



Maine State Grange

Reply to:
Walter Boomsma, Communications Director
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2016-17 Annual Report of the Maine State Grange Communications Director

Brothers and Sisters,

It is my distinct honor to again report to you some activities and accomplishments from this year's efforts. This is the third full year I have served in the capacity of Communications Director—a position created in January 2014 that both combined and expanded the historical roles of the publicity director and webmaster. My broad-based role includes assembling the printed Bulletin, maintaining the website, facilitating communication between and to State Leaders, advising on communication matters and providing information and resources to Subordinate and Pomona Granges.

During the past year I published twelve monthly Bulletins without missing a deadline. I am grateful to those directors and officers who regularly submit articles and support improving our internal communication.

The website is now in its seventh full year of operation in its current form. The objectives for the redesign in November 2010 were simple. Some of the more important included:

- To encourage prompt posting and maintenance of information and resources,
- To control that posting process with some level of moderation and quality control,
- To allow users to find basic information and resources (such as applications, manuals, etc.) readily, and
- To allow users to subscribe to the site and receive email versions of posts.

We continue to achieve those objectives. Site visits are slightly less for the most recent year, but are trending up again for the last six months. There have been just over 26,000 site visits from September 1, 2016 through August 13, 2017—an average of over 2,150 per month and over 70 per day.

One interesting observation regarding site visits is that the most visited page is the “Program Books and Information Page.” This evidences the fact that site visitors are often seeking specific information and suggests that most visits to the site are made by members. After the Home Page (where all visitors land initially) the Program Books page is the most visited. In the previous 12 months, it has been accessed an average of 100 times per month—over twice the number of any other page or post. It is also interesting that all of the informational pages receive the most visits.

Of course, numbers do not tell the entire story. It has been personally rewarding to receive an increasing number of “Exciting Granges and Grangers” posts, celebrating our accomplishments and success. Also, members and non-members are also using the site as a vehicle for asking questions—

these questions do not always appear on the site (unless they are of a general nature) but are handled by forwarding to the appropriate party or parties.

During this past year, I have continued to add resource documents and tools to our collection of communication resources available on the site. A single page directory of state officers, deputies, and directors including contact information and is available on the site, along with program books, applications, etc. that are made available by directors and state officers.

Technological changes to the site have been made, including a major change in the way site subscriptions are handled. This will give us a better handle on our subscriber list and, in time, open the doorway to some additional communication mechanisms. Since the “old” subscription system continues to function, it is still difficult to measure the number of subscribers, but we are gaining subscribers under the “new” system every week.

The ODD (Officers, Directors, Deputies) email list we created three years ago is allowing us to communicate with state officers, deputies and directors regularly and “as needed.” The service is free and quick—all that’s required is an email to me with the information that needs to be shared. I would note that of the current “ODD” list, 43 have email addresses and only 4 do not, making this an effective way to communicate.

Writing the monthly “Exploring Traditions” Column has been both inspiring and rewarding and I plan to continue to challenge members to give thought to “the Grange way of life.” Thanks to those who have sent encouraging emails, indicating you have found the information interesting and helpful.

Thanks to Heather Retberg of Halcyon Grange for her willingness to share her columns for our monthly “View from Farm.” Heather also freely shares her insights regarding legislative activity around farming and agriculture that are of interest to Grangers.

Communication from National Grange has increased and we are supplementing posts to the website with these articles as well. We have had a strong presence at the National Level with columns and local Grange stories/events being featured in the National Grange Newsletter. Danforth Grange Member Wes Ryder’s poem about the 150th Birthday was featured as a full page in the National Grange Good Day! magazine.

Thanks also to Executive Committee Member Vicki Huff for her assistance in getting us enrolled in the Amazon Smiles Program. If you are an Amazon Shopper, please use the link on our website—your shopping experience won’t change, but the Maine Grange Foundation will receive a donation from Amazon based on your purchases.

Media interest in the Grange has continued at a satisfactory rate. A challenge we continue to face is deflecting the media’s interest in our declining membership and providing news that demonstrates we are still vibrant and have potential. This seems to be more attainable on a local level, when a Grange hosts or sponsors an event. I repeat my oft-stated mantra, “It is easier to make news than to write press releases.”

Looking ahead, there are several areas I recommend for focus next year. One is the “Exciting Granges and Grangers” category. The feedback I receive from you suggests that learning about other Granges and their successes is both motivating and helpful. This past year, some Granges decided to send representatives to other Granges who are reporting success to see first-hand “how

they are doing it.” A priority for next year will be to encourage more success stories and contributions. As if to further support this, we’ve had several cases where the media has picked up those success stories from our website. I’ve also been contacted by media representatives in search of successes to report.

A second priority is expanding the “Resources for Grangers” feature of the website. While we don’t want to “clutter” the site, the goal of this feature is to provide Granges and Grangers with resources that may have value personally, provide programming and event ideas, or just be of general value. There are several challenges associated with this, but it does seem to be worthy of pursuit!

Obviously, these are both areas where your help is needed. Don’t underestimate the value of the things your Grange does. What may seem commonplace to you may be an exciting, brand new idea needed by another Grange. I admit that I get really excited when I receive an email from someone whose name I don’t recognize because I can’t wait to see what you’ve done. Photos are also great—and a photo or two with what we call a “cutline” can tell a story. (A cutline is media talk for the caption explaining the photo—usually a sentence or two.)

I believe the primary role of any state position or function is to support Subordinate and Pomona Granges. But communication is not a “one-person job.” Individuals, Community/Subordinate and Pomona Granges can best support our communications efforts by providing positive news and information.

I will also continue to encourage more open communication throughout our Order. We must generate interest and excitement among our communities, prospective members, and ourselves.

With that background, our greatest accomplishment in 2016-17 is also our greatest need for the coming year. We must continue to increase participation and information, working to build the Maine State Grange website as a “go to” place for members and friends who wish to learn more about our Order.

If there is anything I can do to help you and your Grange, please let me know.

Thank you for your continued confidence and support.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Walter Boomsma', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Walter Boomsma

Maine State Grange Communications Director

<http://mainestategrange.org>