

## Clubs RVers can Join

by Alice Zyetz

Ah, the life of the open road: the sense of complete freedom, just meandering down the back roads of our great country, moving from one beautiful scene to the next-no plans, no cares, no responsibilities, no neighbors, nobody to talk to but each other (IF you are traveling with a partner). For some people, the independence is a delightful change from their old life. But for most of us, we begin to miss the networks we built during our "stick house" years. We seek companionship and some structure as we wander.

The solution: membership clubs. In addition to providing a social organization, the clubs can provide technical assistance, emergency services, mail and message services, campground discounts, and prodigious amounts of information. There are multipurpose clubs, clubs for owners of specific RV brands, and special interest groups to join. Membership fees are low compared to services offered.



### Major Multipurpose RV Clubs (in alphabetical order)

**Escapees RV Club** (<http://www.escapees.com>) offers a magazine, private campground discounts, a system of Escapees parks, two national rallies, mail service, extensive Web site, special interest groups, local chapters, partnerships with various service providers, political action preserving RVers' rights, and a day-care facility for ailing members.

Originally designed as a support group for full-timers, the Escapees RV Club has grown into a full-fledged "family" on the road meeting the principles of Support, Knowledge, and Parking. The letters S, K, P stand for the sound you hear when you say "Escapee."

**FMCA** (Family Motor Coach Association <http://www.fmca.com>) offers many of the above benefits but does not have its own parks or a day-care facility. Before the widespread use of the cell phone, FMCA's message service was invaluable for a low cost solution to phone communication for the traveler. Members tell me they particularly enjoy the smaller chapter or regional rallies for information-sharing and socializing with old friends. The large rallies provide excellent seminars, multiple vendors, and displays of new rigs.

Membership in FMCA is limited to motorhome owners. Most trailer owners don't care, but one of my favorite fifth wheel correspondents is Janet Wilder, whose own rig is no slouch and must be hauled by a medium-duty truck. She tells me that she has a flock of flamingos she puts out when she is parked for a few days. Whenever a motorhome with the FMCA logo (known as an "egg") parks next to her, she warns the owners that her "trailer trash" flamingos' favorite food is FMCA eggs.

**The Good Sam Club** (<http://www.goodsamclub.com>) began in 1966 when a group of RV owners put Good Samaritan bumper stickers on their rigs so fellow members would know they could get help on the road.

Now, with a membership of one million family members, the goal remains the same as from those days: to make RVing safer and more enjoyable, and save members money through Club-endorsed benefits and services. As with Escapees and FMCA, Good Sam has a monthly magazine, rallies, local chapters, and offers campground and service providers' discounts.

## Clubs for Owners of Specific Brands of RVs

In addition to the general interest clubs, many RVers join clubs based on the brand of RV they own to gain information specific to their needs. At the rallies, they receive technical advice as well as repairs from company technicians and experts. Vendors provide products specific to them. Newer models are often displayed so it is easy to trade up. Embroidered throughout is another opportunity for socializing, dining together, and sightseeing. Many have newsletters and local chapters to keep the information flowing all year long. Some sponsor caravans to travel together for extensive sightseeing. An excellent site for information on almost every manufacturer's club is RV Net Linx.

## Special Interest Clubs

Special interest clubs round out the list of clubs one can join: including motorcycle clubs, Canadian clubs, freight chassis owners' clubs, singles clubs, National African-American RV club, pop-up campers' club, etc. Links to more than 75 clubs can be found here. (<http://www.rv-clubs.us/rv-clubs.html>) Most of the national travel clubs, AAA, Better World, etc. also provide special services to the RVer as part of the club membership.

Most of the multipurpose clubs listed above have subgroups for special interests. In the Escapees RV Club, for example, they are called Birds-of-a-feather (BOF) groups and Chapters (by geographic area). This allows members with common interests to get in touch. Many have newsletters or bulletin boards and get-togethers.

Finally, some RVers keep their memberships in non-RV organizations to help maintain their interests as they travel: Audubon Society for the birder; American Volkspport Association, for the walker, publishes a book of walks one can do all over the United States.

You never have to be lonely on the road. My very favorite example is an RVer I met in South Texas who is also a tuba player. Wherever he is every Christmas, he checks the Tuba Christmas site to find out where tuba players are gathering in the area so he can put on his Santa hat, schlep his tuba, and join the local tuba community. Yes, Virginia, there is a club for EVERYBODY!

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