

Sponsorship of local sports events is a good way to improve youth and community relations, and tie-in opportunities are usually abundant. One company with a fine activity in these public relations areas is Consolidated Edison (ConEd), NYC, which provides electricity and gas service in New York City and Westchester County.

ConEd has spent five years refining and expanding a program which it conducts in cooperation with New York Yankees Inc., owners of a noted professional baseball team. In brief, 5,000 bleacher seats at the Yankee Stadium in New York are donated during the summer season for the use of young people, ten to eighteen years of age. Special efforts are made to invite youngsters who, for economic or other reasons, might never see a Major League baseball game. The seats are made available in connection with ConEd's partial sponsorship (costing \$160,000 annually) of the telecasts of the Yankee games.

Robert O. Lehrman, Vice President-Public Affairs, in setting up the youth program, gave careful thought to the problems involved in developing a system of ticket distribution which would insure high attendance at each game and keeping the youngsters interested throughout it. He decided to enlist the assistance of such community and educational groups as Youth Services Agency (YSA), Police Athletic League (PAL), Boy and Girl Scouts, Children's Aid Society, and the New York Housing Authority. This was done in various ways. Under direction of Edward W. Livingston, Director of Community Relations of ConEd, PR staffers informed community leaders, usually at agency board meetings. At gatherings at ConEd's main offices, heads of the groups were greeted by Yankee President Michael Burke and given details. Leaders were invited to a Stadium Club luncheon and shown a film.

It was eventually arranged that each cooperating agency would accept responsibility for: selection of youngsters (many from disadvantaged areas of the city); supervision at games (one group staffer for each eight children); and transportation (free subway rides made available through YSA).

To stimulate attendance, the project is promoted through local publicity, mentions on the telecasts of games, and items in a printed enclosure ("Consumer Tips") sent with ConEd bills.

To maintain the youngsters' interest during the quiet periods which often occur at games, an address system for their area is manned by a "ConEd-Yankee Baseball Answer Man" (a former Big League star). He explains strategy, answers questions, and signs autographs. ConEd employees (recruited via company publications and posters and departmental announcements) volunteer their services. They pass out scorecards and pencils and assist the youngsters in score-keeping.

Special events which stimulate publicity for the program include:

OPENING DAY CEREMONIES: ConEd Board Chairman Charles F. Luce addresses the group and a youngster guest throws out the first ball. . . ConEd-YANKEE KID CONTEST: Eight candidates are chosen by each of three cooperating organizations -- YSA, PAL, and the city's Housing Authority -- on the basis of exemplary conduct at home and school. The name of the winner is drawn by lot at a Stadium Club luncheon to which all 24 are invited. The winner travels, with a friend and a ConEd PR staffer, to see a Yankee week-end series in another city and is given a season pass for two at home games in NYC.

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MOST POPULAR YANKEE CONTEST: Each youngster who attends a game casts a ballot for his favorite player. The season's winner is given a color TV set and a certificate citing him for his "great competitive spirit which served as an inspiration to thousands of youngsters". . . BOROUGH DAYS: Each of NYC's boroughs proclaims "ConEd Yankee Baseball Day" on which government and county officials are honored (Bronx Day, Manhattan Day, etc.). The ConEd Vice President for the borough hosts the event, which provides an excellent opportunity for proclamations and photos.

YANKEE TV SHOW: Between the innings, ConEd executives appear to explain the ConEd-Yankee Youth program. For example, Lehrman, during an interview, talked about the civic groups through whom tickets are distributed. . . BASEBALL CLINICS: "To bring the game to the kids," some 2,000 youngsters a year receive batting and fielding tips from Yankee ballplayers at neighborhoods throughout the city.

More than 200,000 youngsters are ConEd baseball guests each summer. When the millionth attended, he was presented by ConEd President Louis H. Roddis Jr. on a "ConEdison-Yankee Baseball Day," proclaimed by the Mayor to "applaud the efforts of these two organizations to provide recreation and enjoyment to the youngsters of the City of New York."

Publicity has been excellent. Every event has yielded its crop of news stories, features, and interviews on radio, TV, and in neighborhood papers. (E.g., when a Puerto Rican lad was chosen to throw out the first ball at the opening game, the news appeared in the Spanish language press.) The baseball clinics are heralded wherever they take place. Prominent guests' pictures are widely printed. The Borough Days bring out the dignitaries; they capture editorial interest. When the Most Popular Yankee has received his presentation, a photo showing him with ConEd's Chairman was given generous space by the media.

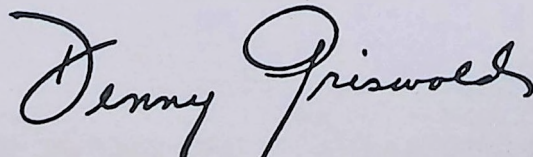
Letters of commendation have come from such sources as churches, civic leaders, the Narcotic Addiction Control Commission, and many individuals. Typical is this comment of the Bronx Borough President: "The community response has been absolutely phenomenal. The program is an excellent example of cooperation between industry and government." A member of the City Council wrote: "Of all the programs dedicated to providing a healthier environment for the youth of this city, the Con-Edison-Yankee's is one of the very best."

The strong relationship which the effort has developed with the city's community groups is credited by Lehrman with helping ConEd win cooperation and support for its other community relations programs.

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For your PR NEWS IDEA LIBRARY, write to: Lamson B. Smith, Vice Pres., First National City Bank, 399 Park Ave., NYC 10022, for "Another Year of..." compilation of a year's reports telling what the institution's employees are doing "to make their city a better place to live in"; it contains an impressive index listing activities from "Addict Care" to "Youth Underground Movement". . . Walter R. Luehring, Pres., General Adjustment Bureau, 123 William St., NYC 10038, for "Floodwaters," 32-page documentary of floods of 1973 and the public's stake in these national disasters.

Sincerely,



Editor