

Winners have a stake in dozens of contests

September 2, 2007

BY PAULA LLOYD

MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

Arlene Merrow says she can't understand how people can complain about never winning contests when they admit to never sending in any entries.

Merrow of Fresno, Calif., wins about 10 contest prizes a month, which has nothing to do with luck, she says, but everything to do with "the three P's -- postage, patience and persistence."

Advertisement

The secret to her success is sending in about 100 entries a month, says Merrow, who helped found the Central California Sweepstakes Club several years ago to share tips for entering contests -- and hopefully the thrill of winning -- with other sweepstakes enthusiasts.

On a recent Saturday morning, about a dozen club members meet for the club's monthly breakfast meeting.

"It's just a fun group. Arlene is just a sweepstakes person. I've won a few things, but not like Arlene," says Janet Talbot, Merrow's neighbor. She has entered contests for many years but only recently joined the club.

During the last 20 years, Merrow has won 15 trips, more than a dozen bicycles, two washers, two dryers, a microwave, an exercise bike, a DVD player, many gift certificates and other smaller gifts.

Merrow has one hard-and-fast rule: "I don't enter for vacuum cleaners." Instead, she looks for contests that award trips or items that will make good gifts. She gave most of the bicycles to her four grandsons.

Merrow's husband, Doyle, says he doesn't mind his wife's hobby. "I get to take the trips," he says, including a seven-day trip to Italy. The Merrows returned from another trip they won to the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta to find notification under their front porch mat that they'd won a trip to Hawaii.

Member Lou Ann Johnson has a favorite saying about sending out a lot of entries: "If you don't send your ship out, your ship won't come in."

Johnson has entered contests for about four years and has won movie tickets and an iPod.

The lure of entering contests is the chance of winning. "It's the unexpected, trying to get something for nothing. If the FedEx truck comes down the street, I get all excited," Johnson says.

But members say they don't enter contests that charge an entry fee. "Our favorite three words are 'no purchase necessary,'" Mellow says.

And they're also careful about entering contests with big-ticket rewards, such as trips or vehicles, Taylor says. Income taxes must be paid on prizes, and those taxes can be high on items worth more than \$600. Instead, members look for big-prize contests that include cash, which can be used to pay taxes.

The members are always on the lookout for contests to enter. "If I see the word 'win,' it pops out at me," says Marge Koontz, 85.

Koontz enters contests daily, but only online, to avoid the cost of postage. She has won a pickup truck, trips, cash, skis, appliances and two computers.

Find this article at:

<http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070902/FEATURES01/709020538/1025/FEATURES>