

Club Meetings: Part

Club meetings! In many ways, they're the backbone of the hobby, and, yet, as with so many phases of hobbies in general these days, they seem to be in trouble. If for no other reason, with the decline in number of collectors, it's correspondingly more difficult to get a decent number of people at club meetings, including swapfests and conventions. That, in turn, causes declining meeting attendance...causing even fewer people to want to attend in the first place—it's a vicious circle! So, back in January, I contacted every RMS member with a known [and working] e-mail address, asking for their thoughts on the problems and solutions here. I also included a similar request with most of my outgoing postal correspondence for the next several weeks. Presented here is the amalgamated input I received.

Perceived Problems With Club Meetings:

1. **Too far to travel.** Understandably, this was by far the most frequent response from those collectors who simply didn't attend meetings at all, and, in those rare instances when such collectors *did* make the journey, Larry Martin's, AZ, response was typical: "Went to one as a one-day trip (about 800 miles+meeting time) and the gas cost me more than was available to buy [at the meeting] that interested me." Jack Benbrook, AZ, added, "I can see local club meetings disappearing, especially on the West Coast (because of the travelling distances)." One Florida collector added, "The biggest negative, in most areas, is the distance people have to cover in order to attend.

2. **Too few attendees:** As noted in the introduction, this is a big one. One collector noted, "Because there are almost no local members on our local club's roster, you cannot do anything with the few people that do show up." Another indicated, "With all the time and driving involved, it's just not worth meeting up with the same six people who couldn't help my collecting goals the last time." Club after club decries poor meeting attendance (i.e., MARVA's Nov. bulletin). Still another added, "We have the same members show up every month and very seldom do we see a new face. We try every year at a Hobby Show to promote our club but very seldom do we get any new members...Our attendance at meetings is down due to illness and every year our members are getting older..."

3. **Apathy.** "I run the Empire Matchcover Club, which holds three of its five meetings a year at my apartment in New York City. I would say we average around 10 members at a meeting. When I first joined Empire over 22 years ago, I think the average attendance was not much higher. Is this because the City scares people - traffic, the cost of parking, etc.? I really don't know. The people that do attend are the people who have a true interest in the hobby. It drives me crazy trying to figure out why people who live in the City never attend a meeting. I've come to the conclusion it's because it's just not that important to them. Think about it- It doesn't cost them anything except maybe \$4 for transportation; it's a chance to meet fellow collectors and share their knowledge and love of the hobby; we have a grab table which is a chance to pick up covers and boxes at no cost; we have "Show & Tell", so it's a chance to learn what's hot or what's new in the hobby or learn about covers or boxes you've never seen before; off and on we have auctions where you can add to your collection at a very minimal cost; we serve cake and coffee and even order pizza for lunch so you won't go home hungry. If these things can't induce you to attend, then you just don't care." [Joe DeGennaro, NY] "Low attendance at local matchcover club meetings has been a problem for quite some time. With such a fast-paced world today, is there no time for us to attempt to get to our local club meeting? If you live close to the meeting place, there's no excuse. If you're retired, there's REALLY NO EXCUSE." [Anonymous]

4. **Meetings not focused on matchcovers.** A large percentage of respondents identified this as a continuing problem and a *real* turn-off for attending. For example: "It seems we sometimes get bogged down in the business meeting and spend less time "doing" the hobby." [Joyce Moyer, MA] "I attended several AMCAL conventions in the late 80's and early 90's, but I quickly lost interest because there was too much emphasis on social activities and not enough emphasis on the hobby." [Jack Benbrook, AZ]

5. **Too many veteran collectors are gone.** "What I have seen in the past few years is that the veteran mainstays

Problems vs. Solutions

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of the hobby have passed away. In the Long Beach Club, for example, they have lost Jim Moffett, Frank Lawton,

Hank Northam, Walter Hubbard, Jimmy and Opal Calhoun, Dorothy and Bob Cheesman, and many others. Of course, Sierra Diablo lost Warren Marshall, and I believe those veterans were really what made clubs successful. That the hobby needs new members goes without saying, but so far all efforts seem to have added few new members, and I'm not sure if they attend club meetings." *[Jack Benbrook, AZ]*

- "Really the older collectors are dying off [sad to say], and the ones they are leaving their collections with don't really care about them, only how much can they get for them on "E-Bay", or from some other collector who is truly interested in the covers or what they have on hand." *[Wilton Mason, LA]*

- "Unfortunately, as older members die off and are not replaced the trend seems to be that all local clubs are suffering a lack of attendance. It's something that has existed for quite awhile and I don't see it changing in the foreseeable future. I remember in my early days in the hobby driving two hours each way with Manny Phillips and his wife up to Connecticut for their meetings which were well attended. They had sponsors who supplied lunch and beverages, a nice grab table, a good auction and gave display awards which prompted people to bring many wonderful and creative displays. I still attend their Swapfest in October but with Manny and his wife gone it's too long a trip for me to make by myself for just the day." *[Joe DeGennaro, NY]*

6. **Lack of younger collectors.** Several respondees noted the lack of youngsters in the hobby, the traditional problem the hobby has had with attracting young people as members, and the almost impossible circumstances now, with the decline in cover availability and smoking, in general.

7. **ebay.** "I think EBAY has taken all the joy out of the hobbies; nobody has to drive miles when all they have to do is sit on their butts. *[Bob Stowe, FL]*

8. **Decline in product.** "We can't get new younger members to stay with the hobby because of the "product". I got into this grand hobby over 50 years ago because I was attracted by the beauty of the covers I noticed. Back in the early 50's, I saw these beautiful matchcovers...the Lion 30's, Features. Then Universal came out with Uniglos, Filligrees, Foilites, Jewels, Jewelites, etc, etc, and, oh yes, Matchoramas...boy, what a grand time I had....and I am sure that collectors of my generation will agree. So...what do the young collectors today have to look out for? Dull, crappy, uninteresting, boring covers...(that's why I switched to boxes)...They join RMS and advertise that they are after knotholes, odd strikers, features, etc., and then when they don't get any response, they quit. So, don't blame the "hobby"; blame the "product". *[Les Good, NY]* "A lot of people started casually in the hobby because matchbooks were readily available and easy to pick up at a restaurant, bar, hotel, etc. Rare is the corner bar, coffee shop, even diner, that has matchbooks anymore." *[Anonymous]*

9. **Meeting dates and places.** "I love going to the club meetings, but my problem is the time that they are held. I have to work Sunday afternoons so I am unable to attend them. I guess no time would be perfect for everybody. *[Tom Meek, CA]*

10. **Additional factors: \$\$.** Another issue in the background reaching critical mass is club finances. With the loss of members throughout the hobby, and that means less dues and fewer people participating in club auctions, more and more clubs have had to make cutbacks somewhere. Great Lakes MC, for example, recently cut its bulletin back from 12 to 10 pages. Sierra-Diablo, which has prided itself on putting out a monthly bulletin since its inception 20+ years ago, has now had to go to 10 bulletins a year. It also only mails out its club roster upon request, posting it, instead, on its web site...and so on. The declining number of collectors has also led to other problems for clubs. Mid-South MC, for example, announced, first, that it was no longer able to support the Southeast Swapfest...due to a lack of manpower...and then later announced its *Proposed solutions next issue*