

# Clubs Face Challenges Recruiting Young Adults

*Pacific Business News, October 31, 2008*

Hawaii Jaycees President Patrick Tomiyasu recalls the buzz generated by members at annual conventions in the early 1990's.

**PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS**

"We got together, wore our Jaycee garb, traded our Jaycee chapter pins and had Jaycee training," he said.

At the end of the conventions, the group stood in a circle, linked fingers and recited the Jaycee creed.

"Nowadays, it looks geeky to younger people," Tomiyasu said. "It's like, 'Whoa, OK, you're a joiner.'"

The Hawaii Jaycees, part of an international leadership-service group for young professionals age 40 and under, was 5,000-people strong back then. Now there are 500 members. Jaycees rituals are downplayed at annual conventions and the focus now is on professional training.

"We can't expect to do the same thing and get the same results," said Tomiyasu, who recently organized an Adopt-A-School Day to appeal to a younger crowd and unite the Hawaii Jaycees' 13 chapters.

Capturing the interest of people in their 20s and 30s is a challenge not unique to the Jaycees. The Lions, Rotary and Kiwanis clubs are concerned about legacy.

"World War II saw the peak of Lionism," said Jim Bryan, public relations chairman for the Hawaii Lions District 50, which once had as many as 2,500 members and is down to 1,800. There are 63 clubs statewide.

"As they pass on (or) become less involved because of age, we have not been able to keep those numbers consistent," Bryan said. "That's what all nonprofits are dealing with today."

Pete Horton, a baby boomer who joined Kiwanis International at age 22, said it is unfair to typecast all younger members but said he notices that the “dogma of traditional service club meetings is not as appealing to younger generations.”

People are busy.

“They don’t want to be in an hour-and-a-half meeting when they are establishing careers and families,” said Horton, executive director of the Kiwanis’ California-Hawaii-Nevada district office. There are 260 Kiwanians in Hawaii down from 700-plus in the early 1990s.

In response to time constraints, the Kiwanis in Hawaii and California have started young-professional groups emphasizing community service, not meetings. The groups gather over the Internet or for cocktails at members’ homes on Sunday evenings.

“Meetings are more about planning events, rather than doing the traditional pledge and songs,” Horton said.

Rotary clubs in Hawaii are seeing waning interest among young professionals.

“Many in the Rotary are in their 60s and 70s, bringing up the (average) age,” said Ayman El-Dakhkhni, district governor of the Rotary District 5000 and president and CEO of V.I.P. Car Rental Inc. “Our effort for a few years is trying to bring Rotary to younger business people.”

There are approximately 2,000 Rotarians in the state.

At a meeting for local Rotary presidents at the Pacific Beach Hotel earlier this month, a four-person panel from generations X and Y (also called millennials) analyzed their peers. What attracts people ages 20 to 40 to professional groups? What turns them off?

Panelist Clifton Yasutomi, 28, a Merrill Lynch adviser and president of the Rotary Club of Pearlridge, told the audience that relationships drew him to the organization.

“Younger people look for opportunities to partner with and learn from existing Rotarians that have established themselves as leaders in their business,” said Yasutomi, the youngest Rotary president in the state.

Relationships help, but there’s more to the equation, say generational experts locally and nationally.

“People lump (generation X and Y) together and think they’re the same, but they have very different characteristics,” said **Sarah Sladek** of Limelight Generations, a Minneapolis consulting firm specializing in both generations.

Gen X-ers, born between 1965 and 1976, represent between 46 million and 48 million people nationwide. They grew up during mass corporate layoffs and high divorce rates and generally are “skeptical, independent, pragmatic people who seek balance,” said Sherri Okinaga, a generational expert and co-founder with Cynthia Kitagawa of Honolulu-based Insight Consulting & Training.

The United States has approximately 80 million Gen Y-ers, or millennials. They also are called echo boomers because their parents are baby boomers. Millennials were born between 1976 and 2000. Sladek says millennials are collaborative and coachable because they generally grew up in group environments, playing team sports.

“Millennials like responsibility but like to receive a lot of guidance and feedback along the way, she said. “They are a whole new learning curve.”