

# Village of Skokie

## Marketing and Communications Plan Update 2011- 2016



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## Village of Skokie

### Marketing and Communications Plan Update 2011 – 2016

#### **I. Introduction**

In 1999, the Skokie Village Board adopted the Village's first five-year Marketing and Communications Plan. An updated plan was approved by the Village Board in 2004. Both plans outlined communications outreach goals and tactics for reaching Skokie residents, businesses, both the public and commercial sector outside of Skokie, the media, fellow governments and Village employees.

The Village strives for excellence in communications to all constituents. Providing professional and coordinated communication is essential to both quality customer service and maintaining a positive image for the community.

#### **II. Marketing and Communications Team**

The Village Manager, Assistant Village Manager, Director of Marketing and Communications, Public Information Officer/Management Analyst and Public Information Secretary serve as the Village's Marketing and Communications Team. In addition, all Village officials, appointed board and commission members, Village employees, Skokie residents, business owners and employees at Skokie businesses also serve as communications ambassadors for the Village.

#### **III. Plan Principles and Goals**

##### Principles

- This marketing and communications plan is centered on the expectations of the community.
- The plan supports and reinforces the Village's goals to provide thorough, excellent communications to all sectors and constituents.
- The intent of the plan is to be proactive rather than reactive.
- The plan continues the Village's practice of communicating timely, accurate and useful information to all audiences in a clear, professional manner.
- The plan continues and enhances the Village's commitment to a two-way flow of information which is essential to ongoing communications excellence.
- It is important to distinguish between public information and marketing:
  - Public Information – necessary information about programs and services.
  - Marketing – good news, positive emphasis on community programs and services in an effort to enhance Skokie's image, reputation and desirability as an excellent location in which to live, work or establish a business.

## Goals

With this plan, the Village strives to accomplish the following as allowed by staff and fiscal resources:

- Strengthen outgoing communication to Skokie residents and businesses;
- Further utilize Village employees and board/commission members as ambassadors for Village information;
- Increase opportunities for incoming communication from Skokie residents and businesses;
- Maintain and increase Skokie's focus on high-quality economic development communications and marketing outreach;
- Maintain and increase Skokie's visibility locally, regionally, nationally and globally as a quality community in which to live, work and locate a business;
- Maintain and increase property values in the community; and
- Continue to cultivate strong relationships with the media.

## **IV. Plan Development**

The updated Marketing and Communications Plan is intended to serve as a guide to achieve the Village's communications goals in 2011 and beyond. As with the Village's prior Marketing and Communications plans, it is an evolving document that will be updated and evaluated annually, at minimum, as part of the Village's budget development process. Additional evaluation will occur as opportunities are presented, community needs surface and as resources available for plan implementation fluctuate.

The updated Marketing and Communications plan was developed after a considerable amount of research, including:

- Review of the Village's 2009 National Citizen Survey;
- Review of other municipal marketing and communications plans from Clayton, Ohio; Red Wing, Minnesota, Hickory, North Carolina and Peoria County, Illinois; and
- Individual or focus group interviews with nearly 75 individuals:
  - Mayor, Village Clerk and all Trustees
  - Village department directors, and most deputy directors
  - BIG employee committee
    - Eight front-line employee representatives from the Corporation Counsel's Office and the Finance, Health, Police and Public Works Departments
  - Representatives of the Skokie:
    - Chamber of Commerce
      - Focus group with executive director and representatives of the Illinois Science + Technology Park, Westfield Old Orchard, IMODS and other Skokie businesses
    - Library
      - Executive director, board representative and public information office

- Park District
  - Executive director, superintendent of recreation, board chairman, public information officer
- Skokie Hospital
  - Executive director and community relations manager
- Other community organizations:
  - Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau
    - Executive director
  - Oakton Community College
    - Dean, Skokie campus and director of college advancement
  - Niles Township English Language Learners Parent Center
    - Meeting with executive director and focus group with seven immigrant women who have lived in the United States for an average of six years
  - School Districts
    - Superintendent, District 68
    - Superintendent, District 69
    - Superintendent, District 72
    - Superintendent, District 219 and public information officer
  - Skokie Voice
    - Chairperson and chairpersons of four other Skokie Voice subcommittees
- Other Skokie residents:
  - Sarah Alexander – Skokie resident/former *Know Your Neighbor* Week host
  - Burt Burdeen – Skokie resident/Neighborhood Watch block captain
  - Jim Coney, Chairman, Human Relations Commission
  - Janette Enwia – Skokie resident/Beautification Commission member and former *Know Your Neighbor* Week host
  - Judy Jackson - Skokie resident/Neighborhood Watch block captain
  - George Mitchell, Plan Commission
- Area real estate professionals:
  - Carolyn Smith, Prairie Shore Properties
  - Donna Zupancic, @ Properties

During the interview process separate lists of questions were used for those internal to the organization and those interviewed who represented outside organizations.

Those internal to the organization were asked to comment on how they would change the 2004 plan goals:

1. Increased public awareness of Skokie and quality of life in the community, primarily by Skokie residents and also by those outside of the community that results in a continued desirability to live and work in Skokie and property values that increase above the norm.

2. Maintain and, where necessary, enhance communication outreach to Skokie residents and businesses.
3. Maintain, and where necessary, improve Skokie's image as a commercial and industrial center and a desirable place to conduct business.

Many of those interviewed commented that the first goal seemed too long, but that they generally agreed with the goals. The 2011 goals, as outlined in section III, include all of the 2004 goals but in simpler, more clarified terms.

There were no specific changes suggested to the list of target audiences, however, the common sentiment of focusing more on communication to Skokie residents and businesses was pervasive, with a lot of emphasis on personal communication. Thus, these constituents remain at the top of the 2011 target audience list.

Internal interviews included a number of additional questions, a sample of which include:

1. What Village program or service do you think does not get the attention/recognition it deserves?
2. What Village communications outreach programs would you like to see implemented, and why?
3. What information do you think residents want from the Village that they're not getting? How could we better communicate with residents? The business community? Village employees? Board and commission members?

External interviews included a variety of additional questions, including:

1. What Village communication outreach program do you think most needs improvement or expansion, and why?
2. In what area or areas relative to communications would you like to have further cooperation/collaboration between the Village and your organization?

Consensus of opinion on *NewSkokie* as an informative piece mirrored the 2009 citizen survey in which nearly 90% of those surveyed gave the newsletter excellent/good ratings. Some of those interviewed expressed a desire for more in-depth articles about Village policies and programs in addition to the routine program and service news. Other common threads among those interviewed include:

- The Village should embark on a campaign to recruit young families to the Village of Skokie;
- Concern over the amount of foreclosed properties in the community;
- Some of those interviewed believe that the Village should venture into social media, such as Facebook, by establishing a 'fan page' that directs visitors to the Village web site;
- Several people suggested that *NewSkokie* should be given a facelift, possibly adding more color and photos;
- The Village's web site is good and functional, but consideration should be given to technology advancements and upgrades, such as streaming videos and providing an RSS feed through which people could opt to receive automatic notification of new postings;

- The Village’s web site should feature more community photos or simple surveys with results announced online to draw residents to the site;
- Efforts should be made to promote and encourage volunteerism in the community; and
- The largest, most pervasive sentiment was that the community needs more personal outreach from the Village through small forums with residents and businesses, forming a speakers’ bureau to give presentations to community groups and more to provide personal interaction.

Numerous individual ideas for improved or expanded communications were expressed in the interviews. To the extent possible, many of these ideas are reflected in this Marketing and Communications Plan.

## **V. Target Audiences**

Identifying and prioritizing target audiences are key components of an effective marketing and communications plan. The prioritized order of the plan’s target audiences is as follows:

- Skokie residents
  - Residents of Skokie continue as the highest priority target audience. Continuing to foster two-way communication with Skokie residents is the most appropriate starting point of a sound communications program.
- Skokie businesses, including daytime population
  - In tandem with outreach to Skokie residents is increasing effective communications to Skokie businesses. Quality information outreach to the Village’s existing commercial base is an important plan component. It also is important to reach the Village’s considerable daytime population that comprises a strong, growing market for the community. Communicating with Skokie’s service organizations and non-profit agencies is another important priority.
- Village employees and members of Village boards and commissions
  - People employed by the Village of Skokie in its various departments comprise the third target audience category. Presently, there are just over 500 Village employees involved in a wide variety of services. Effective communications with employees is essential to maintaining and enhancing the Village’s quality customer service delivery. It also is essential to build communications with the Village’s more than 250 appointed board and commission members who serve as community ambassadors.
- Commercial sector outside of Skokie
  - The commercial sector outside of Skokie remains a priority audience for the Village’s marketing efforts. Outreach such as radio advertising, participating in appropriate trade shows and other efforts geared to business recruitment will continue as a marketing priority. Specific outreach to commercial real estate professionals and representatives of

major Chicago corporations who advise transferees on communities in which to seek housing will be implemented.

- Residents outside of Skokie
  - Promoting Skokie as a wonderful community in which to live and raise a family or to visit on a weekend to experience unique ethnic dining will be a priority in this marketing plan. This will include marketing efforts at the Skokie Swift stations and at Westfield Old Orchard.
- Tourists
  - Through affiliation with the Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau and other outreach, Skokie will continue to be promoted as a lodging, dining and recreational destination to those considering visiting the North Shore area.
- News media
  - The media are important because their coverage of the Village government influences Skokie's image among other target audiences. For purposes of the Marketing and Communications Plan, news media includes a variety of print and broadcast entities.
- Other (fellow governments, trade associations, etc.)
  - Involvement in and recognition by peer governments and related organizations enhances the Village's overall image.

## **VI. STRATEGIES AND TACTICS**

### Strategies

The following strategies will be used to achieve Marketing and Communications Plan goals:

- Employ a multi-media and multi-level communications approach by developing and using a number of communications activities and various techniques and tools.
- Use interactive communications tools and techniques wherever and whenever possible to involve target audiences and increase their commitment to the communications process.
- Cross-promote Marketing and Communications Plan tactics whenever possible, and cross-promote programs with outside agencies such as the Skokie school districts, the Skokie Public Library, Skokie Park District, North Shore Center for the Performing Arts in Skokie, Skokie Northshore Sculpture Park, Skokie Chamber of Commerce, Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau, Skokie school districts, service organizations, non-profit agencies and others. The annual Skokie Festival of Cultures and Backlot Bash are examples of opportunities for the Village to cross-promote with fellow government agencies, service organizations and non-profit groups.
- Continue developing a communications research program, using both formal and informal research methods to measure attitudes and opinions, as well as current and desired sources of information.



## Tactics

The tactics suggested for achieving the Marketing and Communications Plan goals are organized according to the target audience to which they are primarily directed. It also is noted whether tactics are continued from the original plan or represent a new initiative.

*With many of the tactics, there is the potential for overlap in terms of reaching more than one target audience. For example, enhancing the Village's web site provides increased information and convenience for Skokie residents, businesses and Village employees while also improving the Village's external image.*

An implementation timeline for each tactic is presented, and the tactics section is followed by a five-year work plan.

### **Skokie Residents**

#### 1. Expand *NewSkokie*

**Ongoing Initiative:** As validated by the 2003, 2006 and 2009 citizen surveys, the Village newsletter is a primary means of communication outreach to Skokie residents and businesses and will continue to be issued at least nine times annually. The newsletter contains a wealth of important program information for Skokie residents, presented in an attractive, inviting, professional format. Potential enhancements to the newsletter will continue to be discussed on a regular basis, and inserts on construction, water quality and other topics will continue as the budget allows. Special sections will begin on the front page and continue in the body of the newsletter for greater visibility.

**New Initiatives:** A request for proposals for the contract to print *NewSkokie* will be issued in fall 2011. At that time, cost implications for adding color and other visual amenities will be explored. Content adjustments will be reviewed. While an emphasis will continue on imparting important service and program information, more attention will be given to including articles about policy decisions and other longer-term, strategic Village initiatives. The newsletter also will be used to showcase Village boards and commissions, with a new board/commission page being featured in each edition beginning in April 2011. Also, consideration will be given to providing recognition to residents who participate in the *Know Your Neighbor* initiatives and other positive community programs.

Years 1 - 5: Publish newsletter at least nine times annually with several four-color inserts produced annually and ongoing improvements and new features in each edition.

#### 2. Web Site – [www.skokie.org](http://www.skokie.org)

**Ongoing Initiative:** The Village continually adjusts the web site for content and appearance. Emphasis will continue on timely information updates and functionality, with staff striving for a user-friendly format. In addition to outgoing communications, the web site features a resident information query system that is continually monitored, with an emphasis on response in 24 hours or less.

New Initiatives: New technologies will be investigated to draw more visitors and enhance the site's functionality. Such enhancements could include a Real Simple Syndication (RSS) feed function. Utilizing an RSS feed would enable the Village to publish web updates, including posting press releases, into the feed. People interested in knowing when the Village web site has been updated would need to subscribe to receive the feeds. All RSS feed subscriptions are anonymous, and give the reader instant access to updated information from the web sites of their choice instead of having to check the sites continually for updates. Other options also will be explored for showing videos on the Village web site.

Content enhancements also will be considered, including adding brief, fun, positive surveys posted for short periods of time with the results reported on the home page. An example might be: What is your favorite Skokie park, and why? Other content enhancements could include feature slides with the top 10 best things about Skokie, and other positive showcasing for the community, or a rotating 'How to' feature that provides information on how to plan a block party, how to join a Village board or commission, how to volunteer in the community, etc. A rotating schedule will be established to work with individual departments to make sure their page is functional and implement any additional pages or other enhancements. Consideration will be given to additional cross-promotion with the library, park district, chamber of commerce and other organizations to enhance Skokie's image as a vibrant community with an abundance of activities and programs for all ages.

Years 1 – 5: Year one, research updated technology options and review content changes, and also begin working with departments on a rotating basis. Years two through five, continue to review new technologies and content enhancements.

### 3. Social Media

New Initiative: Interest in social media, including Facebook, Twitter and other 'instant' outreach tools is increasing, particularly among younger demographics, however; several recent Village surveys show that a Facebook page is not of interest to a majority of Skokie residents. One survey was conducted at the 2011 *Know Your Neighbor* coffees, and the second online survey was sent to 3,000 *SkokieNews* subscribers during summer 2011. Despite this, staff believes that a Facebook page would resonate with younger residents, possibly with prospective residents (younger) and that it could be a useful tool for economic development-related promotions.

The marketing team plans to work closely with the Economic Development Division staff to launch a Facebook page in early 2012 that will focus solely on economic development. The Village does not feature or permit commercial-oriented information on the web site or in *NewSkokie*, except for twice-yearly new business listings and Downtown Skokie information. A Facebook page dedicated to economic development could include promotional information about Skokie businesses and restaurants as a means of generating interest in Downtown Skokie, West Dempster Street and possibly other business districts.

A strong concern about starting a Facebook page is the possibility of people posting inappropriate/inflammatory comments. While Village staff would monitor the site, even on evenings and weekends, there is the possibility of unacceptable messages remaining on the site until staff can review and remove. There is currently no means of preventing visitors from commenting on Village posts. As a component of staff's ongoing research on this subject, a draft social media policy plan and policy were developed and are attached as Exhibit A.

The Marketing Team will monitor response to the new economic-development-oriented Facebook page. Staff also will continue to research other appropriate social-media-type communications to target a younger audience ("Millenials"), including Twitter and other emerging social media outlets, and will explore other options for two-way communication with the community.

Year 1: Finalize the social media policy and procedures and launch an economic-development-focused Facebook page in early 2012.

Years 2 – 5: Monitor the new Facebook page and research other emerging social media outlets.

#### 4. *SkokieNews*

Ongoing Initiative: The Village issues an electronic newsletter at least once each month to approximately 3,000 subscribers. The subscription base includes all Village employees and many of the Village's appointed board and commission members. The newsletter is issued more often during emergencies, such as during the 2011 summer storms and blizzard and the 2009 H1N1 crisis.

New Initiatives: Assistance will be enlisted from the Village's boards and commissions to recruit neighbors and friends to subscribe to *SkokieNews*. Other methods of bolstering the subscription base will be explored, including through schools, and offering a prize incentive for new subscribers (Village coffee mugs, \$10 off on a water bill, etc. by random drawing of new subscribers each month, etc.). Explore adding enews subscription information to all Village publications.

Year 1: Reach out to board and commission members to assist in recruiting more subscribers. Develop other methods for increasing the subscription base.

Years 2 to 5: Implement programs to increase the subscription base.

#### 5. 1660 AM Skokie Radio

Ongoing Initiative: Promotion of the Village's emergency radio station will continue. During non-emergency times, emergency preparedness information will air. Outreach will continue in *NewSkokie* and will be pursued through Skokie schools, houses of worship and other outlets. Sometime in years two or three of the marketing plan, the narrow use of the radio station for emergency communication only will be

revisited with consideration for using the station to promote other programs as is consistent with FCC license which prohibits advertising on the station.

Years 1 – 5: Promote radio station to community.

Year 2 or 3: Revisit narrow use of station with consideration for promotional use as allowed under FCC license guidelines.

## 6. Topical Publications

Ongoing Initiative: The Marketing and Public Information Division will continue to edit existing and new department- or program-specific booklets, informational letters or pamphlets for citizen use. When necessary, revisions will be made and new publications will be developed in cooperation with the appropriate Village department.

Years 1-5: All department and division booklets and pamphlets edited for accuracy and style. New publications developed as needed and as resources allow.

## 7. Display Booths

Ongoing Initiative: In conjunction with Village open house events, graphics for the Village's professional display booths will be reviewed and updated as necessary. Booths are currently used by the Community Development, Fire, Health, Police and Public Works Departments, Human Services Division and by the Manager's Office. If warranted by wear, new booths should be purchased in years four and five of the plan, staggering departments for budgeting purposes. The booths were originally purchased in 1999, with a new Economic Development booth purchased in 2006.

Years 1 – 5: Update department booth graphics and explore using booths at external venues to promote Village services and programs, replacing booths as necessary.

## 8. Develop "How To" Brochures for Village Processes

Ongoing Initiative: A series of "How To" brochures have been developed for residents to use when approaching the Village for permits, variances or other administrative requests. The Marketing Division will continue to work with appropriate Village departments to prioritize ongoing information needs and to develop additional brochures as necessary. Topics can include how to plan a block party, how to coordinate a home remodeling project and the required permitting/inspection process, etc. Existing brochures will be updated as required by changes in policies, procedures or other information. Brochures will be displayed at Village Hall, distributed by Village departments and at community events and in other venues as appropriate. Brochures also will be posted on the Village web site.

Years 1 - 5: Continually prioritize information needs, developing new brochures and updating existing brochures as necessary.

## 9. Develop Video Programs

Ongoing Initiative: Marketing and Public Information staff will collaborate with Multi-Media Division staff to develop new informational videos on Village departments and key services. In the first year, at least one video program will be developed about the Police Department. In addition, the Welcome to Skokie and Health Department videos will be updated. A video on alternate side parking also will be considered for the first year. Additional topics will be explored annually in years 2 to 5, including a video showcasing Skokie's diversity, programs and assets as a means of generating community pride. All programs will be featured on Skokie's cable television channels and also accessible from the Village web site.

Years 1 - 5: Continually prioritize information needs, developing new video programs and updating existing videos as necessary.

## 10. Review New Resident Packet and Develop New Resident Information in Multiple Languages

Ongoing Initiative: Due to cost constraints and the availability of online information, the Village no longer mails a new resident packet to each residence upon property transfer. While some new resident packets are still issued by mail, the majority of new residents are receiving Village information by email or through the Village web site.

New Initiative: The costs of developing a welcome post card for new residents inviting them to go online or call for a new resident packet will be explored. New residents could also be invited to Village Hall for a brief reception before a Village Board meeting to pick up a new resident packet, meet officials and stay for the meeting if they choose. Provide the Finance Department with a supply of the new post cards to distribute to residents who live in apartments and buy their first vehicle sticker.

In addition, and in conjunction with the Human Services Division, staff will look at the feasibility of developing simple instructions on critical information for new residents in the top five or ten languages noted in the annual school home language survey. The sheet is likely to include emergency preparedness information as well as information about vehicle stickers, alternate side parking and Health and Human Services programs. These information sheets will be distributed through the library, schools, ELL parent center and other community outlets. They also will be posted on the Village web site.

Year 1: Research cost of developing/ mailing postcard to new residents and, if feasible, implement initiative. Also research feasibility of new resident reception in conjunction with a Village Board meeting and implement in year one or two.

Year 2: Research translating new resident information into top languages cited in the annual school home language survey.

## 11. Alternate Side Parking Notifications

Ongoing Initiative: Each fall, staff from Public Works, the Village Manager's Office and the Marketing/Public Information and Multi-Media Divisions convenes to review the process of alerting the community to the declaration of the Village's alternate side parking program. Current methods include posting notices on the Village web site, crawl messages on both cable channels, messages on 1660 AM Skokie and the snow hotline (847/675-SNOW), emergency sirens and cable program emergency interruptions.

New Initiative: In fall 2011 staff from all departments and divisions involved with alternate side parking will review all notice methods, and consider dropping those that are unreliable or outmoded, such as the emergency cable override that can no longer be restricted just to Skokie subscribers. When appropriate, new communications tools will be added. Possible new methods could include Facebook postings and use of CodeRED text messaging.

Year 1: Review public notice notification methods and drop those that are unreliable or outmoded. Analyze adding new methods. Publicize program changes.

Years 2 to 5: Annual review of notification methods and publication of program changes.

## 12. Public Open House

Ongoing Initiative: The Village hosts a public open house every two years on the even year. In fall 2010, the event was held at the new Police Headquarters for a considerably lower cost. On odd-numbered years the Skokie Fire Department traditionally holds an open house at one of the three stations. The next public open house will be held in fall 2012, location to be determined.

New Initiatives: Review options for other community events, such as the Know Your Neighbor program and Village-sponsored community forums to reach more residents at a lower cost. Intergovernmental programs could be considered, with cost-sharing by the agencies involved. An open house could be held at Village Hall every few years, possibly in conjunction with other community events, such as the Backlot Bash. Also, consider beginning a "Skokie 101" program with limited enrollment, held over the course of several weeks, to provide information on community programs and services. A certificate of completion could be awarded and meetings with officials could be included in the program.

Year 1: Hold a Village open house in fall 2012, location to be determined.

Years 2 to 5: Review options for program changes and implement program changes.

### 13. Surveys

Ongoing Initiative: Every three years the Village contracts with the National Research Center in Boulder, Colorado, to conduct a statistically valid opinion survey of Skokie residents. The next such survey is slated for 2012.

New Initiatives: Research cost of conducting a survey of Skokie businesses in the first year about their satisfaction with Village services. If economically feasible, implement in year one; if cost prohibitive, implement in year three which will be an off-year for the citizen survey. Changing the three-year citizen survey cycle is not recommended as long as funding is available. The information gleaned and trends identified from the citizen surveys are important for program development.

Other surveys of residents and businesses will continue as required by grants or other programs or as Village staff deem necessary to gather information. For example, in July 2011 the Village sent an on-line survey to 3,000 *SkokieNews* subscribers about electronic communications preferences and received more than 800 responses. In summer, 2011, the Village participated in a number of focus-group type meetings involving West Dempster Street property owners, merchants and area residents. These meetings were required by an RTA grant the Village received and served to provide a sense of what the various constituents would like to take place in the West Dempster Street area.

Consideration also should be given to resident exit and entrance surveys. The former could be done as a condition of property transfer processing; the latter could be done in conjunction with the new resident postcard mailings and/or receptions proposed in number nine above. An incentive could be offered for new residents to complete and return the survey, such as two coffee mugs or other small premium from the Village.

Year 1: research costs and program parameters for business survey. If feasible, implement. If cost prohibitive, include in third-year budget. Research resident exit and entrance surveys and implement one or both as resources and staffing allow.  
Years 2 to 5: National Citizen Survey in years 1 and 5; possible business survey in year 3.

### 14. Board and Commission Outreach

New Initiative: Develop methods of better utilizing volunteer board and commission members as community ambassadors. Possible programs include special board/commission e-newsletters and annual visits to each commission by Mayor Van Dusen. Boards and commissions with special projects, such as the Farmers' Market (Consumer Affairs Commission), SOAR (Fine Arts Commission) and others will be featured, along with the program information, in a new display on the first floor of Village Hall. Consideration also should be given to hosting small, low-cost receptions in conjunction with commissions prior to Village board meetings to recognize residents who participate in positive community programs, such as property

beautification, block party organizers (not just winners), Know Your Neighbor program hosts, etc. Ideas to better utilize commissioners also will be sought from Village Board members who are assigned as liaisons to the various commissions and staff who serve as liaisons.

Year 1: Implement new commission/program display and explore additional programs. Establish special board/commission e-newsletter.

Years 2 to 5: Brainstorm with elected official and staff liaisons. Implement programs as developed and as budget allows.

## 15. Outreach to Schools

Ongoing Initiative: The Village will continue to ask Skokie schools to issue information about special programs, such as Village open house event.

New Initiatives: Efforts will be made to increase the amount of information disseminated through Skokie schools, including requests for e-news subscribers, alternate-side parking requirements, etc. Other initiatives involving the schools will be explored, including hosting an annual meeting with PTA presidents to foster increased knowledge of Village programs and services.

Also explore the possibility of partnering with District 219 on a summer school youth in government experience as a means of educating students about local government and acquainting both students and parents with local government structure, processes and programs.

Year 1: Partner with schools to disseminate information to students and families. Explore options for additional programs, including the high school summer school youth in government program, and implement if feasible.

Years 2 to 5: Continue partnering with schools for communications purposes and implementing other programs as budget and resources allow.

## 16. Village Program Talking Points

New Initiative: In conjunction with each Manager's Newsletter, staff will develop several talking points that will be distributed, at minimum, to the Village Board and all Department Directors. The talking points will include information on economic development, crime, and 'good and welfare' of the community, such as a festival, library program, etc. The talking points will be flexible on topics as necessary and will be distributed via email. The purpose is to provide officials and key staff with information to speak about when they interact with residents and others in the community. Consideration also should be given to distributing the talking points to board and commission members and all Village employees to assist them in serving as ambassadors for the Village.

Years 1 to 5: Develop format for talking points and begin distribution. Determine distribution scope.



## 17. Internal Residential Marketing Campaigns

New Initiative: Along with the appropriate Village staff and advisory commissions, explore the possibility of embarking on a community marketing campaign on several fronts: to increase volunteerism in the community, to promote shared responsibility for community safety and appearance, and to continue the ‘many cultures, one community’ theme to promote unity.

Year 1: Begin internal discussions with appropriate Village staff.

Years 2 to 5: Involve commissions, as appropriate, and initiate campaigns based on staff and funding resources.

## 18. Village Board Meetings

New Initiatives: Explore feasibility of live broadcasts of Village Board meetings in light of equipment and staffing resources.

Consider profiling Village departments on a rotating basis at Village Board meetings that have light agendas and no scheduled special presentations to promote community programs, services and professionalism. Promote presentations and encourage public dialogue.

Year 1: Research and discuss new program feasibility.

Years 2 to 5: Implement programs if approved and as resources allow.

## 19. Neighborhood Watch Program

Ongoing Initiative: Review quarterly Neighborhood Watch newsletter and add additional Village information as a means of further utilizing block captains as community ambassadors. Continue to promote Neighborhood Watch in *NewSkokie*.

New Initiatives: Work with the Police Department to determine where there are gaps in the Neighborhood Watch program, and develop a campaign to recruit block captains and neighborhood participation in those areas. Honor Neighborhood Watch block captains at a Village Board meeting, and assist the Police Department and Public Safety Commission with a meet-and-greet reception for Neighborhood Watch block captains.

Year 1: Review newsletter and schedule reception, budget and resources permitting

Years 2 through 5: Analyze geographic dispersion in community and, in concert with the Police Department, develop outreach campaign to recruit additional block captains and neighborhood involvement.

## 20. Community Events and Entry Point Signs

Ongoing Initiative: Continue weekly updates to both sides of the Skokie Swift changeable copy message board, and continue use of Niles Center Road/Skokie Boulevard sign. The latter is open to community groups that apply for use of the space and provide a professional sign for display.

New Initiative: Work with Engineering and Community Development staff on installation of a digital sign on the southwest corner of Searle Parkway and Skokie Boulevard at the new Oakton Station. Review community entry point signage. Explore design and cost implications of installing a digital sign at Niles Center Road/Skokie Boulevard for enhanced aesthetics and increased flexibility with messaging.

Year 1: Continue standard practice for both signs and begin work on design/installation of electronic sign at Skokie Boulevard and Searle Parkway. Research installing an electronic sign at Niles Center Road/Skokie Boulevard.  
Years 2 through 5: Research cost/feasibility of installing an electronic sign at Niles Center Road and Skokie Boulevard, and implement if feasible and funding is available. Continue standard practice for existing community events signs.

## 21. Outreach at Community Events

Ongoing Initiative: As has been the practice for many years, the Village has a booth or informational table or tables at as many community events as possible, including the Skokie Festival of Cultures, Backlot Bash and other events. Content and focus of the displays and information distributed will shift depending on issues at hand, venue and audience.

New Initiative: Research additional events and forums for Village outreach, such as school open houses, etc.

Year 1: Continue participation in long-standing community events.  
Years 2 to 5: Research additional community events and participate as staff resources and budget allows.

## 22. *Know Your Neighbor* Program

Ongoing Initiative: The *Know Your Neighbor* program, held in cooperation with the Human Relations Commission, began in 2008 and continued in 2010 through funding from The Chicago Community Trust. In these programs, residents were encouraged to open their homes to their neighbors for a coffee event to meet each other and strengthen their neighborhoods. A specific 10-day period was specified for each program, and hosts received a kit that included invitations, a coupon for a free Kosher or traditional coffee cake (or both) and other items. A wrap-up thank you coffee was held for all hosts after each program concluded. In May and June, 2011,

approximately 50 residents participated in the Know Your Neighbor, Know Your Community program. Modeled after the 2008 and 2010 programs, hosts received the same kits. Specific dates were set for coffees, including Tuesday and Thursday evenings or Sunday afternoons, and, at the host's request, a two-person team of a Village official and senior-level management staff person also attended to meet residents and answer their questions about Village programs and services. The program proved very popular with residents and hosts, per comments on both participation surveys given at the events and a post-event survey completed by a majority of hosts. Due to the program's popularity, it should be repeated every 12 to 18 months as budget and staffing resources allow.

Year 1: Repeat successful 2011 program model.

Years 2 to 5: Repeat every one to two years as budget and other resources allow.

### 23. Speakers Bureau

New Initiative: Develop a formal speakers' bureau of Village staff representatives and promote the same within the community.

Year 1: Research speakers' bureau formats, develop a Skokie model and promote within the community. Special focus on securing speaking engagements at PTA meetings throughout the community.

Years 2 through 5: Revise speakers list as necessary and continue promotion.

### **Skokie Businesses**

#### 1. New Business Checklist

New Initiative: Develop a guide with an accompanying step-by-step checklist for prospective businesses on how to open a business or restaurant in Skokie. Post the brochure online and have copies available at the Community Development, through the Skokie Chamber of Commerce and other appropriate locations. The goal of this and other outreach programs is to continue to impart a sense of Skokie as a business-friendly community and to reduce vacancy rates at commercial properties.

Year 1: Work with Community Development to develop and distribute the brochure.

Years 2 to 5: Update the brochure as necessary to remain current.

#### 2. Build Email Database for Skokie Businesses and Issue Electronic Messages

Ongoing Initiative: In a cooperative effort between Community Development Department, the Fire Department and the Village Manager's Office, efforts are underway to collect email addresses from every business in the community. Efforts during summer, 2011, resulted in an existing database of nearly 900 business email addresses. Additional email addresses will be added as submitted by the Community Development and Fire Departments as obtained through business license and

inspections. To date, the database has been used to issue periodic informational email messages to business owners and representatives.

New Initiative: In an effort to build the business email database at a faster pace, develop an outreach campaign on the Village web site and through the Skokie Chamber of Commerce to encourage business representatives to submit their email address to the Village for inclusion on the list.

Year 1: Continue to build database from Community Development and Fire Department records and send messages to the business community when appropriate issues or programs arise.

Years 2 to 5: Continue to build database and issue messages on a regular basis.

### 3. Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours

Ongoing Initiative: The Village should continue to host a Skokie Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours during years when there is no Village open house. The last program was in February 2011 at the new Police Headquarters. For added interest, future events should be hosted at other Village buildings such as the Public Works, one of the fire stations or Village Hall.

Years 1–5: Repeated in years 3 and 5 as budget and resources allow.

### 4. Village Web Site Business Page

New Initiative: Work with the Community Development Division, the Skokie Chamber of Commerce and other business groups on developing content for a web page on the Village site for existing businesses.

Year 1: No activity on this initiative.

Years 2 – 5: Develop and add a business-specific page to the Village’s web site by the end of year 2 and update as necessary through year.

### 5. Business Survey

New Initiative: As detailed in number 13 in the Resident section, survey Skokie businesses periodically regarding issues of concern, what they like about their Skokie location, market conditions, etc. The survey should be professionally administered and developed in conjunction with appropriate Village departments and business groups.

Year 1: Research costs and program parameters for business survey. If feasible, implement. If cost prohibitive, include in third-year budget.

Years 2 to 5: If business survey is not feasible in Year 1, defer to Year 3.

## 6. Business Retention Outreach

New Initiative: In 2000, staff from the Economic Development and Marketing Divisions embarked on a business retention visit program and, over the course of several years, paid informational visits to nearly 30 of Skokie's largest businesses. The Skokie Chamber of Commerce assisted with the effort. This program was put on hiatus due to the increasing focus on Downtown Skokie and West Dempster Street. Consideration should be given to re-instituting this program, possibly with small groups instead of individual meetings. The purpose of the meetings will be to field questions and understand business concerns, and also to acquaint businesses with Village and other assistance resources available to them. Several meetings of this type were held in summer 2011 with West Dempster Street businesses.

Year 1: Develop and implement program.

Year 2: Continue program as staffing and other resources allow.

## 7. Downtown Skokie Marketing

Ongoing Initiative: In 2010, the Village began a concentrated marketing plan for Downtown Skokie, including development of a new logo and brand identity in the Downtown Reinvented campaign. Banners were erected, storefronts enhanced with bright standardized coverings, and numerous ads and direct mail initiatives took place. A Dine-Around event was held to acquaint the daytime population in and around Downtown Skokie with the Downtown area restaurants. This initiative continues in 2011, with similar outreach. The new *Wednesdays on the Green* program also is being promoted, with a corresponding Downtown restaurant dining campaign. The Village has also instituted a marketing campaign in Chicago Magazine and through the Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau to promote Downtown Skokie restaurants on a regional basis. Village staff will continue to work with the Independent Merchants of Downtown Skokie, the Skokie Chamber of Commerce and the Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau.

New Initiative: Develop a Downtown Skokie restaurant guide. Distribute copies at Village Hall, the Library, Downtown businesses and possibly as a NewSkokie insert, and through appropriate methods outside of Skokie. Additional focus on engaging the daytime population and Skokie Swift riders, particularly in tandem with opening the new CTA Yellow Line Oakton Street Station.

Year 1: Continue Downtown Skokie marketing campaign.

Years 2 to 5: Develop/distribute restaurant brochure in Year 2; continue marketing campaign as resources allow.

## 8. Additional Commercial Marketing Campaigns

Ongoing Initiative: In summer 2010, the Village developed an informational promotional brochure for West Dempster Street that has been distributed to hundreds of commercial real estate brokers and business representatives. The Village participated in the 2006, 2007 and 2010 international BIO conferences to promote the Illinois Science + Technology Park, and developed a brochure about the park in the context of its Downtown Skokie location. Village staff also is active in the International Council of Shopping Centers and participated in the fall 2010 and 2011 Deal Making expo in Chicago. These initiatives should continue and consideration should be given to additional marketing for West Dempster Street and other commercial areas as circumstances dictate and resources allow.

Years 1 to 5: Continue and expand marketing outreach as resources allow.

## Residents and Businesses Outside of Skokie

### 1. External Residential Marketing Campaign

New Initiative: Research the feasibility of initiating a branding and marketing study and possibly launching a promotional media campaign for Skokie, including print, radio, internet and possibly television ads, aimed at featuring Skokie as an ideal community for young families. Careful attention would be given to ensuring media placements in publications and electronic sources that reach the prime demographic. The purpose of the campaign would be to encourage young families and recent college graduates to consider Skokie as a place to live and/or work.

Year 1: Research feasibility/cost.

Years 2 to 5: Implement as resources allow.

### 2. Overall Economic Development Marketing Campaign

Ongoing Initiative: In 2005, the Village embarked on a three-year advertising campaign for Skokie as a good place to locate business. From 2005 to 2006, a series of ads ran in *Crain's Chicago Business*. In 2007, the Village ran a 15-month radio advertising campaign on WGN radio, and in June 2008, began a 12-month radio advertising campaign on WBBM-AM radio. The purpose of the advertising was to build Skokie's image as a community with a progressive approach to economic development, and the ads served to generate a lot of positive comments from those in and around the community. In year 2 of the plan, consideration should be given to re-instituting an overall economic development marketing campaign for the Village with evaluation of internet, print, radio and television advertising options.

Year 1: No activity on this initiative.

Years 2 to 5: Evaluate marketing campaign options and implement as possible given available resources.

### 3. Outreach to Real Estate Professionals

Ongoing Initiative: In 1999, the Village held a luncheon and community tour for approximately 60 area real estate professionals, more than 80% of whom were not from Skokie. In 2002, the Village developed a brochure for use by residential real estate professionals for use in acquainting customers with the Village. This brochure was distributed at no cost to area real estate offices through the Barrington-North Shore and nearby Chicago real estate boards.

New Initiative: The Village should explore options for continued outreach to real estate professionals. A survey should be considered to determine what real estate professionals need from the Village of Skokie to promote the community. Once this information is obtained, a campaign should be developed that includes materials and outreach that is desired, whether new brochures, web site, periodic community tours, etc. Consider including community banking officials in the outreach as well. Finding a means of connecting with relocation companies has long been a marketing plan tactic and should continue to be explored.

Year 1: Begin planning and research for this initiative.

Years 2 to 5: Implement plan as resources allow.

### 4. Outreach to National Publications

Ongoing Initiative: From time to time the Village has been featured in national/regional publications such as *Money* magazine, *Chicago Magazine* and *PM* (Public Management) and *IML* (Illinois Municipal League) magazines. Outreach to national and regional publications should continue, and increase, with an emphasis on economic development.

Year 1: Develop a database of where to submit query letters and draft articles to appropriate publications and begin submittals.

Years 2 through 5: Update/expand database and continue submitting articles.

### 5. Tourism Promotions

Ongoing Initiative: Since 2002, the Village has belonged to the Chicago's North Shore Convention & Visitors Bureau. Four other communities currently belong to the bureau, including Evanston, Glenview, Northbrook and Winnetka. A majority of Skokie hotels and attractions are active in the bureau and serve on the organization's board. Staff from the Village Manager's Office and Marketing and Public Information Division represent the Village on the bureau board. The Village Board will consider a three-year agreement for bureau membership in early summer 2011. The agreement is the same as in prior years and contains terms favorable to Skokie.

Years 1 to 5: Continue bureau membership as resources are available and as the community's hotels and attractions show positive benefits from the affiliation.

## **The Media**

### 1. Press Releases

Ongoing Initiative: The Village issues an average of three press releases per week to the local and metropolitan media and subsequently receives good media coverage. Marketing and Public Information staff work closely with all departments and divisions to develop accurate, timely, interesting releases. This practice will continue.

Years 1 to 5: Continue issuing multiple press releases each week.

### 2. Meetings with the Media

Ongoing Initiative: Marketing and Public Information staff schedule periodic meetings with print media representatives who cover Skokie to build relationships, discuss process and information distribution and also professional standards. These meetings will continue with an emphasis on holding journalists accountable for acceptable professional standards and balanced coverage.

Years 1 to 5: Continue meetings with the media.

### 3. Contact Media for Advance Stories

New Initiative: Consideration should be given to contacting the media to run in-depth stories in advance of policy making decisions. Such examples include the multi-use trail, possible Big Brothers, Big Sisters initiative, etc.

Years 1 to 5: Contact the media requesting that they run advance stories on important initiatives.

### 4. Other Media Relations

Ongoing Initiative: The Marketing and Public Information Division works closely with all departments and divisions to process print and media requests on a timely basis. Due to Skokie's proximity to Northwestern University, the Village of Skokie departments are assigned as 'beats' to students at Medill School of Journalism. As time allows, department and division directors assist students. The Village has a strict policy that all requests for assistance must begin with the Marketing and Public Information Division. Should assisting Medill students become too cumbersome or time consuming, Marketing and Communications Division may request that Medill shift assignments for a semester or two.



Marketing and Public Information Division staff will increase efforts to seek regional, electronic media focus on positive stories about Skokie, including aspects of the Downtown Reinvented campaign. Village staff also cooperate with filming for television and movie projects in Skokie, many of which generate revenue for both the Village and local businesses.

Years 1 to 5: Continue to work with Medill students as is reasonable and feasible. Increase focus on creative, positive media coverage for Skokie.

## **Village Employees**

### 1. Information Sources for Employees

New Initiative: Village employees express the desire to know about Village programs and often need reminders about where to find information. The Marketing and Public Information Division will explore the possibility of adding a section to the employee Intranet that reminds employees about where to find information, such as by checking the Village web site every few days, reading *NewSkokie* and *SkokieNews*, reviewing Village Board packets posted on the Village web site, Village Manager's Staff meeting minutes, etc. The possibility of posting other items on the employee Intranet, including the talking points suggested in number 16 of the Resident section of this plan. Consider adding information to payroll envelopes every few months.

Years 1 to 5: Encourage employees to stay in the know about Village initiatives and provide reminders on where to source information.

### 2. Employee Events

Ongoing Initiative: Throughout the year, the Village offers a number of fun events to build camaraderie among the Village's 500 employees. Examples include the annual employee party which is now held on a Friday after work during the spring, the Halloween Party at Village Hall when employees are encouraged to dress up or wear silly hats, enjoy donuts and cider, and vote on the best costume and the annual spring employee health fair during which Health Department staff offer health screenings for employees, healthy snacks are served and chair massages are given. These events are planned to be low-cost and will continue with input from employees.

Years 1 to 5: Continue employee events as resources allow.

### 3. *Skribbles* Employee Newsletter

Ongoing Initiative: *Skribbles* resumed regular publication in 1999 and continues to be distributed on a bi-monthly basis. While some hard copies are sent to Fire, Police and Public Works, other employees receive the newsletter via the employee Intranet. Consideration will be given to listing employee birthdays and employment

anniversaries and other topics of interest to employees. A survey will be taken to ensure that the content meets employees' expectations.

Year 1: Survey employees regarding *Skribbles* content and implement feasible changes.

Years 2 to 5: Survey employees again in year 4 and continue regular publication.

#### 4. Better/Brighter Ideas Group (BIG)

Ongoing Initiative: The "Better/Brighter Ideas Group" (BIG) of front-line staff representatives from each department was originally convened in spring 1999. The committee's purpose is to provide a wide perspective on the numerous outreach programs outlined in the Marketing and Communications Plan. Initially the committee met monthly and developed important initiatives such as the A-Z and Frequent Referrals guides, Annual Employee Health Fair, How About Lunch? program, the New Employee Orientation Manual and other employee relations and customer service programs. The group meets several times each year to discuss communications initiatives or specific programs for which the Village administration desires employee feedback. To date, BIG members have been rotated at department and division directors' discretion. More attention will be given to encouraging department and division directors to appoint a new representative every few years.

Years 1 - 5: Ongoing

#### 5. WORK PLAN

##### Ongoing Initiatives:

- *NewSkokie*
- Web Site
- SkokieNews
- 1660 AM Skokie Radio
- Topical Publications
- Display Booths
- "How To" Brochures
- Video Programs
- New Resident Packet
- Alternate Side Parking Notification
- Public Open House
- Surveys
- Outreach to Schools
- Neighborhood Watch Program
- Community Events Signs
- Outreach at Community Events
- Know Your Neighbor Program

- Email Database for Skokie Businesses and Issue Electronic Messages
- Chamber of Commerce Business After Hours
- Downtown Skokie Marketing
- Commercial Marketing Campaigns
- Economic Development Marketing Campaign
- Outreach to Real Estate Professionals
- Outreach to National Publications
- Tourism Promotions
- Press Releases
- Meetings with the Media
- Other Media Relations
- Employee Events
- *Skribbles*

### **New Initiatives:**

- Social Media
- Board and Commission Outreach
- Village Talking Points
- Internal Residential Marketing Campaign
- Live Broadcast of Village Board Meetings
- Speakers Bureau
- New Business Checklist
- Village Web Site Business Page
- Business Survey
- Business Retention Outreach
- External Residential Marketing Campaign
- Contact Media for Advance Stories
- Publish Information Sources for Employees

### **First-Year Initiatives**

- *Social Media*  
The development of a Facebook fan page to promote Village activities and marketing initiatives and direct visitors to the Village web site for detailed information.
- *Board and Commission Outreach*  
To utilize volunteer board and commission members as community ambassadors.
- *Village Talking Points*

Staff will develop three talking points that will be distributed to the Village Board and Department Directors. These points will provide officials and key staff with information to speak about when they interact with residents and others in the community.

- *Village Board Meetings*  
Explore the feasibility of live broadcasts of the meetings. Consider profiling Village departments on a rotating basis at Village Board meetings with light agendas to promote community programs, services and professionalism. Promote presentations and encourage public dialogue.
- *Speakers Bureau*  
Develop a formal speakers' bureau of Village staff representatives and promote the same within the community.
- *New Business Checklist*  
Develop a guide for prospective businesses on how to open a business or restaurant in Skokie.
- *Business Survey*  
Periodically survey Skokie businesses regarding issues of concern, what they like about their Skokie location, market conditions.
- *Business Retention Outreach*  
Re-instituting this program of informational visits to Skokie's largest businesses. The purpose of the meetings will be to field questions and understand business concerns and to acquaint businesses with Village and other assistance resources available to them.
- *External Residential Marketing Campaign*  
The development of a media campaign for Skokie aimed at featuring Skokie as an ideal community for young families.
- *Contact Media for Advance Stories*  
Contact the media requesting that they run advance stories on important initiatives.
- *Information Sources for Employees*  
Encourage employees to stay in the know about Village initiatives and provide reminders on where to source information.

## **CONCLUSION**

This Marketing and Communications Plan is presented as a flexible document that will naturally change and evolve with time. It is a snapshot of the Village's current communications needs and seeks to provide a plan for meeting those needs in a prioritized, timely, organized, cost-effective manner.

This plan is based on the goals suggested by the constituencies interviewed in the development process. The Marketing and Communications Plan will be reviewed annually, most likely with each annual budget cycle.

The Marketing and Public Information Division appreciates the support and interest of the many people involved in developing the Marketing and Communications Plan and who are integral to its success.

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