

Submitting articles to SMOKE SIGNALS is a great way to practice writing press releases, as the newsletter is a media outlet. Here your target audience is other district Scouts, Scouters and Scouting families.

Communicating Scouting events and achievements to the public serves many purposes. Through press releases, you can let the community know what your unit has been doing, the activities you have completed, the awards your Scouts have achieved, and more.

Writing a press release that gets the attention of the media is the first step in the process. Inspiring interest from the media to run your press release is possibly the hardest part of writing an effective press release. The press release is a starting point for reporters. It gets the news in front of them, makes them aware of the events that are happening in their area. If they find your release compelling enough, they might further investigate and produce a feature story for their publication. This is the ultimate goal of the press release, but not all press releases bring about a feature story in the newspaper. Some are simply published as they are originally submitted, as a community news bulletin or even a calendar event.

So how do you create a press release that will convey your news and perhaps elicit further interest from the press?

Firstly, the news is a very timely medium. Be sure to submit your press releases immediately after an event. If you are announcing an upcoming event, be sure to submit your release at least two weeks prior to the event. This will give the reporters time to schedule a photographer (should they decide to send one) and for them to gather more information (should they decide to write a feature article.)

Writing the Press Release

When it comes to writing press releases there are five key factors to keep in mind, and those are the answers to the questions: who, what, when, where and why.

The first four are pretty basic. If you're announcing an event, you'll need to give the event details: what the event is, when and where it is being held, and who the event is for and/or being held by. The why is often a tricky answer, as a good press release tells the reader not just why you – the writer or event host – thinks the event is important, but why it is important to the reader.

Answering the last question, why, may take a bit more research or thought on your part, but it will make the difference between writing something you find interesting and writing something a publication and its readers will find interesting. And achieving that betters your chances of seeing your release in print.

Your press release should also tell a story. You could write:

Johnny Johnson of Springfield earned the rank of Eagle Scout for

his work identifying fire hydrants by marking their locations on roadways.

Or you could tell write:

When other teenagers were having fun, Johnny Johnson of Springfield spent his summer bent over hot asphalt, painting lines on miles of roadway. The lines will show firefighters the location of hydrants blocked from view by snow or cars and could result in homes, businesses and lives being saved. The work was Johnson's Eagle Scout project"

The last example begins to tell a story of not just one young man's accomplishment in the Scouts, but why his work is not only special but also matters to the reader.

Write your story from the top down, listing the most important pieces of information first (who, what, when, where & why). Editors usually cut from the bottom up to meet their space restrictions.

Formatting your Press Release

There are a few key guidelines to keep in mind when formatting your press release.

- Format with wide margins and double space between paragraphs. This allows for notes the editor or reporter might need to jot down.
- You must include contact information, name, day and evening phone numbers and email addresses. If the reporter has questions, or wants more information, they need to know how to contact you or someone in your unit. They may even wish to speak with young Johnny himself.

Submitting Photographs

We are a visual society. We love photographs and photographs are a great way to add interest to your release, they can help tell the Scouting story. And they have a better chance of being published than a straight press release. But there are rules when submitting photographs.

Photographs should be sent as individual attachments. Do not embed them in your WORD documents. The resulting image is not of sufficient quality to run in a publication.

You MUST include names with each photograph and it is best to include a brief description of what the photograph shows.

For example:

Johnny Johnson, of Springfield, marks asphalt to indicate the location of fire hydrants. This summer endeavor was Johnny's Eagle Scout community service project.

Submitting your Press Release

Releases should be typed and submitted electronically to the media. This is a tough one for those not apart of the computer generation, but is pretty essential these

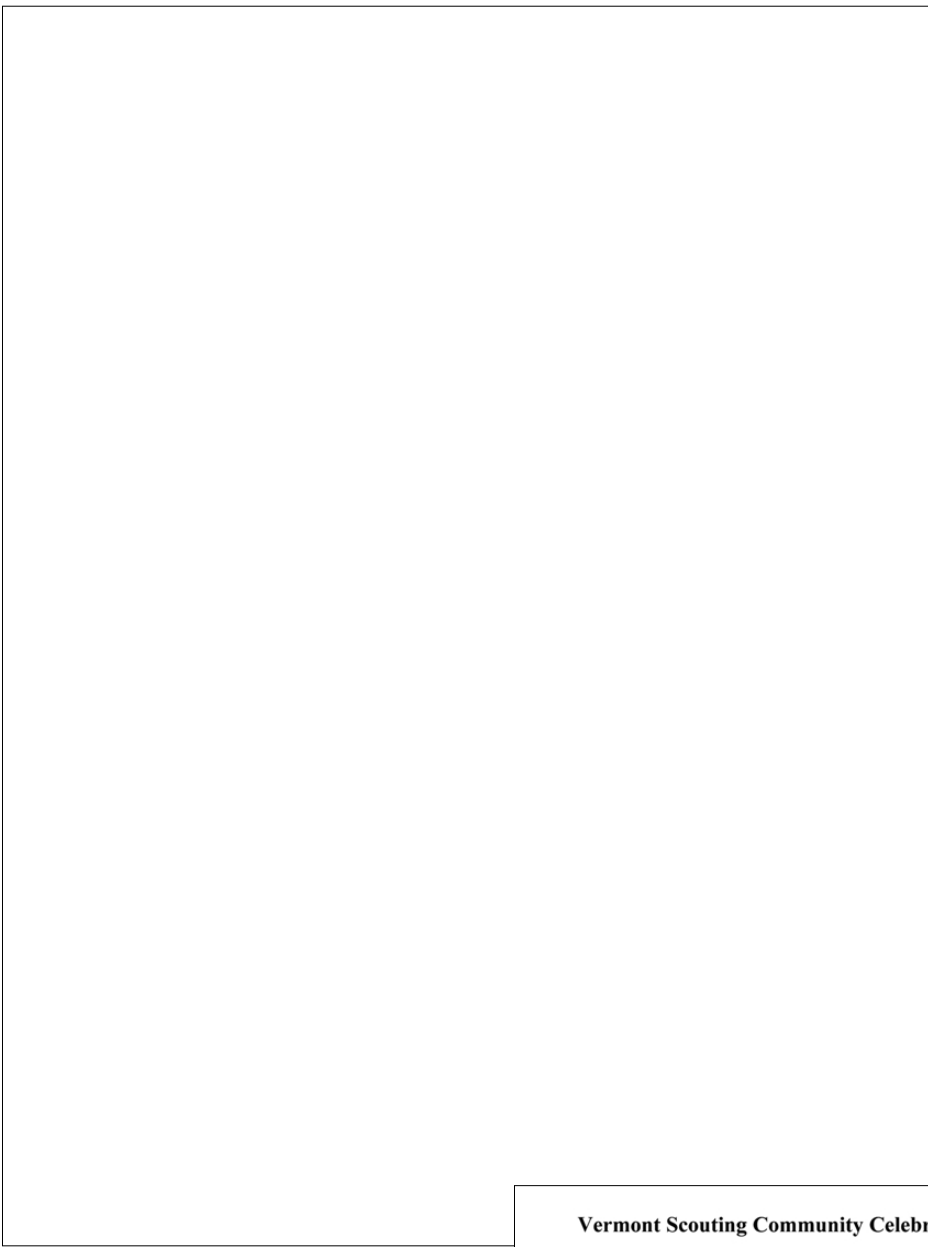
days. Electronic submissions mean less work by the media outlet to ready your release for publication and are therefore more likely to be published.

It's best to submit your release to specific individuals, such as reporter John Smith or to dedicated email address, like Community News editor.

Following up your submission with a phone call is a good idea. You can confirm that the media has indeed received your release and you can provide additional information if necessary.

And if your release is published, be sure to send a thank you note, either by mail or email. It shows you are appreciative of the media's time and efforts, and will help ensure the potential publication of future press releases.

Robin Palmer, a communications specialist and former reporter, contributed to this article.



For more sample press releases visit the PR101 section of the Long Trail District marketing materials page at www.butternutgraphics.com/longtrail or the Marketing section of the Long Trail District website at www.scoutingvermont.org/longtrail/marketing.

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out a second-story window to escape the blaze. Hanson suffered second-degree burns to his ears and some smoke inhalation, plus cuts and bruises from his 15-foot jump into the snow. Also present for the pinning were Charles Miner of Cabot Ambulance and Jennifer Miner of Cabot Fire Department. Jennifer Miner also serves as Hanson's Cubmaster.

For more information regarding the BSA Lifesaving or Meritorious Action Awards please contact Kevin O'Hara, Long Trail District Executive, Green Mountain Council, 802-244-5189, kohara@scoutingvermont.org

Photos Included:

Hanson01 – Paula Hanson pins the Honor Medal to her son, Heath's scout uniform.
Hanson02 & Hanson03 – Heath Hanson and his mother, Paula, proudly display his Honor Medal certificate and a letter from the Boy Scouts of America National Council.
Photographer: Tammy Hooker