

P.E.O. Membership Initiatives in Action

Chapter L, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Membership Committee Works to Strengthen Chapter

by Becky Frazier, Editor, *The P.E.O. Record*

The membership committee of Chapter L, Minneapolis, Minnesota, concedes they might be seen as obsessed, overzealous or even crazy by their P.E.O. chapter sisters...but they don't mind because they are having fun—and making a real difference within their chapter.

Chapter L, which was formed in 1915, has 45 resident members. Twenty years ago, the majority of Chapter L sisters were centrally located near Minneapolis; today members are dispersed throughout 18 cities across the Minneapolis/Saint Paul metropolitan area. Initiation dates of Chapter L members range from 1965 to the present (five generations), with the vast majority of initiations in the last two decades.

Formed in May 2010, the Chapter L membership committee is comprised of Lindsay Larson and Kris Hanson. Kris recalls, “When we met as a committee for the first time, we used the MEmbership Begins with ME document. I can’t tell you enough how helpful it is—it contains fabulous information and it motivated us to commit to our role as a committee.”

One of the first things the committee decided to do was complete a thorough chapter assessment. First, they looked at basic demographic information, average meeting attendance, participation in social groups and cumulative participation. It was important for the committee to look at the data in context. Kris said, “When we looked at the numbers for meeting attendance alone, that did not reflect the positive energy that is in our chapter. We have an active

social group and active interest groups. These are wonderful but we don’t want these activities to be a substitute for bonding during meetings.”

Part of the assessment process was holding membership focus groups—small group sessions where members were encouraged to speak candidly with each other, bond and share stories. Topics discussed in these focus groups included “What do you love most about our chapter?” and “What would you suggest we change to make our chapter more vibrant?”

Key findings and recommendations from the chapter assessment included:

- **The more we know the more we grow.** As understanding of P.E.O. procedures, projects and traditions is enhanced, sisters will be more focused and enjoy greater satisfaction.
- **Committees are critical.** Committees provide a significant opportunity to engage and build relationships.
- **Support focus groups to explore continued opportunities for improvement.**
- **Adjust structure of meeting as needed.** Support time for bonding, chapter work and programming.
- **Commit to chapter growth.** Facilitate collaboration among committees to increase outreach and recruitment.
- **Develop emphasis on nurturing.** Implement a mentor program for new members; facilitate bonding for current members.

The membership committee maintains a visible presence within the chapter. Each month they publish two columns in the chapter newsletter. Kris explains, “The most

reasonable way to share all the information we have for members is in bits and pieces. Every month we give readers gentle reminders on where to focus their energies, how to be good members and care for one another.”

One column, called “Did You Know?” aims to inspire awareness and generate interest while sharing P.E.O. membership information. Each “Did You Know” typically includes a detailed chart or graph using membership data from March 2009–March 2010. Past “Did You Know” topics have included “Where Our Chapter Members Live,” “Where Our Meetings Take Place” and “Comparisons in Attendance—Variations Due to Days of the Week and Months of the Year.”

The other membership committee column is called “Ask a Sister,” where discussion about membership is promoted in a conversational manner using a question and answer format. This is a way to get to know P.E.O. sisters better, to know how P.E.O. impacts their lives and how their lives impact P.E.O. A new question is presented to members each month at the chapter meeting. Past questions posed in the “Ask a Sister” column include “What is your favorite way to serve the chapter?” “How has P.E.O. affected your children or you as a child?” and “Have you ever heard something that made you think ‘she sounds like a project recipient?’ How might we develop our listening skills to identify potential candidates?”

A recent coup for the committee was being able to interview International President Elizabeth (Liz) Garrels for the “Ask A Sister”

feature, asking her, “Does meeting attendance equal member participation?” Liz’s response was a resounding “Yes!” and she elaborated, “As we give in P.E.O. the rewards we receive are great. Building relationships is what builds our chapters and a strong membership leads to strong relationships.”

Inspired by their interview with Liz, the membership committee asked Chapter L sisters, “What components make you not want to miss a Chapter L meeting or social event?” Answers given were:

- Staying current with sisters
- Friendships
- Learning something new about your sister
- Promoting women’s education
- Social time after meetings
- Socializing with women of different ages, professions, etc.
- Philanthropy for local communities
- Fun, laughter, learning
- Fellowship
- Interesting, well-prepared programs
- Book group
- Hearing about the great things Chapter L is doing and the women we’re impacting
- Historical connectivity of P.E.O.
- Learning from others through interesting programs
- Inspiration and loving support from each other
- Feeling like I’m part of a cozy group
- Common interests between sisters
- With a recent initiation, the reminder of the oath I took makes me want to attend
- Being a part of something “bigger”

Last fall the membership committee presented a detailed action plan with recommendations to Chapter L’s officers. The committee’s ideas



Members of Chapter L at a recent meeting

were enthusiastically received and this year the committee’s initiatives will focus on four principles and objectives:

- **Principle:** Enthusiastic participation
Objective: To inspire membership participation through committee involvement
- **Principle:** Member attendance
Objective: To increase perceived value of meetings to drive increased attendance of members and guests
- **Principle:** Strengthening the Sisterhood
Objective: To make P.E.O. “personal” again
- **Principle:** Commitment to growth
Objective: To increase membership

The Chapter L membership committee recognizes that a strong membership is crucial to a happy and healthy chapter and that it is sometimes helpful to be reminded and reflect upon how great it is to be part of P.E.O. Kris said, “Having had the beautiful experience with

Liz, we don’t have to think of ourselves within any particular arbitrary confines—city, state or country. P.E.O. extends beyond all of those boundaries.”

Chapter L’s membership committee knows that their efforts don’t stop with one or two individuals. They say, “P.E.O. truly is an organization of many inspirational women. As we draw from—and contribute to—one another, our strength builds. It has no limits. It’s about working with our sisters so they can maximize their strengths and gain from the benefits of P.E.O.” Members of Chapter L have demonstrated genuine interest in the membership initiatives—they are clearly motivated to making Chapter L and P.E.O. the best it can be. 🌸