

When I joined the Alumni Association as president and CEO, the first thing I did was establish our vision of being the biggest and the best alumni organization in the world.

That vision contains two specific challenges.

Being the best is something that is something our staff aspires to each and every day. It is a charge to seek ways to change, innovate, and expand. I want my staff to challenge assumptions and never accept that the way that we've always done things is the way that we should always do them.

I think that we've lived up to this challenge. Today, we offer more programs, raise more scholarship money, and have a better view of our members than ever before. When we can directly affect and improve the worth of a membership in the Association, we live up to this challenge.

The second part of our vision is being the biggest. Simply put, we want to have more dues-paying members than anyone else. The Association draws a great deal of its operating resources from membership revenue, so the more members we have, the better and richer benefits we are able to offer.

The value of a membership is something that we talk about every day in our organization. In fact, our third strategic goal speaks directly to this conversation. It reads: We will become the biggest dues-supported alumni association by demonstrating exceptional service and indispensable value. Those last two phrases are very important to me. They suggest that we won't become the biggest by happenstance. Rather, we offer so many valuable benefits that you'd be selling yourself short by not joining.

We hope that all alumni view membership in the Association as a valued part of their complete Buckeye experience. And I have no doubt that many do feel this way. I have heard from countless members who've joined because they feel indebted to Ohio State and want to continue to help their university. This was the prime reason I joined—I wanted to pay forward for the university, and I knew that the Alumni Association was deeply engaged in furthering the Ohio State's mission. To me, joining was an easy choice.

For others, it is not quite as easy. In these difficult economic times, budgets are tight and many people are looking for value when they plunk down the money to join an organization. Although it may not be quite as straight forward as an out-and-out quid pro quo, many members want to know that their \$65 will bring them at least that much in return. This is understandable. If it is indeed our goal to offer exceptional service and indispensable value, reaching that \$65 benchmark should not be that difficult.

So I decided to take a closer look at our benefits of membership to see what is included. Are we providing the dollar-for-dollar value that makes it a no-brainer for someone to join?

What I did is look at four benefits that a member could potentially use. If I bought \$100-worth of merchandise at Buckeye Corner, my membership would get me a \$10 rebate. If I wanted to wear that new gear to a Blue Jackets game, my membership would get me 20 percent off of two tickets, a savings of \$20 for some pretty good seats. If I used our 20 percent discount at Brooks Brothers on a \$100 purchase, I'd save another \$20. And if after these purchases I decided to take a Spanish course through Ohio State's Continuing Education Office, my membership would get me an \$18 savings.

On those four purchases combined, I would have saved \$68, which would exceed the \$65 cost of an annual membership. And this only takes into account four of the more than 40 benefits we have listed on our site. It also doesn't take into account the fact that members receive six copies of *Ohio State Alumni Magazine* each year, and subscriptions to a bi-monthly magazine can cost between \$15 and \$25.

As you can see, I believe we can make a strong case that a membership in our Association is worth each and every penny. When you pile the intangibles on top of it and factor in the work we do to make your university stronger, I frankly think that joining is a no-brainer.

Of course, this does not mean we are ready to rest on our laurels. As I mentioned early on, being the best means you are constantly striving for ways to improve. To that end, our staff continues to seek ways to add value to a membership. We have some very good ideas about how we can improve and grow in the next few years and we're working diligently to bring those benefits to reality.

I am truly excited about the way our organization is positioned for the future. There is no doubt in my mind that we have some fruitful and bright days ahead.