

## **Lee Corder's tips for starting and growing your chapter.**

*Excerpted from Rolling Column "Designated Driver" October 2000*

...I have told and retold the story of forming the North Bay Chapter so I'll skip over that. I had a great model for organizing the chapter. I had been a member of the local BMW motorcycle club for a number of years. They were really well organized, had a newsletter, a dinner meeting every month and several riding and camping events every year. I loved to ride with the club and we always had fun at dinner and hanging out with each other. I thought if it worked for them, why not for Volvo nuts as well?

It has taken almost three years of hard work but I think now we have one of the most active chapters in the club. If you live in Northern California and you want to go to a Volvo event, the longest you will have to wait is 30 days. We have a core group of people who always show up, will help out, like each other, and contribute ideas and energy to making the next event a good one. To give you some perspective, our swap meet in Davis last year drew nearly 100 cars and our dinner meeting at the Pyramid Brewery was attended by 50+ people. Looking back on the experience, here are old uncle Lee's principals for a successful chapter/event.

### **1. Perseverance:**

We started really small. It took almost a year to meet enough people to form a chapter. It requires 12 and we just didn't have them. In the early days we all carried cards in our cars that we put on the windshields of Volvos we saw, inviting people to call us up and join the club. It was slow going. A couple of our early dinner meetings were attended by 4 or 5 people. We decided that rather than be discouraged, we would pick activities where we would have fun even if we did them by ourselves. If anyone else showed up it was a bonus, if they didn't we would have a ball anyway. It is a philosophy we still maintain.

### **2. Communication**

While the motorcycle club had a printed newsletter and "calling trees" to communicate, I had the idea at the start of this adventure that if we could collect e-mail addresses we could communicate with club members on the cheap. Instead of spending \$30 or \$40 in postage to notify folks of upcoming activities, I could just click a button and tell everybody at once, instantly and for FREE! It has been interesting to watch the growth of the internet through the eyes of the club. At first, three years ago, probably 30% of people in the club had e-mail. I now have e-mail lists containing over 400 names of local club members, and find it necessary to send out paper copies of stuff via snail mail to only 30 "late adapters". I wonder if the Post Office has noticed this trend, too.

Early on in the history of North Bay Chapter, we had the extremely good fortune to meet Bruce and Laureen Lloyd. They showed up at one of the very first events with a digital camera and a super cool 544. Laureen, it turns out, is a self taught web site whiz who does the site for Bruce's business and she immediately volunteered to do a chapter website. It is really great, and has been a blessing. We have a counter on the site, and it has been visited by over 7000 people since last summer. It is so great for members to log on and see pictures of themselves and their cars, to check the event schedule and see the club roster. It is one of the best things that ever happened to us.

Communication isn't a one way street. If you want people to show up you have to do something they are interested in. As every good market researcher knows, **YOUR ASSUMPTIONS ARE WRONG**. Every year we do a survey of all the people on our lists about the kind of events they like and will attend. From my background, I assumed people would love driving events, where we met somewhere and drove to an interesting spot. It turns out those kind of events are among the least popular. Here is the trick in surveying. Suggest stuff. If your survey says "What do you want to do next year?" you get no response. If you say choose between these activities, everybody has an opinion. Want to know what the big winner is every time? Take a guess. Here are the options from last year's survey

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Swap Meets

Short driving event – drive in a group to lunch or picnic.

Autocross

Overnight Trips – North coast or Sierras

Museums or Historical tours

Rally's or Poker Runs

Car show with judging

Charity events or fund raisers

Historic Races – spend the day at Sears Point or Laguna Seca

Technical Sessions at dealer or Volvo repair shop

Concours de elegance – Hillsborough or Lafayette

Meeting with guest speaker

If you guessed "Meeting with guest speaker" you lost. It is Swap Meets. Every time and by a big margin. If you want to do a meeting with a guest speaker, you have to say "Next month's activity is a SWAP MEET with a meeting and a guest speaker." That will work fine.

### 3. Attention to detail

Once you get people interested, you have to think about them. For me this is almost impossible. If you want to have successful events, find somebody like Joyce Roberts. Joyce is our chapter secretary and was an events planner for the Yountville Veteran's Home for years until her recent retirement. Joyce is God's gift to our club. She thinks of other people! She seems to do it naturally. She will say things like.... "Ummmmm, so if we have this meet where there are no bathrooms and plenty of heavy traffic, what will the people with kids do?" You just can't fault that kind of thinking. Through Joyce's tutelage we have learned to have a backdrop for the event, amenities and stuff for spouses and others to do. I mean really, there seem to be people in this world for whom a camshaft is an item of very little interest. Somewhere in the second hour of discussing the camshaft their eyes glaze over and they get bored. I know many of us can't imagine such a thing, but I have seen it (after Joyce pointed it out, of course). For a truly successful large event you must see it through the eyes of all the attendees, some excited, some bored to tears, some captives. Get the latter two categories involved and the event will be a success.

### 5. Sharing the responsibility.

People come with all sorts of talent, interest and ability. We were lucky to have a web designer, a T-shirt artist, an events planner, a communications specialist, etc. show up in our original mix. I think that is pretty common. My observation of people who own

Volvos is that they are smart and resourceful. We also have people who are less specialized but have much energy. Most folks are more than willing but just don't know what is needed or what is acceptable. When someone volunteers, quickly give them something to do. Find a way to say yes to ideas. If you shut down an idea, it is unlikely you will get a second chance. There is too much to do in a successful chapter for one or two people to handle.

#### 6. Pushing Membership in VCOA

Here is a big mistake we made in the beginning. We thought (assuming again) that people would just go ahead and join once they saw what fun we were having. They don't. At least not in the numbers we expected. You have to ask. Once they are members they behave differently. More sense of ownership, more willingness to help out, etc. It is really amazing what effect paying a small amount of money and signing the membership form has for most people.

#### 7. Making a little money

Our chapter has a bank account with a small balance. We make money on T shirt sales, doughnuts and coffee at meets, sometimes people send us a small donation when they sell something as a result of a classified ad on our website or in our newsletter. We don't charge chapter dues. The thought among our members that we need to remain solvent through our activities rather than through dues collection is a great motivator and idea generator. I'll let you in on a great secret: You can charge admission to get into SWAP MEETS! You might even get a guest speaker.

#### 8. Sponsoring and doing a National Meet.

Members flood in, and it raises the level of awareness and participation for everyone. It says to members, we have a greater purpose and we can do something very special.

Thanks for sticking with me through this. It may be a bunch of stuff you have absolutely no use for or interest in, but you read it anyway. Kind of like a day at the office.