

NARPO Stafford and Stone Sub Branch

We are fortunate to have one of the largest Sub Branches and because the Polish White Eagle Club, is more or less in the centre of our area, travelling to meetings shouldn't be a problem; however, NARPO is not getting the support of all of its members. This is a shame as NARPO is doing so much at national level to improve our pensions and look after our well being.

There are 423 members in our Sub Branch and the following is a break-down of the membership:¹

- Full Members 348
- Life members 5
- Females (Full) 19
- Widows 66
- Widowers 15

Present Activities – alas Stafford and Stone Sub Branch is one of the least active of the Staffordshire NARPO branch, it holds:

- Three business meetings per year – but only about 20 – 25 members attend our meetings and the majority are men
- One Christmas party – which is supported by over 100 members and quite a few bring their partners; but as it is open to **all** retired Police personnel more effort is needed to encourage non-NARPO members (retired police, civilians and Specials) to attend.
- General social activities - which are not supported

Need for Change – *'serving those who have served'* is highly relevant, and this is why:

- Present political climate of cost cutting will affect many of our existing members, and newly retired personnel, especially those on restricted incomes
- All members will be facing hard decisions over rising costs of food, energy and fuel including the costs of holidays and leisure activities
- For NARPO to be an effective pressure group it needs to actively engage with its membership the lower levels (the economically active) as well as the newly retired personnel, widows and widowers, and listen to their concerns; and use that information to lobby the best deals for our pensions.

¹¹ Some members fall in more than one section

- Likewise, more effort is needed from our Sub Branch membership to support the different social activities which, if successful, will improve attendance at the business meetings.

A Buddy system – Is doing what we all did best when we were in the job – *spreading the news; helping out people in crisis and telling a good story*. The following are examples of what can be done to generate interest within our Sub Branch:

- Bring a colleague member to the meeting
- Make the business meetings and social activities more interesting for partners
- ‘Bring and share’ buffet table items for meetings
- Sale tables at Meetings - Rent²a space on a table to sell/barter your own produce and handicrafts– Fresh fruit, veg, eggs, honey, home-made jams, cakes, small craft items. (not car boot sale items on these occasions)
- Helping hands – Someone always needs assistance around the home – cleaning windows, light gardening; or small household maintenance jobs
- Training – e.g. Learn a new activity – gardening, cooking, bee keeping; or set up an IT help desk to find a job or enable the wannabe ‘silver surfers’ use the local library internet cafes to keep in touch with friends and families. (Please note this would not be in competition with U3A).

Concluding Remarks

Staffordshire Branch is fortunate to have its own website and the Stafford and Stone Sub Branch does have its own page. However the website is in its infancy and although it is highly informative, the level of social networking needed to inject interest into the sub branch cannot be supported by the present system.

Cost is an issue and although we are all volunteers the present website is not sufficient to meet our need for improving communication with our membership. We are therefore, presented with a circular problem: Postage to 423 members three times a year is out of the question (£600 per annum³); personal delivery would be an option, however, the buddy system needs to be set up before we can embark on personal delivery⁴ and for that we need a more powerful/flexible website or a social networking system.

² Based on an agreed percentage of goods sold

³ Based on 50p postage per item per meeting to cover cost of stamp, letter and envelope

⁴ Otherwise mileage expenses would be incurred

There are a number of internet groups that facilitate group communication, FaceBook, Yahoo and Google to name three:

1. FaceBook's social networking site is possibly the most well-known and was initially set up for communicating with friends and families; and people with similar interest groups. A separate 'Group' page would be available for members of the Sub Branch.
2. Yahoo has their professional group that only permits membership through a series of self-monitoring group controls. One of Yahoo's most popular 'green' groups is the Yahoo Freecycling group where members, within given post code areas, are able to recycle unwanted items to each other.
3. Google, on the other hand, has the largest presence on the internet. Setting up a Google web mail account is free and there are no management costs for the group account. Google is recognised as one of the most secure⁵ internet group. In addition to the provision of free web mail addresses it also provides Google group members with the free exchange of information; and has its own telephone system, similar to Skype, that enables its users to speak, Google to Google, free of charge.

For the buddy system to work effectively, at minimum cost to the Sub Branch, it needs to use one of the internet group sites to get the members involved. The buddy system can also be used to familiarise those members without computers to use the internet cafes at the libraries. The buddy system would be fun because it is not aimed at discussing sensitive issues.

Please let me have your views.

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⁵ Its process of monitoring key strokes can be used to trace security breaches