**Mentoring New Stamp Club Members**

**Part One: Starting**

**Rationale:** Todays’ stamp clubs are experiencing an influx of members aged 50 to 65 who are returning to a hobby they enjoyed in their youth. In addition, there are beginner collectors from this age group also joining clubs (perhaps as a result of inheriting a collection many years ago or because they have the leisure time to take up a hobby). The other group that needs mentoring are the youth who attend our shows as well as our clubs. Mentors are needed that are oriented to youth as well as adult beginners. Don’t take for granted that the new collectors who visit your club have any idea how to proceed, for that assumption will cost the hobby dearly.

Stamp clubs tend to view members as experienced and long-term collectors and often are not organized to assist those who come to the hobby as beginners. For the hobby to thrive we, the experienced collectors, have a duty to all new members.

**Who should be a mentor:** While all members of any stamp club should be prepared to mentor, the more experienced members (life-time members of the club and/or RPSC for example) are those who should leap into action! These are the individuals with the most knowledge and experience.

**What are the subject matters that new collectors need to learn?**

**Each of these areas can be addressed on an as-needed basis or organized as a series of presentations. This will depend upon the needs of the beginner(s) and could be one-on-one or focused on a small group.**

1. Where do I start? This should include a discussion of supplies (tongs, hinges, stock sheets, albums, and books on beginner collecting).
2. What do I do with the collection I’ve inherited? Often the new member has a starter collection and needs to get advice about how to proceed.
3. What do I collect? A discussion of mint versus used, country versus topical, First Day Covers versus event covers and so forth. This could easily involve the whole club in a discussion as every collector does something different and has different interests. Encourage the collector to start with what they are comfortable with.
4. Removing stamps from paper (envelopes):
   1. How to soak and dry stamps.
   2. How to handle coloured paper soaking (everyone can remember that stamp that turned bright red).
   3. What about self-stick stamps? Some soak just fine in water while others require a glue solvent (Bestine, for example).
5. Handling stamps and the use of tongs. What are the precautions that need to be taken, especially with mint and rare (valuable) stamps?
6. Identifying the country that issued a stamp. Two sources: stamp identifiers that were issued by stamp companies like ‘Harris’ and a catalogue.
7. How does one use a catalogue?
8. The advantages of an album versus using your own pages (recommend 28-pound weight or better if one is going to make their own pages).
9. Hinge use: When and how to use hinges. Also, how to safely remove hinges without damaging the stamp (today’s hinges are quite aggressive and should be soaked off).
10. Stock pages for mint stamps.
11. Specialized books for covers.
12. Storage of your collection. (where, why, and how).
13. Buying: Dealers, auctions, on-line, club circuits, bourses etc. Do I buy bulk or individual items, mint or used, older versus more recent, covers, etc.? Some collectors enjoy the hunt (bulk buyer), some want to fill holes, etc. No strategy is wrong, but finding one’s comfort zone may take time.
14. Insurance: At what point does a collector need insurance? What is the best source?
15. Library: Does the club have a library? If not, has the club made an effort to arrange the borrowing of books from other members by creating a list of available publications.
16. *The Canadian Philatelist*, *Canada Stamp News*, on-line, and other publications as sources of information. Are there samples available at the club?
17. A beginner table: This creates a comfort zone for new collectors. They can work with like-minded collectors and ask questions.
18. Tagging, paper types, errors, freaks, and other specialized discussions should occur whenever questions about these come up. Tagging and paper types are not areas of wide-spread knowledge at the club level, so a mentor is essential, not just for beginners but any collector who has interest in these areas as their collection grows.

**Finally (and of importance):** Is the club environment one of friendly interaction or one of specialized intents. The atmosphere at the club (and shows) must be one that is open, respectful and focused on working with and encouraging all levels of activity.

**Mentoring Part Two: Specialization and Exhibiting**

**Rationale:** Sharing knowledge is done in two ways: discussion groups and exhibiting.

**Discussions (or presentations):** A short 5 to 10-minute talk on what any collector finds intriguing about the hobby leads to healthy discussions at the club level (and seminars at the regional and national level). How well does your club do encouraging short talks and meetings?

**Exhibiting:** Many collectors have areas of ‘expertise’ but rarely share their knowledge. Exhibiting, whether as a single page or multiple frames (6 or 16 pages per frame), should be encouraged.

1. Mentor: an experienced exhibitor or an exhibit judge should work with individuals who want to share their specialization (or just create a story).
2. Level: At first encourage creating the exhibit for a local level display. Far too few local shows have exhibits of any type and fun exhibits encourage collecting (e.g. a topical exhibit).
3. Specialized exhibits: Advanced collectors may want to exhibit at the regional and national level. A local mentor working with the (novice or experienced) exhibitor will better prepare the exhibitor for what the judges expect. Doing well encourages exhibiting, but is dependent entirely upon a good local mentor to insure the exhibit is well done (see David Piercey’s articles in TCP).