

## 5-15-09 Just Imagine This Music

Just imagine being a not-for-profit organization, such as WGBH, and you receive a call from a member. The caller says, "Hi, I was looking at my membership card and I realized that it is time to renew. So, I'd like to do that now, at the same level as last year."

Wouldn't they be thrilled? It must, I am guessing, be rare for them to receive such a call, when it is so much easier for most of us to assume we will get that call when it is time and we'll think about it then. Why bother with it ahead of time or even on time, when we know they'll contact us?

Now, also imagine the time and personnel and volunteers and advertising and radio time and the cost of mass mailings, simply to remind people of their membership. All that adds up to the very high and very real cost of program administration. Just thinking about it makes me want to spare my favorite recipients the cost of reminding me of planned and expected contributions and give them more time for pursuing new funding sources and more time for what they do best.

Now imagine if that on-time responsible caller also wanted to share some feedback and ask some questions about the funded programs. That would complete the fundraiser's dream call: continuation of funding, offered independently and the sharing of useful information.

Now imagine your local town hall as the annual recipient of your contributions. Imagine also asking questions, receiving answers and offering suggestions and feedback. Not only could we save our town a lot of money but also we can make the town employees' day by asking for their help and thanking them for it.

Add to the above scenarios the concept of enforcement. NPR is not going to issue a fine if I don't contribute (although they may threaten the possible loss of programming) but many town departments deal with overseeing compliance with laws and regulations and have little choice when it comes to enforcing them. When a person or business calls ahead of time, pays fees on time and communicates with the appropriate boards and town hall departments, well, that is just music to the ears of the very fortunate town employee receiving that oh-so-helpful call.

I received a couple such calls recently. I consider myself very fortunate for having received them. One call was to talk about the new Virginia Graham Baker law regarding safety measures for swimming pool and hot tub filter pumps. Many board of health regulations come into existence in response to a tragedy and this is no exception. After the tragic drowning death of Virginia Graham Baker, granddaughter of former Secretary of State James Baker, it was realized that these accidents could be prevented by requiring that all public swimming pools and spas be equipped with anti-entrapment drain covers and/or a safety vacuum release, a suction-limiting vent system, a gravity drainage system, or an automatic pump shut-off.

When I received the call from the property manager months ahead of swimming season, I knew I was talking to someone who wanted to prevent problems and not leave this important issue to the last minute. I actually received the call moments after thinking about this new law and where it might apply in Halifax. Don't you just love it when that happens?

That ESP thing happened again recently with a call from a preschool wanting to have a camp. Camps are regulated by 105 CMR 430.000 Minimal Standards for

Recreational Camps for Children and for good reason. Who wants their children to be unsafe in any way, medically or physically? I had just been thinking, “April vacation reminds me of school’s summer vacation and that means there will be at least a couple camps. I sure would like to simplify that application process.” Well, not so much simplify it as to streamline it. It was so time-consuming last year because their package of responses was out of sync with the State’s checklist; so it just took more time going back and forth confirming completion of the application. I thought maybe I could share the checklist and ask the camp directors to submit their information in the same order. All they had to do was copy and paste their responses to line up with my checklist. Then we could fly through every item, check-check-check and still feel certain we hadn’t missed anything.

Then the phone rang. “Hi, I wanted to talk about this summer’s camp. It isn’t too early, is it?” Ah...music to my ears.

If this is the music of reason, sanity and cost savings, then, please, play on.

*Cathleen Drinan is the health agent for the Town of Halifax. She looks forward to your questions and comments, considering this to be music to her ears. She can be contacted at 781 293 6768 or [cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us](mailto:cdrinan@town.halifax.ma.us)*