

SENESCHALS, CHATELAINS/HOSPITALLERS AND THE MEDIA

by Stephanie Drummonds, Assistant VP for Press and Media Relations - April 2007

As you should be aware, the Society as a whole has a media policy in place (available on www.sca.org, under the Seneschal's page). I would like to clear up any confusion regarding this policy as it relates to the Chatelain's office and local group interaction with the media. The media (whether television, print or online) is not, and should not be considered, a primary recruiting tool. The best recruiting tool that any of us have is a firm handshake combined with one-on-one interaction.

So, how is the media to be utilized, if at all? The answers break down into two basic categories – if the media contacts you, or if you want to contact the media.

- 1) **If the media contacts your group** for the purpose of doing a story or other media presentation, this needs to be reported to the media office. For example, if a reporter/photographer shows up at a demo or fight practice unannounced, then the chatelain and/or seneschal of the group should talk to them, following the guidelines set forth in the media policy regarding image we want to project, topics/words to avoid, etc. Photographers and videographers should also be informed that any participant may decline to be photographed.

Following this type of contact, a brief report should be emailed to the Kingdom Media Officer for information and possible follow up, if required. An incident report form is listed below.

If there is a period of time between when the group is contacted and when the media attends the event, then the Kingdom Media Officer should be contacted in that interim. That way, the Kingdom Officer can provide the local group with Society press materials and rules for film crews, as well as making provisions to attend or appoint an appropriate spokesperson for the event.

- 2) **If the group wishes to contact the media** and invite them to an event, this must be approved through the Kingdom Media Office ahead of time. This will give the Kingdom Media Office time to provide local representatives with the appropriate press materials, or to prepare event specific materials if required, as well as making provisions to attend or appoint an appropriate spokesperson for the event.

For example, if a group is planning an event with a particular theme or a special feature (e.g., authentic 16th-century Turkish feast, Norse poetry competition) then the Media Office can work with the group to send targeted press releases to local media, and plan to attend the event and distribute information which will include the appropriate local contact information.

In this case, no local incident report would need to be filed after the event, as the Kingdom Media Officer would already be involved. However, if there is follow up contact after the event, this should be reported as in number 1.

Guidelines for interacting with the media at an event or demo:

- All media contact should be handled by the seneschal or designated representative. Designated representatives should be articulate and conform to the image delineated in the Society Media Relations policy. NOTE: If the Kingdom media officer is on site for the event, he or she is by default, in charge of all media contact, and should be prepared with all appropriate press materials. The Kingdom media officer can choose to delegate or share these responsibilities with a suitable local representative.

- When the media arrives, the designated representative should be waiting to greet them. Introduce yourself, using modern names, and give them a brief introduction to the Society. Give them the prepared press materials (either the general press release or a targeted one if it has been created). Include local contact and meeting information with this information. If the media is from television, please have on hand the Society rules for film crews.
 - If the media has been invited to an event, it is the responsibility of the seneschal and event steward to make certain that the event staff is briefed in advance and knows who the designated media contact for the event will be. Conversely, if the Kingdom Media Officer is in attendance, he or she should alert the event staff of their presence and preparedness to handle the media. It is also a good idea to alert any royalty attending the event that the media are expected.
 - Guide the press through their interactions. Focus on positive aspects of the Society and use caution in what you say, using the press materials and media policy as a guide for talking points and topics/words to avoid. Remember, anyone can be misquoted.
 - Stress safety. This can be done in discussions – by explanation that SCA combat is a martial art form which requires training and skill, and has strictly monitored equipment standards, and routine safety inspections for all participants. This can also be done in practice, by making sure that all spectators, whether media or general public, are protected from any combat areas.
 - It is also a good idea to stress the courtesy and chivalry aspects of the SCA. One of the best ways to do this is by treating the media, and demo spectators, as courteously as we strive to treat one another.
- 3) **National Media:** If any national media outlet, such as a cable television channel, news program, prime time television show, or filmmaker, contacts a local group, they should NEVER be dealt with at a local level. These contacts should be referred to the Kingdom Media Officer immediately, and will more than likely be dealt with at a Society level.
- 4) **Community Calendars:** Many local media outlets, either television or newspaper, have a free calendar for listing community events, either in the paper itself or on its website. There are also some local community-oriented event sites which are not attached to any particular media outlet. If the group wishes to place this sort of announcement for a demo, as a way of attracting greater attendance from the public, this is permissible with courtesy notification to the Kingdom Media Officer. However, it is not recommended to place such announcements for events. If too many people respond to the announcement, a large number of spectators looking to be entertained could easily overload the capacity of the event site or disrupt the event schedule.

A sample announcement is below:

Who: Society for Creative Anachronism, Shire/Barony/March of XYZ

What: Demo at the Spring Art Fair

Where: (recommend you include the entire mailing address, including zip code for the location)

When:

Contact for More Information: (Phone and/or email of seneschal/ chatelain), local and Society websites

You should include a brief explanation of the Society, such as:

Do you dream of being an armored knight locked in combat armed with sword and shield or a dashing swordsman wielding a rapier in a duel? Come realize your dream with the Society for Creative Anachronism, an international not-for-profit living history organization dedicated to bringing the Middle Ages and Renaissance to life through research and reenactment

Most outlets accept requests for this type of announcement via regular mail, email, or fax. Contact the Community Editor or Assignment Editor to determine how they prefer to receive announcements. If via email, it is best to use the words – “Community Announcement” or “Community Calendar Listing” in the subject line so it will get forwarded to the correct person and less likely to get caught in company spam filters. In this case, the Kingdom Media Officer should be alerted that the group is going to place this type of announcement. A copy of the announcement, as well as a list of where it will be posted, should be copied to the Kingdom officer at the time it is sent to the calendars. That way, the office can be prepared should any media contact occur as a result of these listings. If you are planning to list an event on the calendars, please clear this with your Kingdom Media Office first (or seneschal if there is not a media officer).

- 5) **The Internet:** With the preponderance of internet photo and video websites (e.g. YouTube, MySpace), more and more people are posting pictures and video of Society-related activities to these sites. While it is not the intention of this office to limit this type of expression, it is an arena where good sense needs to prevail. Think before you post. If the material is your own, fine. If the material is copyrighted, and you do not hold the copyright, don't post it unless you obtain written permission from the copyright holder to do so. (Please note: televised newscasts ARE copyrighted material, the copyright being held by either the station or the network.) This includes placing copyrighted music with your own pictures or video. As it stands now, the person responsible for posting the pictures or video is the one who is responsible for obtaining permission, and is the one legally liable if material is used without permission.

At the current time, the Internet is something of the “Wild West,” as far as guidelines and regulation are concerned. However, this topic is heating up with Congress and the FCC. Copyright holders have successfully sued websites which used their materials without permission.

Overall, when it comes to media interaction, the rule of thumb is “when in doubt, don't.” If there is any question on how to handle a media contact, refer the question to the Kingdom Media Officer/Kingdom Seneschal for a ruling.

Sample Incident Report:

Media Incident Report – Kingdom of _____ – Group Name

Initial Contact Date:

Contact Person: (Include name and contact information for any media person who contacts you. That way the Kingdom Media Officer can follow up with them directly if necessary.)

Description of Incident:

Submitted by: (Include your complete contact information, so the Kingdom Media Officer can follow up if more information is required.)

Date Submitted: