

2014 National School Public Relations Association Mark of Distinction Award

The Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) currently has 140 members, of which about 40 are NSPRA members. That means MSPRA falls in Category A: Chapter has less than 50% NSPRA membership. This year, we are submitting an entry under Section II: Special Focus Areas: Professional Development/PR Skill-Building.

Section II: Special Focus Areas

1. Professional Development/PR Skill-Building –

Each year, the Michigan School Public Relations Association (MSPRA) plans and provides a variety of programs/activities to support the professional growth and status of its members and improve the communication skills of Michigan educators including administrators, board members, teachers and support staff. This submission includes four examples of professional growth support: A) MSPRA's Annual Conference, B) Two Drive-In Conferences, C) MSPRA's Annual Communication Contest, and D) The Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award and Gold Medallion Award.

This entry shows documentation and evidence of chapter programs/activities, including:

- 1) Explanation and overview of overall year-long effort (follows in this section)
- 2) Statement of chapter goals and objectives for programs/activities (follows in this section)
- 3) Documentation and copies of conference/workshop/meeting programs and agendas, marketing materials, tip sheets and/or presentations distributed or made available to participants (See Section A and B.)
- 4) Examples of specific programs/activities for contests and awards (See Section C and D.)
- 5) Identification of target audience and participation/attendance lists (See participant list in Section A and B.)
- 6) Documentation/demonstration of measurable outcomes, effectiveness and success of the program/activity (See annual conference evaluation in Section A and drive-in conference evaluation in Section B.)
- 7) Explanation of how program/activity relates to NSPRA's Goals and Objectives (follows in this section)
- 8) Other relevant examples of chapter's professional development/PR skill-building efforts (follows in this section)

Note: One flash drive, containing all of these materials, is included with this submission.

Michigan School Public Relations Association

Overview of MSPRA Professional Development & Skill-Building Activities

Professional development and skill building is a major goal of the Michigan School Public Relations Association. As an association, we focus a great deal of our human and financial resources in this area. The results are some of the best communication skill-building offerings in the state. The strength of our efforts aids in our membership retention and, despite a sluggish economy, continues to drive conference attendance.

Our professional development activities are as follows:

- Our Annual Conference offers two days of intensive skill-building sessions, networking and learning.
- Our Regional Drive-in Conferences feature topical workshops with expert speakers to equip members with knowledge and skills.
- Our Annual Communication Contest is a competition to recognize member skills and encourage sharing of high-quality projects and programs. One part of the contest includes an Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award to recognize the critical role of communication at the top of our organizations and to showcase the state's best examples.

The MSPRA Board appoints a minimum of three members to Professional Development initiatives: one to manage the Annual Conference, one to manage MSPRA's Communication Contest, and the third to serve as a resource for APR Certification. Typically, an additional 1-3 board members are also either conference co-chairs, assist with the contest, or coordinate regional drive-in conferences.

The Board has several goals for its professional development activities. For the annual conference and drive-in sessions, these include:

- Skill-building for all levels of members, from those who are new to the profession to those with many years of experience.
- Preparing members to address current hot topics in Michigan education.
- Networking to strengthen professional relationships.
- Recognition of the skills and sharing of the successful strategies of our contest winners.
- Exposure to some of the topics, trends, and speakers identified at the National School Public Relations Association conference. This year, one of our conference speakers was Ron Koehler, APR, a frequent NSPRA presenter and a Past NSPRA President.

And, MSPRA's Communication Contest aims to:

- affirm school districts' communication efforts.
- inform districts on how they can improve their communication efforts.
- provide a venue to exchange best practices among those providing communication services in Michigan's public schools.

Together, the Communication Contest, Annual Conference and Regional Drive-in Conferences provide unparalleled opportunities for members and interested others in the school family to learn about and improve upon their communication skills. All of these activities generate widespread participation from communicators and educators across the state.

Evaluations from these activities are mined for improvement ideas and member suggestions. And, every few years, these activities are reinvented to ensure their relevance, value to our members and high quality of programming. We are using social media and technology to promote our organization and events, and finding new ways to use these tools for professional development as well.

Our reputation for professionalism and excellence means we are the group other state education-related associations turn to for communication advice, toolkits, presentations and workshops for their members. Our board members can be found at the conferences and meetings of many of these partner organizations, helping to equip other members of the school family with the communication skills they need.

MSPRA'S professional development activities mirror the goals and objectives of NSPRA.

- MSPRA is the go-to organization for strategic communication.
- MSPRA is a leader in the use of technology to advance education through responsible communication.
- MSPRA provides valuable services and resources to our members to help them acquire and sharpen the skills they need to:
 - ✓ plan and implement an effective public relations program.
 - ✓ be recognized and valued as critical members of school/district leadership teams.

Every workshop, session and speaker is chosen to build the abilities of our members. Every contest entry helps advance the use of the RACE formula as well as shine a bright light on our profession and excellent communication practices.

Through purposeful planning and expert implementation, our chapter elevates the role of school communication, the skill of our members and the value we each bring to our schools and communities.

The 2014 Annual MSPRA Conference

This year, MSPRA held its annual two-day conference on March 13 and 14, 2014 at the Hawk Hollow Golf Course and Banquet Facility near East Lansing, Michigan. A total of 70 people including presenters, members, vendors and others attended the conference. **Evaluations of the conference were positive with an overall rating of 4.68 out of 5.0.** Plus, frequent anecdotal references cited the outstanding structure of the conference in terms of providing informative keynote speakers, offering useful break-out sessions, and building in time for networking among members.

This year, we promoted the conference with a printed postcard that was sent via U.S. mail to members and interested others. We followed that mailing with regular conference teaser and reminder emails that included an attached conference registration form and a link to MSPRA's website.

Unique Features

Four unique features were part of MSPRA's 2014 Annual Conference:

- 1) This year, we had two keynote speakers—one each day. The first day, we encouraged members to take care of themselves by having Dr. Lew Dotterer, a former change management consultant, talk about recharging our emotional batteries. The second morning, we learned about managing our social media and online reputation from Social Media Consultant Sommer Poquette.
- 2) We were pleased to have four sponsors for this year's conference: Foxbright: Smarter school websites; kdn (broadcast TV, video production, and post production); peachjar (electronic school flyers); and **UniteMediaGroup** (raising non-traditional revenue through community sponsorship). (See Section E for sponsor materials.)
- 3) This year, we stayed together in the same large room for the mornings of both days to facilitate networking and enhance the group experience. In the afternoon of the first day we offered two pairs of breakout sessions, featuring three topics. (The "*Changing Face of Elections*" was offered during both time slots.) The afternoon of the second day we offered three, two-hour skill-building sessions, simultaneously. Participants were able to choose from either: photography, graphic design, or writing and editing.
- 4) Our sponsors and their displays were in the same meeting room as our large group sessions, which gave them ready and easy access to our members. Plus, we gave each sponsor time for a mini-presentation (3-5) minutes at one of our designated breaks as part of their sponsorship "package." The designated breaks were sprinkled throughout the two days.

The Annual Conference—Day One

The conference convened with our first keynote speaker, Dr. Lew Dotterer, an independent consultant who taught us about "*Recharging our Batteries and Finding Life Balance.*" Lew has previously served as the Consultant for Change Management for Michigan State University helping individuals, departments and colleges cope with and excel in times of significant change. He shared insights on putting ourselves first and making the most of the time we have by focusing on that which we can control: ourselves, and our reactions to events and people. He said if you aren't happy to be at work when you arrive at the office, you should remain in your car in the parking lot until your attitude changes. (He thinks that some of his former co-workers may still be sitting out in their cars.)

Mid-morning (after a break and vendor mini-presentation), a panel of MSPRA members shared *“Innovative Ways to Tell the Story of our Schools.”* Panel members included Ron Koehler, APR, Assistant Superintendent of Organizational and Community Initiatives and Legislative Affairs at Kent ISD; Allison Kaufman, Director of Communications and Marketing for Kent ISD and Managing Editor for School News Network; Danelle Gittus, APR, Manager of Communication Services at Oakland Schools; and Jean MacLeod, Social Media Specialist at Oakland Schools. The panelists shared two different, effective ways of telling our success stories and getting the word out about our students’ and schools’ achievements.

After lunch, we engaged in *Table Talk*, a facilitated conversation on one of three topics:

- a) *“Share Your Good News, Your Bad News, Ask for Project Help!”*
- b) *“How Are You Telling the Positive Story of Public Schools?”*
- c) *“What are You Doing to Turn Attention to What Really Matters: Student Achievement?”*

After Table Talk (and a vendor mini-presentation), participants chose from two sets of break-out sessions: The first session of the first set was entitled, *“The Future of Online Learning – Moving Michigan Farther, Faster: Personalized Learning and the Transformation of Learning in Michigan.”* In this session, Jamey Fitzpatrick from Michigan Virtual University and Jeff Williams from Public Sector Consultants engaged participants in a discussion about a recently completed study commissioned by Michigan’s Governor Rick Snyder. The report recommends that Michigan design an education system that includes tools and support to provide an individualized education for all students as well as increased support for classroom teachers to lead this effort.

The second session of the first set entitled, *“The Changing Face of Elections,”* featured Gail Allevato, Senior Vice President/Chief Marketing Officer for TMP Architecture, Inc. and Diane Bauman, APR, Director of School/Community Relations for Farmington Public Schools. These two campaign veterans shared lessons learned from more than 100 school elections including: understanding your voter, tips for a district’s information campaign, and strategies for the community’s advocacy campaign. Due to its (correctly) anticipated popularity, this presentation was repeated in the second set of break-out sessions.

The second set of break-out sessions included the repeat of *“The Changing Face of Elections.”* Participants also had the option to attend *“Copyright Law – What Does The © Mean?”* presented by well-versed and humorous attorneys Ryan J. Nicholson and Frederic G. Heidmann, Thrun Law Firm, P.D. These knowledgeable barristers gave participants the basics of Copyright Law and tips for handling some of today’s thorniest copyright issues.

At the end of the second set of break-out sessions, we adjourned from our formal agenda and transitioned to the evening’s activities.

MSPRA Annual Conference Evening Networking Event

At our annual MSPRA Conference, we start early and learn late, but take a break in the evening for building our relationships. Goals for the evening are for fun, but also connection. The more our members—who come from across the state—connect with each other, the broader their professional networks grow. And, professional networks are key to successful careers. In addition, we want to showcase our conference location, so activities have ranged from a museum after-hours visit to a live theatre performance to a special dinner venue.

This year, our conference hotel was adjacent to the Eastwood Towne Centre and we took full advantage of the proximity. One of our conference planners connected with the DSW shoe store manager who planned a private “Shoe Party” for conference attendees. Interest was high and anticipation was great for this exclusive event.

Late in the afternoon of the first day, excited shoe lovers gathered at DSW and were welcomed by the store manager, given a tote bag filled with goodies and coupons and turned loose in the store for an hour’s worth of shoe shopping. MSPRA shoppers took their treasures back to their cars before heading to dinner.

In the early evening, participants enjoyed a meal at one of two sign-up dinner options—both at the Eastwood Towne Centre. One was an Irish pub and the other offered Mediterranean cuisine. Both of these settings were conducive to candid conversation, enabling us to get to know each other that much better.

Then, we returned to the hotel for an After-Glow Event where we enjoyed desserts and beverages and bonded while watching American Idol. Coincidentally, two of this year’s top eight Idol finalists were from Michigan school districts (Farmington and Southfield) located within eight miles of each other. Both school district public relations professionals were present at the conference and had been involved in a range of “Idol” activities that definitely fall under “other duties as assigned.” (There’s a workshop in here somewhere.) On that evening, we celebrated with our colleagues as both of their student contestants survived to compete in the next round.

The Annual Conference—Day Two

We began our second morning with an interactive session “*Social Media and Online Reputation Management*,” featuring Sommer Poquette, a Social Media Consultant, blogger and author. Sommer engaged us with thought-provoking questions and asked us to get up from our seats, move around the room, and vote with our feet. Then, she taught us how to monitor our online presence and protect ourselves from mishaps that could get us fired or prevent us from being hired. She also gave us tips for producing a social media plan for our schools and how to handle bad press online.

After a break (and a vendor mini-presentation), Chris Glass, Director of Legislative Affairs for the West Michigan Talent Triangle and Karen Heath, Supervisor of Communications for Berrien Regional Educational Service Agency presented “*Linking Schools and Business: Developing a Mutually Beneficial Partnership*.” They shared what businesses are seeking from our students and how to develop meaningful relationships for our schools.

At lunch, MSPRA President Allison Kaufman presented the association’s Annual Report and members voted to amend the association’s bylaws.

Following lunch (and the final vendor mini-presentation), participants chose from three skill-building sessions:

- a) “*DSLR Digital Photography and Video Techniques*” presented by John McGraw, John McGraw Photography LLC and Eldon McGraw, Information Manager at Lansing Public Schools.

- b) “*Award-winning Graphic Design*” presented by Julie Ferguson, Communications, Design and Editing Specialist at Oakland Schools and Katie McClintic, Communications Coordinator at Kent ISD.
- c) “*Writing and Editing – Show Me the People: Writing School News with a Heartbeat*” presented by Charley Honey, writer for Kent ISD’s School News Network.

These two-hour intensives gave participants a deep dive into the subject matter and ample time to ask questions of the experts.

The Annual Conference—In Conclusion

Overall, at our 2014 Annual Conference, we offered participants two keynote speakers: one about keeping ourselves in balance and one about keeping our online selves in check; one panel discussion on telling our stories; one presentation on developing business partnerships; three break-out sessions on copyright law, online learning, and elections; three intensive skill-building sessions on photography/videography, graphics and writing; lunch table talk; four vendor mini-presentations; one private “Shoe Party;” two sign-up dinners; and one after-glow gathering for relaxation and networking.

We left the conference feeling more in balance, more in touch and more in control (of at least our attitudes) and better prepared to tackle the remainder of the school year. Conference evaluations were very positive and are included in Section A.

The 2013-2014 MSPRA Drive-In Conferences

This past year, MSPRA held two drive-in conferences on using iPads to produce videos. One was a half-day offering. The second was a full day. The half-day “*Video for Newbies*” was held at Kent ISD on the west side of the state on June 18, 2013. Based on its popularity, we offered it a second time and expanded it—giving participants the option to attend either a half-day or all-day session entitled: “*iPad Video Training*” and held it on November 1, 2013 at Oakland Schools on the state’s east side. In the optional afternoon segment of this expanded offering, participants collaborated with others on a video project.

A total of 27 participants plus presenters attended these two drive-in trainings.

Both of these hands-on sessions offered quick, easy steps to capturing and processing videos on an iPad. This training was open to MSPRA members as well as others in their districts.

The presenters, introduced by Tom Page from Holland Public Schools, were:

- Jim Camenga, a videographer and writer for MacMedia in Holland, MI and a retired school communications specialist from Zeeland Public Schools.
- Holly McCaw, Communications Director for Otsego Public Schools, who also has an extensive background in TV production from both Channel 3 in Kalamazoo and Fox 17 in Grand Rapids.

Holly and Jim took participants through a step-by-step process for creating short, visually-appealing videos that tell a story. During the training, they emphasized the importance of pre-planning, noting that every effective video is anchored in the creator's willingness to write out and outline the various elements contained in the video ahead of time.

Evaluations were very positive. Here’s one reaction to the June 18th drive-in conference.

“I attended this training...and learned **a ton!** You probably get requests from your staff to help with a video to show some new educational strategy at an upcoming PD offering. I know I get these requests and really didn’t want to deploy our videographer for some of these (he also teaches a CTE TV Broadcasting class and didn’t want to take away class time for some of these requests). After going through this training I feel very adequate to create videos and have added value to the tools offered in my department. The session showed me how to write scripts, plan the shots I want to take, edit my video, insert graphics/still photos or text, and upload the video to share with others. As a matter of fact, I have made it a professional goal this year to create many more videos to support our staff.”

Those participants who responded to the follow-up survey after the November 1st session were similarly pleased with the workshop and would recommend the session to others.

As one observer in the second training noted: “The short videos were inspired, on target, and remarkable. Sometimes I forget about the many hats school communicators wear (facility scheduling, community education program administration, working with board trustees, G.E.D. testing, etc.) but they took on the new role of “video creator” with good humor— and an eagerness to get back to their districts and try out their new learning!”

MSPRA's Annual Communication Contest

MSPRA provides a framework in which people who direct communication and public relations programs can:

- attend conferences and workshops designed to enhance skills in personal and organizational communication.
- exchange ideas and strategies with specialists from other school districts.

One of the best ways to exchange ideas and strategies is through MSPRA's Communication Contest for Publications, Campaigns and Electronic Media. Each year, MSPRA invites schools throughout Michigan to submit their best programs, campaigns, and communication products for a juried review.

Note: We suspended our Communication Contest in 2013 to more closely align the dates of our contest with NSPRA's contest. Now it will be easier for our members to prepare and submit their entries to both contests. And, for this year only, we have allowed submissions from 2012 as well as 2013. Product categories range from writing to print and interactive-media publications. This year we had nearly 70 entries. Judging will be completed soon.

We've included it in this entry as an example of how our program is evolving and improving.

MSPRA's Gold Medallion Award

MSPRA's Gold Medallion Award recognizes outstanding programs or projects that advance responsible school communication. Entries may come from public and private schools, education agencies, regional MSPRA groups, and any public relations agency or private business serving education entities. This year we had four entries: two from Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, one from Fraser Public Schools and one from Bloomfield Hills Public Schools. The results will be announced soon.

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award

MSPRA's Outstanding Superintendent Communicator Award recognizes a superintendent for leadership in school district communication. In 2014, we honored two superintendents, one from Ottawa Area Intermediate School District and one from Muskegon Intermediate School District.

Dave Sipka, Superintendent of Muskegon Area Intermediate School District, was honored for the number of accomplishments and the marked difference he has made in just three years at Muskegon. His communication is transparent, responsive and inclusive. And, he has adopted the successful strategy of including the district's public Information Officer as part of the district's senior leadership team.

Karen McPhee, Superintendent of Ottawa Area Intermediate School District, was honored for her consistent and continued communication practices and support of clear communication as a strategy for community problem-solving and collaboration. Karen has risen through the ranks starting as a school communicator and eventually ascending to the superintendency, all the while remaining true to her communication roots.

Both will receive their awards at the Michigan Association of Intermediate School Administrators (MAISA) Awards Luncheon at the group's summer conference in June. This will honor these recipients in the company of their peers and showcase MSPRA as an association that values effective communication in school leadership.

Other examples of increasing PR visibility and providing PR training

MSPRA members presented at other conferences and school districts on the importance of good public relations. Two examples of these presentations are:

1. On June 18 and 19, 2013 — Representing MSPRA, Past-Co-President Anita Banach presented two sessions at the Michigan Association of Pupil Transportation (MAPT). The sessions were approximately three hours each and covered Customer Service and Internal/External Communications. She also devoted a small portion of the presentation to Low Cost/High Impact PR ideas.
2. In April 2014 — Again representing MSPRA, Former Board Member John Helmholt and Past-Co-President Anita Banach presented a three-hour Effective Communication Certification Class for Michigan Schools Business Officials (MSBO). This session included communication planning, surveys, media relations and managing the chaos.