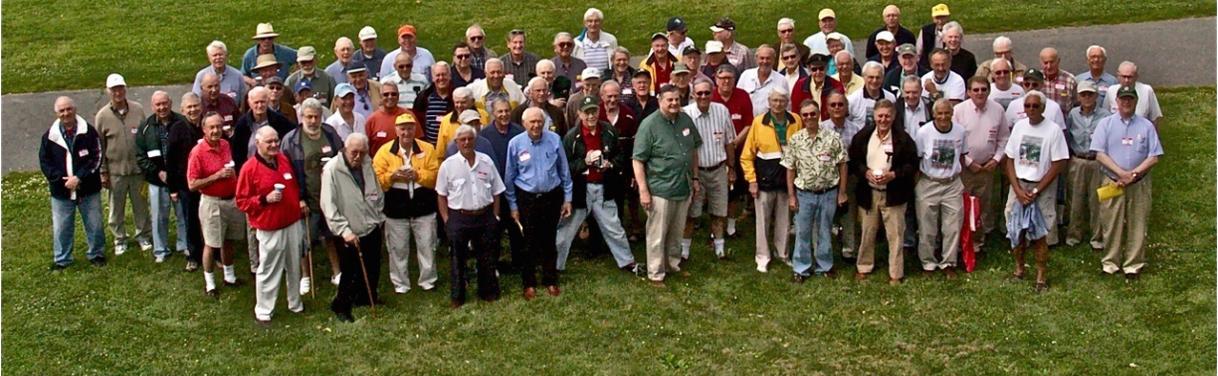


# Attention Senior Americans

Take a look at Westport Connecticut's  
"Sort of Handbook"  
How to Create an Outstanding Senior Men's Club



## The "Y's" Men - How We Keep the Retired Out of Retirement

### Table of Contents

Rationale - The Retirement "It Takes More Than Money" Quiz

Why the "Y's Men - Well, We Didn't Have a Pool Hall

Governance - Without Direction, All is Lost

Directory of Names and Faces - What's Dick's Number? Wait, Who's Dick?

Spreading the Word - Don't Hide Your Light Under a Basket

### Meeting Tips

Choosing Your Meeting Time and Venue - Make it Awesome

Coffee & Donuts Hour - Did You Hear the One About...

Badges - Never Forget a Face, But Names, Not So Much

New Members - A Group's Life's Blood

Health Report and Health Alerts - News from the Right Side of the Grass  
Ten-Minute Talks - Everything You Wanted to Know About What's-His-Name

Good, Topical Speakers Draw a Turnout - Keep 'em Coming

Excellent Sound System - What'd He Say?

Video Record Speakers - Nothing Off-the-Record

### The Keys to Success

Group Activities - Get off that Couch

Trips and Events - Something for Everyone, Really

Community Service - The Rewards of Giving Back

Going off-campus keeps it interesting. Remember "Road Trip!"

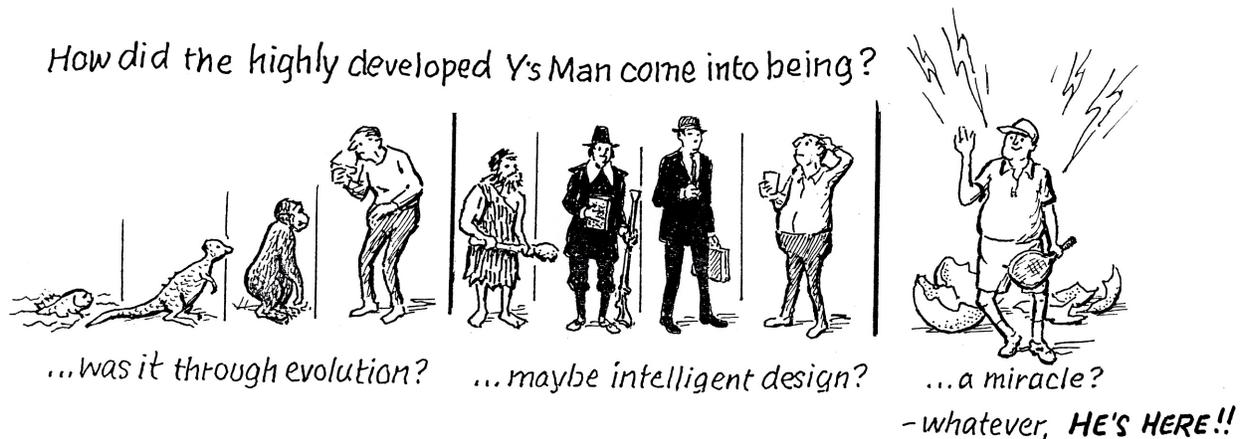
Staying in Touch is Being in Touch

Memorial Day Parade Float - Visibility, Visibility, Visibility

Summer - The Beat Goes On While the Group Takes Off

## Rationale - The Retirement "It takes more than money" Quiz

Tired of watching television commercials showing retired granddads with perfect dentures impaling worms on fishing hooks, while delighted grandkids squeal with uncontrollable delight? Now, welcome to "What do retired folks do when they're not telling endless stories about their above average grandchildren?" This quiz was



designed to help you have a ball in retirement.

But first, listen to Confucius' warning:

"What makes us happy in middle age doesn't necessarily make us happy in retirement."

With that in mind, answer these questions: \*OK, you have plans for your money, what about your retired life? What's your passion? And what don't you ever want to do again? Do you talk about your doctor visits with friends or anyone who'll listen? Are you volunteering? Is retirement boring? What gets you out of the house? What keeps your mind sharp? New language? Music? Computers? How do you keep your spirits up? What new stuff do you want to learn? How about making new friends, having new experiences? How often do you change the batteries on your TV remote - or your hearing aid?

"When men reach their sixties or seventies and retire, they go to pieces. Women go right on cooking." –Gail Sheehy

### Why the "Y's Men" - Jeopardy or an engaging speaker?

Thirty-odd years ago, Westport and Weston, Connecticut, combined population, 36,000, had an active YMCA, but no place for retired men to meet and discuss their problems, world problems, health issues (we call them organ recitals), politics, or above average grandchildren. Then some wise man said "Let's meet at the Y." And so they did - a small group of, men twenty or so. They took the name "Y's Men" and because one of the fellows had an old stuffed owl that would make a nifty ("awesome" to those grandchildren) symbolic pun. Soon the group began to meet regularly.

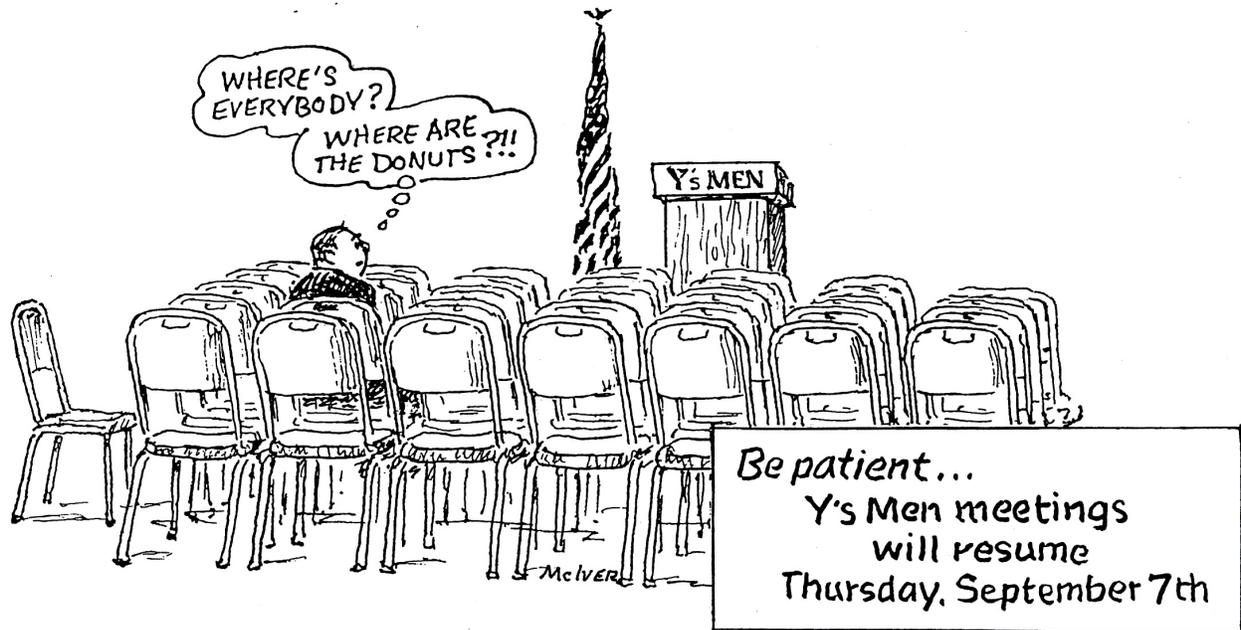
Today our organization numbers more than 400 members - more than 25% of the men aged 65+ in our two towns. When the group began, the median age was 72. Today it's 78. We look forward to our weekly meetings and to joining in one or more of our 22

organized activity groups. The unconfirmed report is that some guys have gone back to work to regain some leisure time.

What follows is tongue-in-cheek blueprint to help organize your band of retired brothers. If we've done this right, you'll get some good ideas from us to add to some ideas of your own.

### Governance - Without direction, all is lost

"Organize, don't agonize."



Everyone's been a scoutmaster, but someone has to be in charge. So create, elect or appoint officers. You can have a loose alliance or a formal one, but, just as in your pre-retirement life, someone has to be in charge. Let the members keep using their pre-retirement organizational skills and experiences for the benefit of the group. We have a President, First VP, Second VP, Program Chairman, Secretary (whose real job is to report the comments of the previous week's speaker for those who either missed the meeting or took a snooze), Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, Assistant Treasurer and Past President. You'll probably also need Committee Chairs. Ours are for Community Service, Historian, Membership, Communications and Trips & Events.

On the subject of officers, succession planning should be built into your organizational structure. Our First VP becomes President and so on. Recruiting interested members to board positions assures that the club will grow and prosper. Their enthusiasm will power the club, so you want the "A" Team on the board.

And keep in mind, nothing's carved in stone. And change is good. Shape and reshape your organization to meet your needs. For instance, over the years we've grown from a few activity groups to nearly 25. We've added and dropped as we've grown and tastes have changed. Our current groups are described on page 8. None of the Group Chairs are on the Board, though they soon join the list of our usual suspects. And on the subject

of who serves in what position, create bylaws and operating procedures. They're tiresome, not to say, tedious to write, so, to recall Tom Lehrer,

“Plagiarize, let no one else’s work evade your eyes.”

Our website is <http://www.ysmenwestportweston.org>, and our by-laws are there. Take a look and feel free to plagiarize.

**Money.** Our annual dues are \$50. Members over 90 (00% of our group is already there) get a freebie. Our annual budget is north \$XX,XXX. A good percentage pays rent for our meeting space - seniors don't get a reduced rate on rent - for technological support, and for our weekly ration of coffee and some of the best donuts on the planet.

### **Directory of Names and Faces - What's Dick's number. Wait, who's Dick?**

Create a membership roster to keep the group engaged. Everyone can reach everyone if everyone contributes their contact information, plus photos. We post our photo-illustrated roster on our website in a protected domain to keep the list from random salesmen and politicians. What to include in each listing is fielder's choice. We display each member's name, address, phone number, e-mail address, wife's name, member's education, vocation, military history and interests. Kinda like Larry Aasen's entry. (off to the side - Larry's been attending meetings for more years than he'd care to admit):

	<p><b>AASEN, LARRY O.</b> 31 Ellery Lane, Westport 227-6126 wife: Martha Ph.D. North Dakota, MS Boston Univ; Exec. Dir: Better Vision Inst; Asst VP, NY Life Ed., McGraw-Hill &amp; other publications WWII: Sgt. 13th Air Div. ETO. Int: Silurians, mbr Wspt Dem Town Comm &amp; RTM, Publ. Relations. aasenm@aol.com</p>
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### **Spreading the Word - Don't hide your light under a basket**

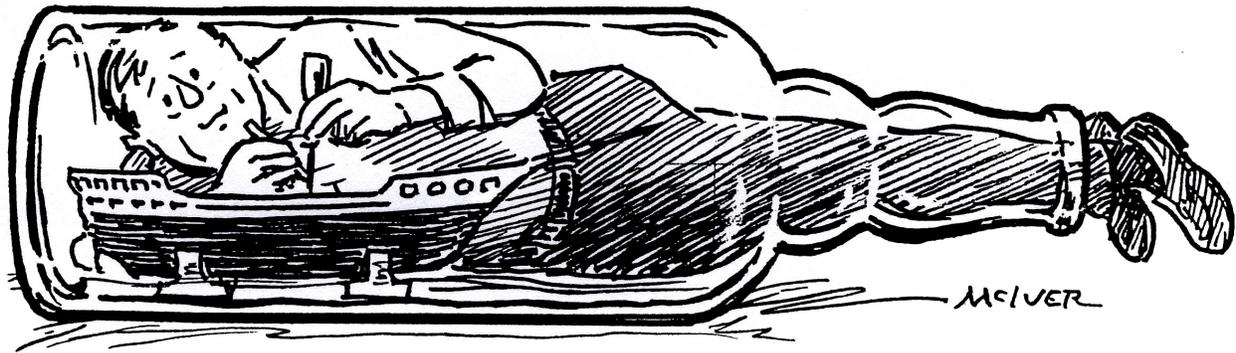
“All publicity is good, except on the obituary page.” Brendan Behan

Don't just send out a press release saying that you plan to start a retirement group. Rather call the local media folks, get together with them for breakfast or coffee. Introduce your officers and let each of them tell the story of what you plan to do, face-to-face. Talk about news the group may generate, such as public service projects, a list of the activities you plan to offer, meeting speakers, like that. Remember, in today's world the local media include websites catering to your community. If you don't know what they are, where they are and who's the editor, ask your children and grandchildren.

They know! "Where's a five year old when you need one," we used to say at the computer.

Be specific with the press, so they have something to write about. Be quotable. Make the story easy to write. Activities such as golf, backgammon, bridge, investing, collectibles, skiing, tennis, world affairs, bowling are a few of our group's activity roster. Prepare a written list you can give the press people. Make sure to include your group's media contact person and contacts for the guys who'll lead each activity. You might introduce the man who'll recruit your speakers. He's an important fellow because he'll work his arse off to recruit the wide variety of speakers you'll need to attract members right off the bat. And members are a great source for speaker recommendations. Your leader should bring a list of the speakers for the next four to five weeks and give a copy to each reporter.

Now here's where your PR mavens take over. He/they should provide media releases every time you have a speaker to announce and write a post-event story. At the outset, you add impact if you follow up with a phone call. The release should announce the subject and provide the speaker's credentials. Characterize him or her as not-to-be-missed and encourage non-members to attend. Make it newsworthy. Create a short paragraph that names your organization, describes it and announces its purpose. Make it the last paragraph of every release. Be sure to include your website, even if it's only in its early development. We've found you can never stop spreading the word. Other than personal selling by existing members, constant media exposure is what you need to attract new members. And new members are your group's life's blood (especially in a senior men's group, whose membership has a bad habit of natural attrition). Expect to lose members. "Try it, you'll like it" may not work for everyone, so recruiting is an on-going task. We have about 400 members from a total population of 36,000.



### **Good Meetings Don't Just Happen**

The core activity of our group is the weekly meeting from September through May. Group business and activity announcements precede the speaker. Our time block affords our speakers about 40 minutes for his/her talk, followed by 20 minutes of Q&A. The best speakers are the ones whose Q&A brings out their best.

### **Choose a Welcoming Venue**

Here are a couple of pointers in choosing your meeting venue. First, it must be big enough and have adequate parking to accommodate your membership and guests, even on full attendance days. Second, it must have both good audio and video

projection capability, including the ability to make the space dark enough to see projected images. Third, a kitchen is helpful for preparing coffee and serving donuts. Which leads us to...

Coffee & Donuts Hour - Did you hear the one about...

## TRACKING DOWN WHO'S BEEN SAMPLING ALL THE DIFFERENT DONUTS



Morning meetings, before nap time, work best. We begin at 10 a.m. But a lot of the fun starts at 9 a.m., when many members arrive for coffee and donuts. It's that all-important schmoozing hour. For some, this is their favorite part of meeting, more so than the scheduled program. Other than having a dedicated set-up and clean-up crew, put your top negotiator on the job to find the best, homemade donuts at the best contract price. Throw in some muffins for the odd fellows watching their diets. You may even want to be adventuresome and offer healthy goodies.

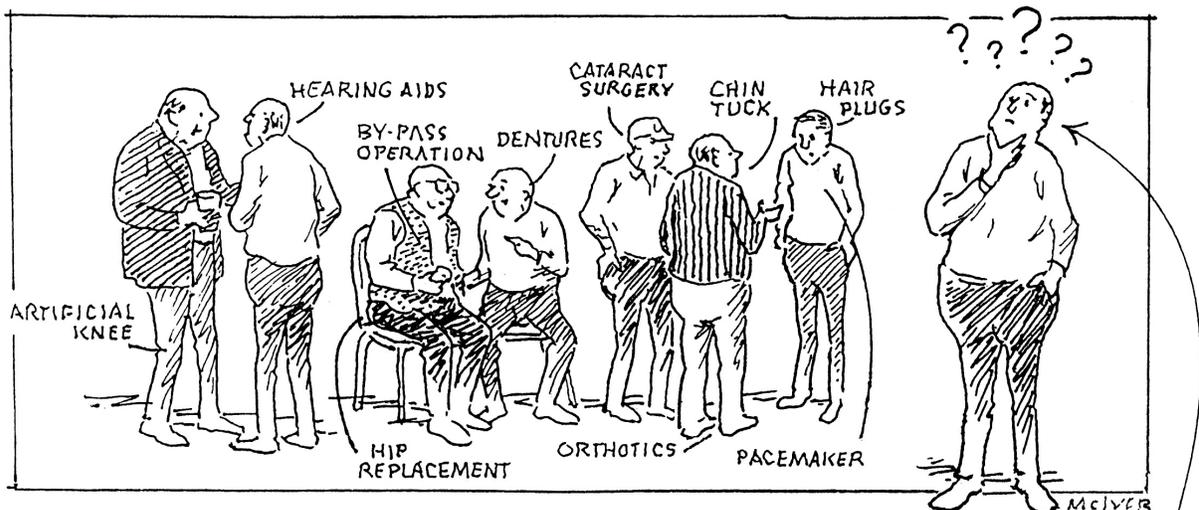
**Badges - Never forget a face, but names, not so much**

"I know the face, but what's his name again?"

That's the open-and-shut case for having substantial meeting badges with first names in big print. Better than those "Hello" stickers that you write your name on at the time share sales pitches. Badges are kept by the master at arms and brought to the meetings, so they don't get left on the kitchen table by the occasionally forgetful member. The badge box also provides an attendance tracker. Not bad information to have on a regular basis.

## New Members - the Group's life's blood

A New Members Chair is essential to constantly recruit new members to replace those who've moved away, "moved on," or become incapacitated. You don't need a retired Marine Corps recruiter, just a guy who knows where to find retired men wandering aimlessly about in the desert, at service clubs, bowling alleys, AARP meetings, fitness centers, recycling centers, bridge clubs and community centers. Invite prospects to be visitors at meetings. Then, once they're hooked, invite all the new members to a luncheon to help make them feel more at home. Above all, remind current members to bring friends to sample your meetings. Keep feeding the local media with news of upcoming speakers, community volunteer work and special events. There's no bad publicity, unless they spell your name wrong.



*Most Y's Men have benefited from some medical procedure*

*...but what's still badly needed  
is a memory chip implant.*

## Health Report and Health Alerts - News from the right side of the grass

Reality is we're getting older and health is getting more important. The group should be kept up to date on all pertinent medical news and on the condition of the membership. Weekly reports of members' serious health challenges keep the group engaged. And short presentations on things that will keep the members healthy are a must. This is our time. Let's make it as long and as much fun as modern medicine and good luck will allow.

On that subject, consider a way to provide transport for members who no longer drive, but want to attend meetings. The lack of transport shouldn't be an impediment to staying engaged.

## Ten-Minute Talks - Everything You Wanted to Know About What's-His-Name

Retired men's backgrounds are varied and frequently interesting. Encourage your members to share their personal, professional or life history in weekly 10-minute talks on interesting subjects of their choosing with the group. We've had doctors talking about what ails us, tax experts telling us how to file and a long list of guys who want to share their work adventures and hobbies. It both entertains and informs the membership of the diversity and depth of their fellow members.

## Entertaining and Topical Speakers Draw Them In

We try to get quality speakers who will come for free. Speakers are announced to members in weekly bulletins. If they're available and willing, we invite them to lunch, so members get an opportunity to talk with them face-to-face and to ask the follow up questions we don't allow during Q&A at our meetings.

By the end of the last year, more than 1,400 speakers addressed our group since its founding. Speakers are announced to members in weekly bulletins and are recruited by the speakers committee. You'll probably find that most speakers appreciate addressing audiences that know something about their subject and ask intelligent questions.

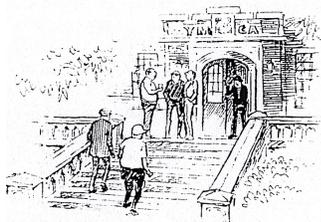
The logistics of managing a speaker are pretty simple, but critical to a smooth presentation. First, contact the speaker and get their audio/visual needs. Make sure the material he's planning to use works with the club's equipment. Second, ask about the speaker's preferences on microphone use. And third, brief the speaker on the format the club prefers - presentation followed by Q&A.

Our press releases provide the essential information about the speaker and his/her background and invite the public to attend. A good speaker can attract and hold an audience on a wide range of topics, including the arts, sports, investments, health related issues, military history, science, computer as a tool, foreign relations, interesting law cases, education, the economy or interesting bios.

Authors and illustrators with new works are a natural. Urge them to bring copies to sign and sell. Choose speakers who use visual material to illustrate their talks. Look for speakers your members recommend. Storytellers make the best speakers, we've found. Avoid politics, religion, you know the drill. Do invite elected officials to tell of their commitment to your town and to seniors. A good time is after the annual budget review. Everyone wants to know where their taxes are being spent.

We ask our speakers to talk for up to 45 minutes and allow 15 minutes for Q&A. Have two of your members move around the room with handheld mikes for the questioners. Benefits for the speaker are pre-meeting PR and an attentive audience. Your responsibility is providing good audio-visual equipment and perhaps a take-home DVD of the talk and lunch with a group of members. A small memento from the club is a nice touch. We give our speakers a Y's Men coffee mug, a daily reminder of their visit.

## The History of The Y's Men



It started in 1977 when a few elderly men found wandering around downtown Westport were lured into the Y to share coffee and donuts.



As the group expanded it became prized as a prime captive audience for speakers of every description.



Its many special interest off-shoots have allowed members to experience heights never realized in their early years.



The Y's Men are still active after 28 years - but the coffee and donuts remain the glue that holds it all together.

Speaker: Executive Producer TV's "History Channel"

## Excellent Sound System -

You never want to hear, "What'd he say?"

Do yourself a favor and just get the best and, as important, have someone capable of making sure it works. End of story.

## Video Record Speakers - Nothing off-the-record

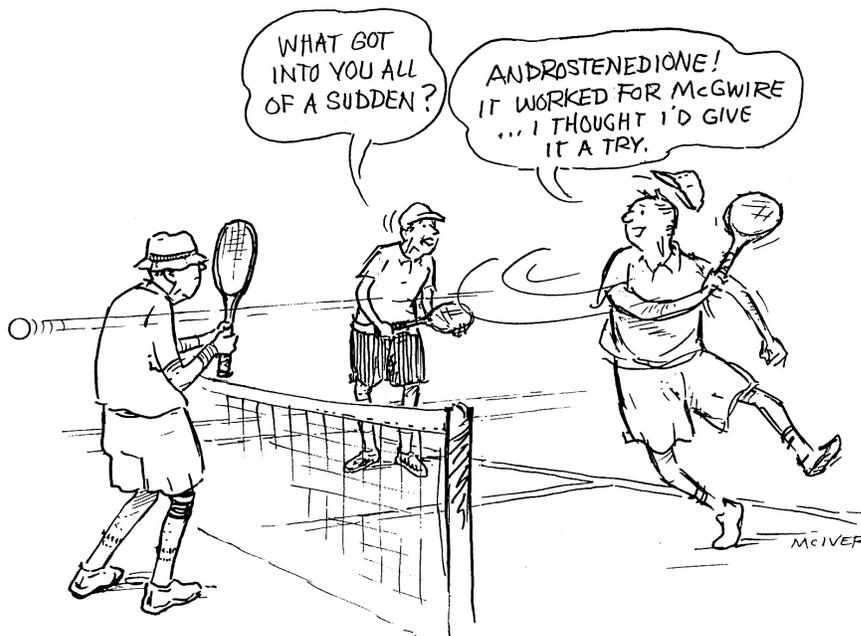
Gone are the days of, "Shucks, I really wanted to hear so-and-so speak, but I couldn't make the meeting." A couple of hundred dollars buys a decent video camera and tripod to make a video record for members who missed a speaker they wanted to hear. As suggested above, if you record the presentations, you can also send a DVD to the speaker.

## The Keys to Success

### Group Activities - Put the active back in activities

Activities outside of weekly meetings are the backbone of our club. Here is a list of the current Y's Men activities. This list is by no means comprehensive. Yours will certainly differ by locale, geography, group interests and lots of other stuff. There's not a lot of call for local big game hunting, rock climbing or bronc busting from our membership here in Westport, Connecticut. Nevada's another story.

Backgammon  
Boating  
Bocce  
Book Club  
Bowling  
Bridge Club  
Camera Club



Collectibles Club  
Community Service  
Computers  
Gardening Club  
Genealogy Club  
Golf  
Hiking/Walking  
Hoot Owls Singing  
Group  
Int'l Discussion  
Group  
Investment Clubs  
Jazz  
Ping-Pong  
Skiing  
Tennis-Winter  
Tennis-Summer

## Trips and Events - Something for everyone, really



Jonathan Winters provides the keynote for our Trips & Events Group with his comment, "If your ship doesn't come in, swim out to it!"

Our T&E people know that retirees are interested damn near everything, including away-from-home experiences. Some are by chartered buses that make enough "technical" stops for guys of a certain age to feel comfortable enough to hit the road and see relatively nearby manufacturers of unique products.

On the other extreme, we arrange "overnights," with a couple of trips to Europe, to be exposed to cultures we've wanted to experience all of our lives. In between the quickies and the extended trips, we car pool to nearby theaters, museums, concerts of all kinds (even rock music has proven to be a draw), museums and casinos (for winners only) and local restaurants. More about that in a few. And when school's out, when regular weekly meetings end at the end of May, we go outside for weekly evening sunset BYOB picnics with wives or others who bestow affection upon us. Find a nearby, attractive park, beach or swimming hole and send an advance party to claim tables for the gang. Make it the same day each week so those subject to distraction won't forget the event.

About restaurants, don't forget to send one of your top eaters to discover interesting restaurants in your area that will welcome a group of hardy eaters, also known to be big tippers. We'd wager that you could add to one monthly to your T&E schedule.

It's one thing to make announcements of upcoming travel and events, but quite another to make sure members remember what they've heard. As a failsafe, set up a manned T&E table where members can see what upcoming, sign-up and take a flier home.

## Community Service – The rewards of giving back

Remember the army sergeant's call to action to "police-up" the area? "I only wanna see asses and elbows," he'd shout. We have a few of these fellows who inspire us to spruce up public areas in our towns. Our targets are litter, leaves and weeds. Our venues are parks and public housing sites. Town officials welcome us. We work for nothing and we're on Medicare. There's also a demand for drivers to take people to doctor's appointments, shopping. Some of us read to the blind. Others provide conversation partners. Homeless shelters need food. Leftover baked goods from local supermarkets and specialty stores are often waiting to be picked up on a regular basis for shelter people and our senior center. We've found that generous stores can readily be found. Community services people in your town will be delighted that you have volunteers at the ready.

"Tis more blessed to give than receive: for example, wedding presents." –H.L. Mencken

### Going off-campus keeps it interesting. Remember the "Animal House Road Trip!"

(McIver #85) Weekly meetings will be the backbone of your organization. Members get to know one another and friendships are born. So, extend these associations to social events where members with spouses/significant others can join in another world of friendships. We have three of these "off campus" events a year. Recognizing that night driving isn't fun, even with cataracts that are history, our Holiday Party is a mid-day event with a band, wine, lunch and seasonal songs from the Hoot Owls, our regionally recognized men's choral group which specializes in in-tune(?) at Holiday time. Here's an opportunity for you to haul out the old blazer or pay a shopping visit to Goodwill. The Missus will surely remember what she wore last year, but not you.

Plan this event early because catering halls and other likely venues are booked months in advance. The Spring Gala is another excuse for the Catering Committee to sample goodies from various suppliers. Typically it's a 4:30–6:30 p.m. event in early April, with hors d'oeuvres, wine, desserts and entertainment that lures us out of the snow melt to enjoy the warmth of group friendship. So much for the co-ed social activities.

### Wrapping up the Year

It's the end of May and time for the Annual Picnic and final meeting of the year. This is

as close to a business meeting as we get. There are several tasks to accomplish that ensure the club's future and a smooth year-to-year transition. First, the slate of club officers for the upcoming year must be voted on and installed. Second, awards are given to umpteen members who worked to make the past year a success. And third, it better be a great feed. An outdoor venue with cover for weather surprises, like a state park with a pavilion, is an

ideal place for this late spring event. Picnic food is the order of the day. Hot dogs, hamburgers, platters of cold cuts, pasta, cole slaw, pickles, potato salad and several bowls of baked beans usually draw a crowd. Don't forget to leave generous tips for the Air Pollution Police a la "Blazing Saddles."



## Staying in touch is being in touch

Now that we have telephones, faxes, radios, television, the Internet and e-mail, the only communications problem left on earth is that between parents and teenagers.

A well-designed, easily navigated website that's kept current weekly is an absolute "must." So what else is new? Please take a look at ours, [www.ysmenwestportweston.org](http://www.ysmenwestportweston.org) and feel free to use anything you like. Our intellectual property is your intellectual property! It's also a "must" that you have frequent e-mail contact with your membership to send news of meetings, special events, and, yes, obits of fellow members.



Here are some sample news flashes: (samples go here)

Now comes the question, who does this? One way to enlist computer help is to ask for a show of hands early each year for those who have computer experience and are willing to become either your webmaster and/or your newsletter "publisher." You'll need commitments because this important volunteer

assignment takes time, skill and patience. The set-up time is many hours and keeping it current is no small job, but with huge rewards for the webmaster and the club. You may want to look at Joomla, a service for setting up and servicing websites. Or you may want to hire someone to do it. Get many estimates because this can be expensive.

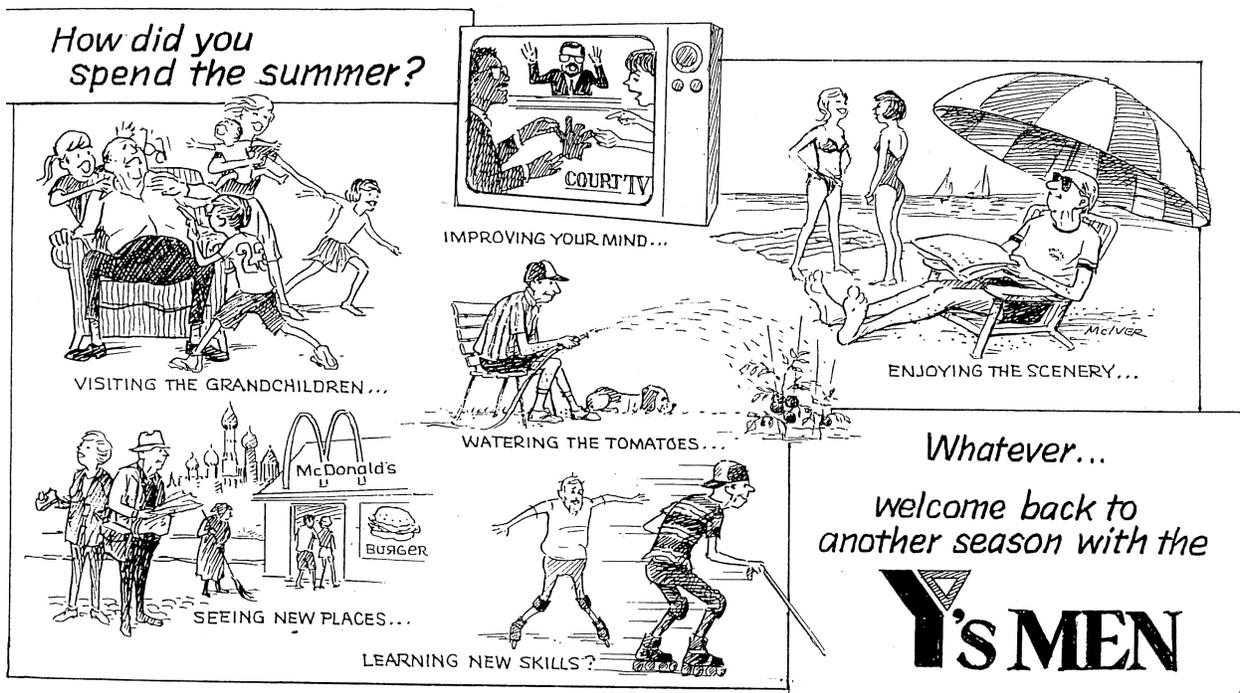
You may want to look into "Constant Contact," a small business service for sending out e-mail "blasts" to the entire membership (ours is about 400). Figure on two-three hours a week to maintain your database and to send announcements. Sure beats printing, inserting, stamping, sealing and mailing. Speaking of which, we still mail physical newsletters to the handful of members who remain computer-phobic. That monthly newsletter is also reproduced on our website. As you might imagine, the combination of e-mail and the website saves significantly on printing and mailing costs. Given annual revenue of only \$50 dues per member, that ain't hay, as your grandkids would say. (Lots more needed – write Bill Balch for help)

## Memorial Day Parade Float - We thrive on great visibility

"Build it and they will come," be it a baseball field or a parade, especially for the yearly first prize parade award our float earns year after year. (Show a flock of pictures from past years with caption or year marker) Who isn't proud of the men and women who've served our nation? And who among us, because many can't march in proper military fashion anymore, isn't proud to work on our parade float. For starters, you will probably have to partner with a local construction company that can provide the tractor and trailer on which the float will be constructed. Besides providing an outlet for our "Erector Set" days, the Y's Men earn the Town's applause and recognition. Here's what you'll need: (Insert list of what needed for the float, including committees, materials and timeline).

## Summer - The beat goes on

Even when regular meetings end in May, the summer offers many opportunities to stay engaged with the membership. Depending on the geography where you live, the summer is open season for outdoor fun. Whether it's beaches, mountains, deserts, lakes, rivers or the ocean, there's no end to the fun you can have and should have with your friends and fellows. So, as the ad says, "Just do it!"



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