

Joining A Local Camera Club; The Benefits Of Membership By Wayne Beauregard • January, 2006

Photography is a wide-ranging field that engenders passion in its practitioners, and like all great forms of expression creates opinions formed through experience and reflection. In its early days one of the great debates was: Is Photography Art? This was the subject of many essays and heated discussions among players and spectators. Today, issues such as film vs. digital, format choices, the validity of computer-generated images, photography as exploitation or revealer, and even the merits of inkjet vs. silver prints cause similar debate. We are opening this department up to readers, manufacturers, and retailers—in short, everyone who lives and breathes photography and who has an opinion about anything affecting imaging today.

Here's how to get involved: write us an e-mail at editorial@shutterbug.com or send us a letter with a proposed topic and a synopsis of your idea. Once approved, we'll ask you to send us about 500-1000 words on the subject chosen. The idea here is not to push any product or wave any flag, but to create discussion about photo and imaging topics of the day. We reserve the right to edit whatever you send in, although we will never edit intention or opinion but only for length and, hopefully, for clarity. We reserve the right to publish your work on our website as well, so you can join the archives and be a resource for opinion for years to come.

So, get thinking and writing and share your Point of View.
—George Schaub

Have you ever had a photography question but couldn't find anyone to help, or maybe a photograph that needs a review to help you improve your skills, or just someone to talk to about photography? Perhaps it is time to consider a camera club.

Camera clubs have been around for nearly as long as the camera has. They are located all over the world and as close as your local town or city. They provide an opportunity to improve your photographic skills and knowledge, a venue to challenge those skills, and a forum to share what you have learned with others who have a passion for photography.

Most camera clubs meet several times during the month. Each meeting centers around a theme, a workshop (how-to) session on equipment or software, a presentation by a member or expert on a particular subject, a competition between members, or a night to review and critique other's work.

My local club has been in existence for 32 years with a membership of approximately 130 adults, ranging from young to young at heart with experience levels from amateur to professional. The one thing we all have in common is the need to continue learning and the willingness to help our companions. During a meeting you will see the 25-year pro teaching the three-year amateur the proper techniques for composition, and 5 minutes later the amateur is teaching the pro about digital storage cards. There is always something new to learn in the world of photography.

Our club meets each week and adheres to the following program schedule. The first week of every month is competition night. You are allowed to bring in two of your favorite images (prints, slides, or digital) to compete with other members in a specific class, e.g., beginners, intermediate, and advanced. Each image is judged by a non-member of the club. In most cases it is a senior member of a neighboring camera club. Ribbons are awarded to the top three finishes in each class. For the beginner class, feedback is provided to help the camera enthusiast improve on their work. These nights are always interesting as it provides you with a barometer to gauge your skills as a photographer against other members of your club. There is also that rivalry among the group for bragging rights till the next competition.

The second week of the month is usually an instructional workshop, where camera equipment and accessories are discussed. The format is usually a short presentation followed by a question and answer period. Some topics may include "Exposure and Metering," "The Proper Use of Flash," or "Matting and Framing Your Prints." For the digital photographer or those who scan their images, workshops are conducted on the use of current software as well as creating a slide presentation complete with special effects and music. The digital world has been a new challenge to our club. Since the beginning, slides have dominated the club's agenda, but with the increasing interest in digital, the club has adjusted to successfully support both formats.

The third week of the month is reserved for presentations. We might have a visiting photographer showcase his work or one of our own members put on a program for us. Many of our members present at other local camera clubs or at a regional level. This gives them a good opportunity to try out their presentation in front of a live crowd. The atmosphere is very relaxed during these evenings where you can just sit back and enjoy the show.

The last week of the month is what we call our image study night. Here you are allowed to bring in two images and show them to the group for critique. This is where your photographic skills can accelerate. Most camera clubs will have members with extensive experience in all types of photography. So whether your preference is outdoor nature or indoor portraiture, there are usually several members who can provide you with the constructive criticism to advance your photography skills to the next plateau.

One of the added benefits of my camera club is the organization of local field trips. It provides an opportunity to learn and share your own photographic knowledge with other members on the trip. This also gives you an opportunity to visit places you may not have considered on your own. The trips typically cover macro photography, portraits, nature, or wildlife and spans all seasons. It's both a way to enhance your portfolio and provide you with material to enter into competition night.

Ok, I have your attention and you can't wait to join, but the question is how do I find a local club? The obvious answer is to do an Internet search on camera or photo clubs in your state. Most camera clubs have their own websites so you can usually review their

program schedule and mission to see if it satisfies your requirements. You can also visit the Photographic Society of America (PSA) website (www.psa-photo.org) for a list of affiliate camera clubs by state. They are a national organization established to promote and enhance the art and science of photography. Another option is through a local camera store. Most camera clubs have an arrangement with the local merchants for processing and supplies (usually at a discount for members), so they can provide you with information on area clubs. The way I got started in a camera club was through a photography seminar I attended where I met and discussed with a number of attendees the benefits of joining a local camera club. Several discussions during the break periods convinced me to join.

Try before you join. Most camera clubs will allow you to attend their meetings prior to joining to determine if your needs will be met. The only thing you will not be allowed to do is participate in competitions. I would recommend you visit all the camera clubs within your acceptable driving range and talk to as many of the members as you can. Once those requirements are met, join the club. You will never regret your decision.

You may visit my club's website at www.photo-ne.com/clubs/stony.html or to locate a club near you visit PSA at www.psa-photo.org.