize that we need to energetically welcome new members and "reach out with warmth to invite association members who have not yet chosen to affiliate with the chapter." Many are also keen to involve SNATS chapters, feeling that it is very important that students are excited about singing and learning to sing and that they should share their ideas and experiences.

As you can imagine, this is just a sampling of the ideas and creativity afoot among our chapters. We all have ideas to share, so I encourage you to become as involved as you can in your chapters.

In addition to the excellent grassroots work taking place throughout the Association, NATS also offers a number of programs that are administered at the national level. I'd like to continue in the next column by highlighting a number of them, and looking at how you might participate and/or support the programs.

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