

Good Ideas

From Deb Kruep, Illinois Trekkers

Walk Alert - The Walk Alert is a short email news brief sent out every Tuesday or Wednesday to remind all of our walkers of what's happening the following weekend. Originally it was just an email. Every walk we collect email addresses and add them to the alert. Over time we had so many our Yahoo account would lock us out thinking we were sending spam. We changed to a Yahoo group where people had to sign up through a laboring process. Over the course of a year we saw our email data base go from over 300 people to 100. People just gave up trying to sign up because it was so cumbersome. The Yahoo group would not allow the administrator to add an address.

Our numbers at events were dwindling also. In September 2013, we switched to Constant Contact. The cost is about \$10.00 a month for nonprofit organizations. It is very easy and has customer service reps to call and ask questions. They are very personable. It comes with many templates that you can customize to fit your club's needs. You may add addresses internally and/or have a button on your website where people can add themselves in just one step. The VERY BEST part is the reports! You can go online and see how many people have opened your email, when, what links they have clicked on, and if they have forwarded etc. This is such valuable information. How many times do you send out information and never know if it went to spam, deleted without reading or put in the trash? Now Illinois Trekkers knows.

We noticed a difference at the very first event after switching to Constant Contact. We had at least three people come that we haven't seen in a year. They said they had finally gotten an email! Since September we have had 12 new people sign up for the alert. This is just one tool for people to use. We still have and maintain our website, but this "Walk Alert" keeps our information in front of people every week. Out of sight out of mind.

Walks - We do not have the advantage of many great natural scenic areas locally. The St. Louis club has all of the tourist attractions across the river. So in order to keep from walking cornfield to cornfield, Illinois Trekkers has come up with "gimmicks" as some of our sister clubs call them. We are also known as the club with the "fun" walks. We like that title better! We approach smaller places that would benefit from having 100 people visit. It is a win win situation. The smaller merchant, restaurant, winery etc. need the exposure and our walkers enjoy the experience.

Poker Walk - The wheel was used to keep everyone honest. We didn't want people switching cards to create a winning hand. We did not tell them what the winning hand was until they reached the finish. If they did not have a winning hand they spun the wheel numbered one through six. Each number corresponded to a bag with prizes accumulated over time such as beanie babies (for Girl Scouts), wine glasses, bags, candy bars, gum, chips etc.

Gingerbread Cookie Walk - We work with 36 downtown merchants. Walkers may purchase a cookie bag and collect 36 different cookies along the route. Merchants like the walk. It brings people into their stores. Along the route are Gingerbread creations in the storefronts. We hire carolers, a barbershop quartet, pianist and balloon sculptor to perform at venues along the route (560 walkers in 2012).

Breakfast in a Bag Walk - Borrowed from Happy Wanderers. Eggs with stir-ins such as bacon, ham, green pepper, cheese etc. are placed in a Ziploc freezer bag, squished together and placed in a turkey fryer filled with boiling water. After seven minutes you have an omelet. Served with orange juice and a biscuit.

Soup Walk - We do this in February..brrrr.(borrowed from Nebraska club) Each person is asked to bring two cans of soup. We put one into a community pot. The other we give to the local food pantry. We hold this at a different church each year. Goal is to encourage new walkers from the church. Each person who brings soup gets a ticket. After the walk, you turn in your ticket for a bowl of soup and a slice of fresh baked bread. We usually have desserts donated and give the profits to the food pantry.

Humming Bird Walk - Walked through a local festival hosted by the Illinois Audubon Society where Humming Birds were being caught, banded and set free. Walkers could pay \$5 and adopt a bird and set it free. Festival also had snakes, turtles etc.

Christmas in July - Walked through an orchard with a Christmas tree farm. Had the start point decorated with a Christmas scene and asked everyone to wear Christmas colors. Took photos of people next to the Christmas backdrop good enough for a Christmas card!

Winery Walk - Walk through local vineyard or small tourist town. Winery gives out tastings and usually has a lunch menu. Sometimes the winery offers 10% off bottles of wine or may donate a bottle.

Way of Lights Walk - This walk is an evening walk through a local Christmas light display that has over a million lights. The Shrine also has children's activities. We give out glow in the dark bracelets. Great for a Girl Scout Walk Together.