

## **Public Service Ads Flower With Local Tie-ins**

**By Howard Bell**

Former U.S. House Speaker tip O'Neill noted that all politics is local. So is all advertising.

There is a lot going on in advertising beyond Madison Avenue that doesn't make the headlines, but does make a difference.

Whether advertising is produced nationally or not, the intended target and impact is in one of more *local* communities. The same principle applies to public service advertising. A campaign created by the Ad Council has the same Main Street targets as one created by a local ad club.

In fact, the most effective Ad Council campaigns are those that directly tie into local organizations. Adaptation of national PSA campaigns to individual community needs is another way to improve the impact. A superb example is the establishment of a Florida state alliance program of the advertising industry's Partnership for a Drug Free America.

The project is patterned after the coalition of advertising and media interests brought together for the national program by the American Association of Advertising Agencies, including Florida media associations, Four A's Florida Council and the 4<sup>th</sup> District American Advertising Federation.

A separate, non-profit corporation was formed, and AAF's 4<sup>th</sup> District requested and received a federal grant to cover operating expenses. The national partnership supplies all its campaign materials to the Florida group free of charge. The ad clubs are marketing the program throughout the state and all media in Florida has been asked to commit to a minimum amount of anti-drug PSAs for one full year.

The result in 1991 was \$32 million of media support, making Florida the state with the highest level of anti-drug abuse messages in the country.

Tom Hall, chairman of Earle Palmer Brown in Tampa and chairman of the Florida partnership, sums up the program: "We have demonstrated how to approach public service advertising in a different way. The result is a more expanded effort and a more effective one."

I suspect there is another benefit as well. State and local governments share the public's concern over drug abuse and the terrible financial burden it creates. These are the same governments that are often ignorant and critical of advertising. A positive industry response to a critical public concern could help create the more favorable climate and attitude for advertising that it deserves but rarely achieves.

In Florida, where the threat of an ad tax has resurfaced, the governor held a special referendum to personally thank everyone involved in the Florida partnership.

Six other states are developing public service programs patterned after the Florida partnership. The national partnership is delighted and hopes the program will spread to all 50 states.

It's a main street idea worth pursuing.

---

*Mr. Bell is the former president of the American Advertising Federation*