

ANDY RICHARDSON MY TURN

Non-profit matches speakers with audiences



Maricopa County has a vast number of not-for-profit groups, clubs and organizations. In fact, you could say the county is awash with astonishing generosity and community spirit.

According to the Alliance of Arizona Nonprofits, the state is home to more than 21,000 non-profit organizations that employ more than 160,000 people and engage thousands of volunteers.

Think about libraries, retirement communities, churches, women's groups, men's groups, Rotaries and chambers of commerce, to mention a few. All of them are doing good things for people, and many of them feature a guest speaker at their meetings.

Many times, guest speakers take the stage (or at least stand up) and offer interesting, relevant topics. Booking speakers can become very costly, but most groups mentioned here do not have deep pockets for guest speakers.

FreeSpeakers.org to the rescue. Launched in Phoenix in July, this new non-profit bureau features speakers who will come to your group and present a talk — for free. Really, for free.

The speakers are generous people who donate their talks for a variety of reasons — to teach, to tell of a personal mission, make contacts, convey a message, give back to the community and frequently, all of the above.

"FreeSpeakers.org has been a god-send to our Rotary Club," said William Sutton, program director, Hinsdale-Oak Brook Sunrise Rotary Club. "The speakers are reliable and never fail to deliver as promised."

Very humble beginnings

FreeSpeakers.org was started unintentionally.

Years ago, Ginny Richardson, my business partner (and mother), had a newspaper career in Chicago and from

that, a vast network. She would get calls asking if she knew anyone who could give a talk. She always recommended friends and/or colleagues who had a good topic. One of her friends, a fitness guru, named her talk, "Fifty Ways to Lose Your Blubber."

This very casual list of speakers grew. In the spring of 1996, she sent mailers to libraries, clubs, chambers, Rotary and Kiwanis groups, churches, etc. Requests began to multiply.

She enjoyed this matchmaking so much, she decided to do it as a community service project and not charge a dime. What is surprising is the number of people interested in becoming speakers in the bureau — very high-level people, all with experience and willingness to give a talk, unconcerned about the size of the audience or the donated time.

The next generation takes over

I took over the duties of FreeSpeakers.org 10 years ago with a mission to expand the concept to other cities — Milwaukee, Indianapolis and, most recently, Phoenix.

People are sometimes suspicious when they experience this totally free service. A typical response is, "Yeah, but how do you make money?" Ginny delights in saying, "We don't. We do this as community service." People are astounded.

It is a labor of love for all of us, and we are proud of the speakers and the wide variety of topics offered.

Phoenix groups, FreeSpeakers.org is for you. To request a speaker for your group visit <https://phoenix.freespeakers.org/>.

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