

A Success Story

by Karl Wysotski

Six years ago the executive director of the Kawartha Stamp Club in Peterborough Ontario, Canada began to phase in a number of changes in the general operation of their stamp club. The results speak for themselves. This 55-year-old club experienced an increase in membership from forty to seventy-eight members, almost a 100 percent increase in six years. While visiting the APS back in October, I was encouraged by Barb Boal, the editor, to write up and share this success story.

All things considered, today's stamp collector joins a stamp club primarily to acquire stamps. Everything else is secondary. The thrust of the changes that we phased in centered on providing collectors with numerous stamps to examine or buy. So numerous, in fact, that there was never enough time at any one meeting to see all the stamps. As a result the collector had to return again and again, and invariably joined the club.

To help members acquire more stamps, almost every meeting features a guest dealer or a neighboring stamp club with their sales circuit. Beginning this fall, some of our guest dealers will also give a talk on their expertise. All told, we have booked fifteen dealers/clubs for the 2010–2011 season.

A second change was to promote the availability of 5- and 10-cent stamps at every meeting. We call this practice our "Woolworth's Books" (based on the old five-and-dime store). We have found that most collectors are very happy to look through inexpensive stockbooks to find interesting topicals and bargains. Thus, members fill stock books with 5- or 10-cent stamps, usually a worldwide mix. These books are placed on the Woolworth's Table and all members are welcomed to take these books back to their table, remove the stamps they want and pay the person whose name is on the cover. At any one meeting there will be about fifty stockbooks available to enjoy. No one will ever have enough time at any one meeting to look at all the books. In addition, different books arrive from one meeting to the next.



From left to right: Marie Olver (past president); Malcolm Pacey and Karl Wysotski (co-presidents).

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To help fill the evening, we also have an extensive club sales circuit with worldwide stamps at reasonable prices. And we have two club sales tables where members place items for sale and buyers simply purchase these items directly from the owner whose name is on the "for sale slip." In addition to all this, we have a resident dealer who attends most meetings, offering a good selection of stamps.

We hold four voice auctions throughout the year, one for each season. There is no limit on the number of lots a member can submit; however, only lots that have been marked with a check mark by an interested party will be auctioned. Lots with no interest never reach the auction block and time is not wasted. Each lot has a \$2 minimum starting price and the club holds back 10 percent as a fund raiser.

Once a year we hold a "Happy Dollar Auction" that needs some explaining. As a way of thanking members for participating in various events throughout the year we give out "Happy Dollars." These are really \$1 and \$5 vouchers that the club has printed and used as a form of currency for this particular auction. On the night of the auction, members donate tins of stamps (no junk) that will be auctioned, tins that can only be purchased with "Happy Dollars" at the auction. Naturally, the more active you are in the club, the more dollars you will



Club members pore over varied stamp offerings at the monthly meeting.

have earned in return. This particular evening is one of the most humorous meetings of the year. Members continually try to outbid one another for a tin of mystery stamps. No one is allowed to open their tin until the auction is over. Of course this auction is sweetened with a gem or two; one member already has donated a "Blue Nose" for the March 2011 auction. Everyone who signs in at the meeting will receive one Happy Dollar. Five Happy Dollars are given when you donate door prizes, enter items in an auction, help out at KAPEX, enter a one-page exhibit, give a short talk, etc.

The Kawartha Club is a chapter member (#58) of the Royal Philatelic Society of Canada. On the first meeting of the month a large selection of RPSC sale circuit books are made available for everyone.

At our December meeting we celebrate Christmas with a turkey dinner, complete with all the trimmings. This meeting takes place at twelve noon to avoid snow storms and winter night driving. Members pay ten dollars for the meal and the balance is subsidized by the club. Everyone is asked to donate a gift valued at seven to ten dollars for our traditional charity auction that follows the meal. Last Christmas we raised more than \$700 for the Salvation Army. After the auction we hold a free elimination draw whereby every fifth name drawn from the hat wins a special door prize. The last name drawn this Christmas will win a very fine stamp, namely New Brunswick #1, with a catalogue value of \$350. Of course, this is a major drawing card to attend the party.

To help you put things in perspective and compare locations, etc., the city of Peterborough has a population of 75,000 and half of our members are drawn from this city. The remainder come from the city outskirts and some members will drive an hour to get to a meeting. Toronto is an hour-and-a-half drive west of Peterborough and most dealers and guest speakers are within this range. Normally the

club meets twice a month but only one meeting in each of July, August and December.

KAPEX, our annual stamp show, takes place on the last Saturday of March at the Evinrude Centre in Peterborough. This is the main event of the year and our biggest fundraiser. We hold a major draw each year and offer wonderful prizes. The show features fourteen dealers, Canada Post, silent auctions, club sales circuit, club consignment table, Woolworth's Table, and free prizes for all the children. We also produce a show cover for each show and take pride in holding juried exhibits. To encourage new exhibitors, aside from trophies and medals we offer monetary prizes for the top one-page and one-frame exhibit. We always have at least sixty-five frames for each show.

Aside from increasing the supply of available stamps at each meeting, a number of other executive decisions also were made. For example, the membership fee was reduced from \$20 to \$10 and the loss of income was made up with a door prize draw. At present we offer at least twelve prizes at every meeting, along with \$5 and \$10 vouchers that can be used at the club sales circuit or at a visiting dealer's table. Tickets are \$1 each or three for \$2. Members are asked to donate door prizes and many are happy to do so. This draw more than covers our rental fee.

The club name was changed from the Kawartha Philatelic Society to the Kawartha Stamp Club. We are a local stamp club, not a society and the word philatelic did nothing to attract new members. At this time the day-to-day task of managing the club was taken over by co-presidents. Two heads are better than one, and we have found that one president complements the other to get the job done. Human nature being what it is, when you do a good job the reward seems to be that you get to do it again and again. The co-presidents are now in their seventh year!

Everyone wears a name tag at club meetings. We hold a name tag draw at each meeting and give away several prizes. Only those members who are wearing their name tag are eligible to win. Prizes consist of recent Canada souvenir sheets and packages of hinges.

Minutes of the previous meeting are posted for all to read, they are not read aloud. The reason being, members want more time to examine stamps and the business portion kept to a minimum.

A few years ago we decided to hold afternoon club meetings during January and February. Most of our members are retired (85%) and somewhat reluctant to drive at night during the dark winter months. In spite of this time change, we have well over thirty members attending the afternoon meetings during these winter months.

To enhance our meetings we have guest speakers and club members give a presentation. This present year we have five guest speakers scheduled and four club members will be giving a

short talk. In our club library we have a supply of many current catalogues that members can borrow. Each year the *Scott's Catalogues* are updated and the old set is auctioned at our fall auction.

As you can see, a lot of hard work is needed to achieve success. This club operates as one large family and complete trust is paramount. Some of our members have been with the club for more than forty years and they bring with them the traditions and standards that the younger members will continue to uphold. These veteran members show how important it is to give back to the club and not be there just for the taking. Success is only achieved when we all work together. By now you have a fair understanding of how the Kawartha Club operates. Hopefully you can take some of these ideas and make them work in your club. If anyone needs more information you can reach me at kingfisher@nexicom.net or through our web site at www.rpsc.org/chapters/kawartha.