

The following is a “drop-in” article about the AJLI Board of Directors’ recent meeting and discussion with Leagues from NorCalRenoHon (Northern California, Reno and Honolulu) on the topic of “Lifelong Membership.” Please insert this article in your news sheets where appropriate.

### **NorCalRenoHon Leagues Connect with AJLI Board To Discuss Lifelong Membership**

The AJLI Board of Directors continued its dialogue with Leagues across the Association in California on Saturday, March 5. Hosted by the JL of Oakland-East Bay, the Board joined League Leaders from NorCalRenoHon (Northern California, Reno, Honolulu) at their annual transitional leadership meeting. Over lunch, AJLI President, Pam Newby, facilitated a conversation about many aspects of Junior League membership.

The conversation explored five questions: What is it about the Junior League that makes you willing to invest your time? Why do members leave your Leagues? What makes Junior League membership “special?” If there were no Junior Leagues, what would a Junior League today look like? How do you see your Association supporting lifelong membership in the Leagues?

This meeting in Oakland-East Bay marks the third such dialogue this year. The AJLI Board began with a conversation in Philadelphia followed by one in Oklahoma City. These dialogues are part of each AJLI Board Meeting and support the Board’s commitment to connection with League leaders as they explore the concept of “lifelong membership” – that there is a place for you in the organization. The membership issue, in particular, has been discussed as we celebrate the fact the Provisional / New Member classes are up Association-wide, and yet many Leagues are experiencing overall membership declines.

In discussing the reasons for investing one’s time in Junior League membership, Naomi Chavez, President-Elect of the JL of Palo Alto\*Mid Peninsula summed it up for many in the room when she said, “My job takes care of my life. But this [my Junior League work] is what feeds my soul.” Many others talked about the ability to make a meaningful difference in their communities.

Several League Leaders felt that members leave because they are frustrated with the time it takes to accomplish anything. Nancy Maushardt, President of the JL of Napa-Sonoma, suggested that League Leaders need to pay attention to the needs of new members because if you understand “why” someone joins, you can better understand how to retain them. She also felt that it was important to get new members into community work right away, a sentiment shared by others.

In discussing what makes Junior League membership special, one Leader suggested that “unique” was a better and more inclusive word than “special.” Another Leader felt that people value what they have to work hard for, and that as a Junior League member you do work hard. Others talked about the emotional connection.

The League Leaders didn’t see a need to start over in terms of what a Junior League of the future might look like. One League Leader did talk about the need to recognize that we are a multinational corporation that raises millions of dollars for worthwhile causes – a fact that we should emphasize. We need to talk about the League in ways that are meaningful to the listener – to tailor our pitch.

When asked what the Association could do for the Leagues regarding membership issues, there was a request for comprehensive support materials, like the materials that came out at the time of the branding campaign. There was also a request from Judy Jorgensen, President of the JL of San Francisco, to help connect Sustainers. In general, the League Leaders were very positive about current training programs and the new Master Curriculum.

The AJLI Board took note of the comments during this lively and thought-provoking session. And the Board continues to welcome the input and ideas from all members. Leagues have been using the questions posed during this meeting and the earlier dialogues, in their own Board and Membership meetings. AJLI Board and Staff have received valuable input from those League-initiated sessions. If you would like to contribute to the conversation about “lifelong membership,” email your thoughts to [info@ajli.org](mailto:info@ajli.org) with ATTN: AJLI BOARD in the subject line.

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