

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING OF THE NATIONAL
PRESS CLUB
MAY 9, 2008
MAUREEN GROPPE, NPC SECRETARY

President Sylvia Smith called the meeting to order at 12:20 p.m. About 50 members were in attendance.

The minutes of the January meeting were approved.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Smith praised the success of the April 5 centennial gala and thanked gala chairwoman Lori Russo, the staff, and the affiliate/associates who raised money to pay for one of the bands.

Smith said she had many inquiries from the public about the speaker event with the Rev. Jeremiah Wright. Smith said she issued a statement explaining that the Club invites people to speak who are likely to make news as Wright did.

The membership approved a bylaw change eliminating the requirement that someone be a member for 10 years before seeking retired dues status. Smith said the change will help recruit members who have moved to D.C. after careers elsewhere.

Smith updated the membership on the library improvement project. After consulting with various Club constituencies, Smith said the new concept retains the existing library footprint and keeps all elements on the 13th floor while creating a new meeting space for members. The staff offices would be moved to where the training center is and their space would become a reading area. A multipurpose room, about the size of the Zenger Room, would also be created. The first priority for the room would be training, expected to take place about two times a week. The library would control other uses, including for Club events or for catering clients.

Former president Don Larrabee called the concept a "marvelous compromise" and a "great relief to a lot of folks."

Smith said the Club is improving email communications, including starting a weekly email on upcoming events. The Club has also started highlighting achievements of members in electronic posters at the Club entrance.

Smith reported that longtime staff member Andrew Price received the first employee-of-the-month award. Members are encouraged to give suggestions for future winners to management.

Smith said the Club is using a \$200,000 donation from Aviva to distribute the Club documentary. The Club has contracted with former president Gil Klein to run events in various cities, including one May 21 in Washington at the Center for Strategic and International Studies cosponsored with the World Affairs Council. Smith is also soliciting ideas for historical Club images to be used on Reliable Source placements throughout the centennial year.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Alan Bjerga reported that revenue through April was \$4.283 million, which is slightly under what was budgeted but so were expenses. The Club had strong months in March and April, following four months of small losses. Because reserves are still too low, Bjerga said the Club has a hiring freeze and is looking at other cost-cutting and revenue-raising measures.

Member Ron Baygents asked how much new revenue is projected to come from the new space in the library that could be rented out to catering clients. Smith said the expectation is that it would be rented out about three days a week, generating about \$300,000 in annual revenue. The revenue would be split between the Club and the library. Smith said the Club is also looking at changes to the Fourth Estate that would make the space suitable for morning catering business.

Library Board president Rick Dunham said renovations to the library would be paid for from the library reserve fund and from the Eric Friedheim bequests. Dunham said the goal is to make the library as self-sufficient as possible so member dues are not needed. A member asked why the price of making a copy in the library has increased to 20 cents. Dunham said a dime isn't what it used to be.

A member asked whether the Newseum is hurting Club business. Bjerga said that while the Newseum is not a direct competitor, the Club did not raise its room rental rates this year to make sure rates would remain attractive.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Membership Secretary Mark Hamrick reported that there are 3,593 members, up from 3,479 at the same point last year. Membership is up in all categories, with the biggest increase in non-resident members. Resignations are also up, although suspensions are down.

Hamrick said upcoming recruitment efforts include a reception hosted by the International Correspondents Committee and efforts by the affiliate/associate members. Hamrick said he is also working with Online News Association to bring in new members.

QUESTIONS FROM THE FLOOR

A member asked what part of the library would be moving to the 14th floor. Smith said some computers would be moved to the alcove.

A member asked what the employee of the month gets. Smith said there is a cash bonus and recognition on the electronic bulletin board.

Vice President Keith Hill asked about the construction timeline for the library. Smith said it would be done over the summer when there's less Club traffic.

Board member John Donnelly asked if the proposed sliding wall between the library and the First Amendment lounge would be soundproof. Smith said it should be.

Member Bill McCloskey complained about the "pen and pad only" rule at lawmaker events. Smith said the Club has long banned cameras from the 14th floor to protect member privacy when drinking. Former president Jerry Zremski said cameras are allowed at some events with lawmakers but others are intentionally kept small to avoid them turning into news conferences.

A member suggested that the Reliable Source would get more business if the Club had polls on the Kentucky Derby and other events. Smith said the Club could lose its liquor license by having gambling events at the bar.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:17 p.m. The next meeting is Oct. 3.