

77 Amazing Facts about The Publicity Club of Chicago (PCC) 1941-2018

By Dominic Calabrese

- 1. The Publicity Club of Chicago (PCC) is the nation's largest independent association of public relations professionals.**
- 2. It is not an exaggeration to say that anyone who is anyone in Chicago public relations has been a member or participated in PCC activities during the past 75 years. Our membership roster has included such industry giants as Dan Edelman, Aaron Cushman, Al Golan and Tom Harris.**
- 3. PCC traces its origins to March 8, 1941, when 33 publicists gathered at the old Merchants and Manufacturers Club at the Merchandise Mart to debate the idea on whether an association was needed. After three hours of discussion, the green light was given and the club officially began as the Publicity Association of Chicago.**
- 4. The club's first luncheon meeting on March 19 attracted 53 publicists who came to hear Luke Hunt, city editor of the old Chicago Daily News. Mr. Hunt offered his thoughts on what PR people do right and what they do wrong. From the very beginning to the present day, PCC programs featuring the media are a popular draw!**
- 5. At the club's first board meeting on April 9, 1941, Buell A. Patterson of American Airlines was elected President and Robert E. Borden of Commonwealth Edison was named First Vice President.**
- 6. Mr. Patterson presided over the first club meeting on April 9, 1941. The guest speaker was another media figure, Sid L. James, manager of Time's editorial office. The luncheon back then cost \$1, including tax and tip! There were door prizes to boot! We have since named our specialty award for technological innovations pertaining to PR in honor of Mr. Patterson.**
- 7. Later in 1941, the board changed the association's name to the present Publicity Club of Chicago (PCC) and dues were raised to \$5. Membership continued to climb and the semi-monthly luncheons brought in respectable numbers.**
- 8. Other memorable guest speakers at PCC events in 1941 included Jack Lieb, well known newsreel photographer; Boyd Lewis of United Press International; and Alex Drier of ABC who enthralled members with his account of escaping from Berlin just before World War II began.**



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9. The spirit of volunteerism and willingness to serve others, which has been a cornerstone of PCC for its entire history, was clearly on display in 1941. Club members actively supported homefront activities like war bond sales, the Red Cross, the USO and various salvage drives.

10. Since the club began in 1941, it has spanned the administrations of 14 U.S. Presidents from FDR to Trump!

11. Our birth year of 1941 was notable for many game-changing events. Of course, it is best known for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the start of U.S. involvement in World War II.

12. In other developments, 1941 saw a new cereal called Cheerioats on breakfast tables and the first Jeep on the roads. Mt. Rushmore's final face, Teddy Roosevelt, was finished. Joe Dimaggio's 56 game hitting streak began and ended. 1941 was also a year filled with outstanding films, including what many consider to be the greatest movie of all time, Orson Wells' classic, "Citizen Kane."

13. In Chicago, 1941 saw initial work started on the atomic bomb, which would ultimately end the war. Our city became a hub for the war effort with two major hotels, the Stevens (now the Hilton) and the neighboring Congress serving as barracks for American troops.

14. In other 1941 trivia, a loaf of bread was 8 cents; a gallon of milk was 34 cents; a new car was about \$925; a house was bought for \$6,954. Average income was \$2,059 and the minimum wage was 30 cents an hour!

15. In 1942-43, PCC began the year with 105 members. The club also named its first female officer, Eleanor Steinart. Popular speakers that year included Lowell Thomas, acclaimed as a national CBS News correspondent and newsreel narrator.

16. The legendary Chicago columnist Irv Kupcinec, who at the time was a young sportswriter at the old Chicago Times, addressed the club for the first time in 1943.

17. In 1945, the year World War II ends, Miss America, Bess Meyerson of New York City, drops in at a PCC lunch.

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18. During the rest of the 1940s, the club attracts show business guests to its meetings. Among them are Hugh Marlowe, who was TV's "Ellery Queen" detective, and had a major role in the classic film, "All About Eve;" and distinguished actor Walter Huston, father of Academy-Award winning director John Huston. Providing entertainment were such notables as celebrated singer Lena Horne; and Ray Bolger, who played the Scarecrow in the "Wizard of Oz."

19 A speech by U of C President Robert Maynard Hutchins, delivered in the 1940s, was the first to be broadcast at a PCC meeting. Still the majority of our luncheon speakers were PR figures and media types, including Arch Ward, Herman Kogan and Fairfax Cone

20. In 1946, PCC holds a cocktail party to honor its members returning from their service during the war. To assist them in finding work, the club initiates an Employment Committee, which serves as a forerunner to the Job Mart, which matched generations of PCCers with new jobs. To this day, the club passes along job leads to its members.

21. When renowned publicist Julian Jackson was president in the 1948-49 year, he brought in literary giants like the prolific author, Nelson Algren. Mr. Jackson, who first gained prominence for his work promoting the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, also lead club members on a field trip to a Milwaukee brewery, where members learned to make and imbibe beer!

22. The 1940s end with club membership at 269 and dues at \$15.

23. During the 1950-51 period, PCC held its most glittering affair to date, our 10th Anniversary Banquet at the Blackstone Hotel on April 6, 1951. It drew 276 members and guests who received a 24-page souvenir booklet featuring articles, photos and tributes to the club from friends in the press.

24. During that era, we also attracted such A-listers as comedian Phil Silvers who starred as Sergeant Bilko in his own hit series, "The Phil Silvers Show;" jazz composer/band leader extraordinaire Duke Ellington; and the acknowledged "father of public relations," Edward L. Bernays, who traveled from New York City to address the club.

25. The 1955 election of PCC board officers gained notoriety for having 17 candidates vying for 8 seats! The slate included such colorful characters as a self-described "whiskey-drinking Kentuckian," while another candidate boasted of promoting a carnival attraction called the "Texas flea." The winner as club president was Bill Peak who handed out cards with a rhinoceros that proclaimed "Pick Peak!"



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26. Mr. Peak is also remembered for opening the club's safe deposit box. It contained unpaid bills, an old gavel and a lady's blue and gold garter!

27. The club's long-standing and highly regarded Practical Publicity course begins during the 1956-57 period.

28. Also in 1956, recently elected Mayor Richard J. Daley receives a special PCC citation, consisting of a montage of the Daley family. The first Mayor Daley gains acclaim as one of the nation's most powerful big-city mayors who would later be credited with helping John F. Kennedy win the presidency in 1960.

29. Hugh Hefner, founder of Playboy, is a big hit at a club luncheon in 1957. Mr. Hefner's daughter, Christie, who succeeded him as CEO, also was a PCC speaker. She gave the keynote presentation at the Golden Trumpets dinner in 2013. So both father and daughter addressed the club!

30. PCC's logo, designed by President Ed Morris in 1959, adorns all our material. It stays in place until well into the 1980s.

31. Also in 1959, the club unveils an awards dinner saluting excellence in public relations work. The program is renamed the Golden Trumpets Award Dinner in 1967. It gains fame as the "Oscars" of public relations! The Trumpets were hand made by RS Owens, the Chicago-based firm that produced the annual Academy Award statuettes.

32. In 1960, the same year that John F. Kennedy is elected U.S. President, the club has a membership of nearly 300 people. There were over 42 entries competing for Golden Trumpets with five winners chosen.

33. PCC hits home runs that year by snaring comedian Jerry Lewis and White Sox owner Bill Veeck as guest speakers.

34. 1961 witnesses PCC's biggest event in its 75-year history when Presidential Press Secretary Pierre Salinger addresses 1,200 communicators at our monthly luncheon on March 8. Also in 1961, the club directory is copyrighted for the first time.

35. Another celebrated luncheon program occurs in 1963 when the speaking roster includes Pulitzer Prize winning author Harry Ashmore; U.S. Department of State Chief of Protocol Angier Biddle Duke; aviation pioneer Captain Eddie Rickenbacker; and ABC anchorman Howard K. Smith, who earlier moderated the first Kennedy-Nixon debate in Chicago



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36. Our collective reputation for being “party animals” is clearly on display in 1963. That year we hold such festive gatherings as the Gaslight Club Christmas Party; a Friday the 13th Party at the Hilton’s posh Imperial Suite; a Presidents’ Party at the Burnham Yacht Club and another at Chez Paul.

37. Also in 1963, PCC breaks new ground by naming Betsy Ann Plank as its first woman president. Ms. Plank takes office at a time when few females hold leadership posts in America. It is another tribute to the club’s long standing commitment to diversity.

38. That commitment is further demonstrated when we welcome our first prominent African-American guest speaker, Winston Moore, warden of Cook County Jail. He addressed the club sometime during the 1960s.

39. In 1965, Job Mart nears its 20th anniversary and draws over 2,100 resumes for open positions. Also that year, in September, PCC hosts a star-studded luncheon panel featuring the city’s top newspaper editors. Participating are Emmett Dedmon of the Sun-Times; Larry Fanning of the Daily News; Clayton Kirkpatrick of the Tribune; and Lloyd Wendt of Chicago Today. Back then, Chicago had four daily newspapers!

40. To celebrate PCC’s 25th anniversary in 1966, we hold a black-tie banquet at the Palmer House, current home of our Golden Trumpet Dinner. The Silver Anniversary event draws 500 members who hear a keynote address from nationally-respected columnist Art Buchwald and enjoy the French charm of entertainer Maurice Chevalier.

41. Also that year, His Eminence, John Cardinal Cody, addresses a PCC luncheon, outlining the historic changes resulting from the Vatican II conference.

42. Other high profile guest speakers who appear at the club in the 1960s are CBS superstar Mike Wallace, who talks about his early days in Chicago radio; consumer advocate Ralph Nader; future O.J. attorney F. Lee Bailey; Dr. J. Allen Hynek, the nation’s foremost expert on flying saucers; Broadway producer and Oak Brook native Michael Butler; Chicago author Studs Terkel; and celebrity psychiatrist Dr. Joyce Brothers.

43. PCC begins the 1970s by hitting the magic membership number of 500!

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44. Entertainment highlights in 1970 include a unique “Christmas in Hawaii” party around the Sheraton Chicago’s (now the InterContinental) stunning Art Deco pool and a swinging time at the super popular Playboy Club.



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45. Also in 1970, syndicated columnist Jack Anderson, who would later gain notoriety for his Watergate coverage, addresses a packed PCC luncheon of over 300 members and guests

46. Republican Mayoral candidate Richard Friedman first announced his candidacy to challenge Mayor Richard J. Daley at a PCC luncheon in 1971.

47. 1974 saw the initiation of a massive effort, the rewriting of the PCC Constitution and By-Laws. This project was so intense that it took two years to complete!

48. Another innovation that year was the introduction of the club's Media Directory in a popular loose-leaf format.

49. The John Hancock's 95th Restaurant was the scene of PCC's largest "Meet the Media" party on Valentine's Day, 1975. Joining the festivities were Kup; Sun-Times editor Jim Hoge; movie critic Roger Ebert; columnist Bob Greene and WMAQ's Dick Kay.

50. In 1976, the year of our nation's Bicentennial, PCC welcomes comedienne Phyllis Diller to a club luncheon.

51. Elynore D. Meserow, PCC's third female president, serves honorably during the 1976-77 period. Her legacy lives on with The Elynore Dolkart Meserow Creativity Award for demonstrating exceptional creativity in PR campaigns, which is presented each year at our Golden Trumpet Awards program. However, Ms. Meserow's term in office begins on an unusual note. She recalled that her first board meeting consisted of sorting through the files and boxes of old PCC records from all the past years that had been stored in an alley garage near Wells Street by a previous administrator!

52. Future Chicago Mayor Jane M. Byrne, who at the time is Consumer Affairs Commissioner, addresses a PCC luncheon in 1978. During a Q and A session, she denies that she plans to run for the city's top job. Of course, the great blizzard of 1979 ultimately propels her into the 5th floor at City Hall!

53. Closing out the 1970s as president is another legendary publicist Fred Strauss, who was in U.S. Army Intelligence during World War II and served as an interpreter at the Nuremberg Trials. (Sadly, Mr. Strauss passed away earlier this year. We salute him for his extraordinary life; service to our country; and the outstanding contributions he made to PCC).

54. The decade ends on a high note for PCC. For the first time in our history, the club directory comes out on January 1, as scheduled; the Practical Publicity



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course sets an all-time financial record with close to 400 persons enrolled; and Golden Trumpets enjoyed a record of more than 200 entries.

55. At the club's 40th anniversary in 1981, President Jack McGuire observed: "What started as a loose-knit fraternity with heavy emphasis on fun and games, has evolved into a well-structured highly organized constituency, offering a variety of programs designed to further our professional development."

56. In 1982, PCC conducts a special service seminar for over 500 principals from the Chicago Public Schools. The event wins praise from School Superintendent Ruth Love.

57. In the early 80s, PCC membership jumps nearly 15% to a record 645 people!

58. During his 1983-84 term, PCC President John Settich visits his counterparts in New York and Los Angeles. He reports that those clubs also publish their own media directories. However, Mr. Settich notes that PCC outshines them in two key areas, "reliability of our volunteers and support from staff."

59. Upon arriving in Chicago, future talk show queen Oprah Winfrey shares her goals during a packed PCC luncheon appearance in 1985.

60. In the first speaking appearance by a sitting governor at the club, Illinois Governor James R. Thompson outlines his promotional campaign for the state at a PCC luncheon in 1986.

61. Also that year, representatives of Coca Cola travel from Atlanta to appear at a club luncheon to address the marketing flap caused by the planned retirement of the "classic" Coke.

62. Another memorable luncheon in 1986 featured a presentation from noted PR observer Philip Lesly who commented on the heated debate whether public relations should have a formal licensing procedure. Mr. Lesly noted that "Recognized professional stature can come only from others to recognize and respect our professionalism. It can't be imposed by law, certificate, membership card or lapel pin."

63. Following a suggestion from PCC member and current President Dominic Calabrese, the club initiates a scholarship program in 1986 for deserving public relations students in the Chicago area. Mayor Harold Washington presents the first awards at a PCC luncheon in 1987. Incidentally, the club brings back the scholarship awards in 2014.



64. At the end of the 1980s, the PCC logo is updated by members Kit Bernardi and Wilhelmina Prinz-Koeller.

65. The club marks its 50th anniversary in 1991 with a special reception at the Chicago History Museum. Also, banners celebrating the milestone adorn Michigan Avenue.

66. PCC's 60th anniversary in 2001, under President Jane Canepa, is observed with publication of a special book featuring an historical timeline; articles from prominent PR practitioners; photos from the club's rich archival collection; and proclamations from both Mayor Richard M. Daley and Governor George H. Ryan.

67. In a memorable luncheon, Don Hewitt, then executive producer of 60 Minutes, led a discussion entitled, "What Should You Do When 60 Minutes Calls?" Hiding was not an option!

68. The second Mayor Daley also is a guest speaker at a PCC luncheon during his term in office. He becomes part of a roster of Chicago mayors, past and future, who speaks before our members: Included are both Mayor Daleys, Harold Washington and Jane Byrne.

69. Charisse Witherspoon, who operates her own Chicago-based PR firm, becomes PCC's first African-American president in 2004.

70. In a rare media appearance, ABC 7's GM Emily Baar, who leads Chicago's top-rated television station, speaks at a jam-packed PCC breakfast in 2012.

71. Longtime member and past president Howard Mendelsohn, who was honored with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013, had such celebrity clients as Jack Benny, Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz.

72. Former President Jimmy Carter was the special guest speaker at PCC's Golden Trumpets Dinner in 2014. This is the first time that a U.S. president has addressed a club event.

73. Other notables who have spoken at the club's awards dinner in the past decade were the aforementioned Christi Hefner as well as Tribune Companies CEO Tony Hunter. It is a testimony to PCC's prestige that we have attracted the top media figures in Chicago to speak at our events. The roster includes the editors of the Sun-Times, Tribune and Crain's. In addition, we have welcomed news anchors, producers and assignment editors from the city's key TV and radio outlets.



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74. Former PCC Executive Director David Brimm is the “iron man” of the club, having served with distinction, a record five times as president, more than anyone else!

75. PCC begins its 75th year in 2016 under President Tim Frisbie by unveiling a new logo and plans to revamp its website.

76. Former Presidential Adviser and current CNN host David Axelrod accepts PCC's Lifetime Achievement Award at our 2017 Golden Trumpets Gala.

77. Thanks to the efforts of PCC board member Lindsey Cramer, the club holds its first event, a media forum, in Northwest Indiana on April 26, 2018.



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