

## CINCINNATI

Mrs. A. D. St. John

The Consumer Conference began most modestly in depression days, and has grown to a membership of approximately 600. We are unique in that we have a solid core of loyal and interested members who have been with us for many years. Unfortunately, age and illness take an annual toll which we must make up with new names and faces.

Being connected with the School of Home Economics of the University of Cincinnati is a great asset. The privilege of meeting on Campus cannot be underestimated. It not only gives prestige to the Consumer Conference; it furnishes us with the interest and support of many faculty members who give us good advice and splendid programs. We have not only the University of Cincinnati to draw on, but also the faculty of Xavier, which has been most generous with its resources. The Better Business Bureau, the Retail Merchants Association, the F.D.A., and Cincinnati's many business firms have given us their finest co-operation. Program material is probably the greatest lure in obtaining and keeping members, but dues frequently are a discouraging item.

The Consumer Conference started in 1934 with annual dues of 25¢. Now, a quarter of a century later, we charge the rather nominal amount of \$1.00, so that membership dues are within the reach of anyone interested in consumer education. Each month we publish a "News" bulletin containing items of interest and help. We are often told by members who are unable to attend regularly or not at all that, "that little 'News' is worth the whole dollar all by itself!"

Our monthly industrial visits to the many and varied business houses in and near Cincinnati appeal to another group whose curiosity is insatiable and whose enthusiasm unbounded. Absolutely nothing keeps them from the "completion of their appointed rounds!"

Each year we have at least one Consumer program on our local educational TV and radio stations. We have many members qualified to speak on a variety of subjects of interest to consumers, so we have a Speakers Bureau ready and willing to furnish programs gratis, to any group requesting their service. Here, too, our efforts are often rewarded by having the group join as a Club. If that is not feasible, several may take out individual memberships.

One problem we have yet to solve is that of parking. To be sure, we are on or near several bus lines, but Cincinnati is spreading into distant areas which cannot be reached "save by long and weary dances" or by car. The campus facilities for parking are stretched to the breaking point and still cannot accommodate all who would use them. The remedy to this situation is probably the one suggested by Will Rogers: "Ban every car from the road that isn't fully paid for!"

In December we have a drive to round up delinquent members who have been kept on our mailing list 'til then. Reminders in the form of an invitation to the Christmas Program are sent to all. Results are gratifying in that a majority respond by sending their dues. Then we make one further effort to reach the rest by personal call or phone. This year it was suggested that members buy memberships to include in Christmas cards to friends whom they wished to introduce to the Consumer Conference or to bring a guest to the program. That guest might then wish to join.

Our Hospitality Committee makes every effort to greet members, particularly new ones, to see that they are made to feel both wanted and at home. One small suggestion, here, which pays off: use plastic containers for membership cards, which may be pinned to one's dress or coat. Each meeting is followed by a tea in our lovely Faculty Parlor. These teas are sponsored by our Co-operating Clubs, and bring the Conference to the attention of the entire Club, so that others, aside from their two representatives, become interested in joining.

To sum up, then:

To acquire and keep members, an organization must have a purpose. In our case, the purpose is Consumer Education. To achieve that purpose, the organization must present timely, stimulating, worthwhile programs. Interest must be fostered by these programs so that members come back for more.

The members must have something to work for which is worth their time and effort, such as participation in a panel discussion or skit,

or working on a committee. For example, our members sponsor the Maude Jackson Memorial Fund, which presents an annual scholarship to the University.

Finally, the members must be given an opportunity to meet congenial people in pleasant surroundings. "All this and parking, too" adds up to a large and loyal membership.

This resume of the methods of the Consumer Conference of Greater Cincinnati in obtaining members and keeping them is offered in the hope that it may be of use to other groups. It has worked for us!