

Junior League Campaign Emphasizes Modern Concerns

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The Association of Junior Leagues International has commissioned a new public service advertising campaign that it hopes will dispel the leagues' elitist image and attract new members and sponsors.

Founded in 1901 in New York City by a debutante, Mary Harriman, to improve living conditions of immigrants, AJLI now has 292 local organizations. All but seven are in the United States, where membership totals almost 160,000; there are also leagues in Canada, Mexico and Britain.

According to Debbie Brown Robinson, president of AJLI and former president of the Junior League of Houston, local leagues have "historically provided women the opportunity to develop leadership skills they would not be able to learn in the workplace." This mission is so important league members reaffirmed the organization's women-only membership status in 1995.

What has changed over the last century are the various social service initiatives local leagues support, as well as their membership base.

Among the issues local league programs focus on today are literacy, children's and women's health, and domestic violence. The Lehigh Valley, Pa., Junior League, for example, sponsors a "books for babies" program for parents of newborns, while the Junior League of Salt Lake City runs an annual fair that provides free medical care to needy families.

Junior League members — 72 percent of whom are age 54 or younger, 88 percent of whom are college graduates, and 57% of whom work — are required not only to pay dues but also to perform an average of 60 to 75 hours of volunteer work annually, according to Mrs. Robinson. She also said league members "are much more reflective of the communities they serve. The leagues across the United States have become much more racially, ethnically and religiously diverse; members are no longer just white Anglo-Saxon Protestants."

The new ads — created by Beard & Boone Marketing, a Dallas-based agency, for use by local Junior Leagues worldwide — was developed, Mrs. Robinson said, to respond to leagues' demand for a national advertising campaign. In 2000, AJLI commissioned another international public service campaign that featured only print and radio ads; the new campaign includes print, radio and TV advertising.

"This is the perfect time to lift awareness about what the Junior League is doing in communities," Mrs. Robinson added. "There's so much going on in the nonprofit world. [President Obama](#) has lifted the awareness of volunteer service, and since 9/11, there is an increase in individuals who want to give back to their communities." Prospective Junior League members are also being wooed by other volunteer groups, like the [American Cancer Society](#), Susan G. Komen for the Cure and [Habitat for Humanity](#), Mrs. Robinson said. "We feel we offer women a place to volunteer, hone their leadership skills and make an impact on their communities," she added.

The new campaign — which consists of two 15-second TV spots, two 30-second radio spots and three print ads — toys with the Junior League's stereotypical image.

One print ad — whose headline says, "Let's share some stories...and make a difference!" — depicts four women (including one who is African-American) reading to a racially diverse group of children. The copy says "Junior League women love to share stories, particularly ones with a happy ending like teaching kids to read. Every year, thousands of Junior League members volunteer their time, energy and abilities to tackle urgent needs in their communities. They work to prevent violence against women and children, promote early childhood education, battle childhood obesity, improve women's health and much more."

The ad concludes with a call to action: "So join your local Junior League. It's a novel approach to improving the world, one community at a time."

The headline on another print ad, depicting a group of women painting a room, reads, "Let's paint the town...and make a difference!" while a third print ad depicting three women teaching a group of children to cook says, "Let's do lunch...and make a difference! Junior League women love to do lunch, especially

when it makes a lasting difference in the community. Like creating programs that help children learn how to make healthy eating choices and battle childhood obesity.”

Similar radio and TV spots promote leagues’ literacy and children’s healthy eating programs. All ads can be customized to include a local league’s Web site address and telephone number.

Brice Beard, president of Beard & Boone Marketing, says the new campaign — which resembles work the agency did earlier for the Junior League of Dallas — is meant to counter “the perception that the Junior League is more of a social organization. There’s no understanding of the volunteer hours and money the Junior League gives to the local community; they do fund-raising to fund community projects.”

Mrs. Robinson said the new campaign is also intended to attract new members and new partners, either local businesses that can sponsor league activities, or local organizations, like Habitat for Humanity, with which local leagues can cooperate on community programs.

Local Junior Leagues can download the print and radio ads free from the AJLI Web site; they must pay a nominal fee to have a customized voice-over created for a TV spot. Mrs. Robinson said local leagues will determine whether they will distribute the ads as a public service campaign, or buy space or time for them.