

How to Start an Ohio Rainbow Web Site

I have frequently been asked how to go about starting a Rainbow Assembly web site. So here are some basic steps to at least get you started on the path to having your own Ohio Rainbow Girls web site for your Assembly.

Before you get started please read Supreme Assembly's guidelines and recommendations for web sites available here on OhioRainbow.org. Also the Ohio Grand Assembly Web Site Committee has designed a form that all Ohio Rainbow web sites must agree to before they can become a sanctioned Ohio Rainbow web site. There are two versions of this form. One for local Assemblies and one for a District web site. You can download this form at OhioRainbow.org in the Acrobat Reader format which is a very common format used on the Internet for documents and which you probably already have on your computer. It is available free of charge if you do not have it.. Search for Acrobat Reader and you will find it.

Step One

Probably the most important thing is to find someone to be the webmaster of your Assembly's new site. This does not have to be someone vastly experienced in web site design, although that would certainly help. They can be an adult or a Rainbow Girl. In fact you only need a willingness to learn and the time to spend learning. Plus the willingness to maintain and keep updated your new site. They don't run themselves you know. I myself knew nothing about web site design when I started the OhioRainbow site back in 1999. I learned by doing. And the best thing to do if you are new to web page design is to start simple with a one page site. You can always add to the site as you progress.

Step Two

Okay, you found someone to be the webmaster. Now what? The webmaster needs to decide what software they are going to use to create the web site. If you have ever looked on the shelf in the stores for web design software you will doubtless find many programs out there that fit the bill. My personal favorite is Microsoft Frontpage, which also happens to be the program that Supreme uses on their web site. But you can certainly use whatever you want. Many software programs include web design in their packages. Broderbund's Printshop for example includes web design. Also check your computer's operating system software. Windows 98 for example included Microsoft Frontpage Express with it. This is a bare bones version of the full blown version but it certainly is adequate for getting started with your web site.

There are many good books out there on web page design. Take a look in your local bookstores. But don't overlook your local library. They may have just what you need and it won't cost you anything.

Now practice designing a site. You do not need a place to host it yet. Most web design software will let you preview your page so that you can see what it will look like online without it actually having to be online. This is a great time to learn what you can do.

If your webmaster also happens to own a scanner or digital camera you can add pictures of your Assembly's activities to your site. But even if the webmaster does not have access to either of these hardware devices themselves they can obtain pictures on a disk from others who do have the hardware. But be careful, only the first names of active Rainbow Girls are permitted on the captions under your pictures!

If you need ideas on what to include on your site the best thing is spend some time visiting other Rainbow Assembly sites. This need not be limited to Ohio Sites. Check out some of the sites in other states. You can find them through the links at Supreme's web site, www.IORG.org

Step Three

You have decided you are ready to go online. Now you must find a server to "host" your site. By that I mean that you have to upload your site to someplace on the Internet that will store your "pages" and make them accessible 24/7 to the whole world. There are several ways to go about this. My first recommendation to Ohio Rainbow Assemblies would be to inquire about the use of some free web space on some of your local Masonic sites. Many Masonic Lodges, Eastern Star Chapters and other members of our Masonic families already have web sites themselves and are happy to provide some space for our youth organizations. OhioRainbow.org for example is hosted by the Grand Lodge of Ohio on the server that they use. And I wish to acknowledge and thank the Grand Lodge for allowing us to do this. So check with your sponsoring bodies, advisory board, and other Masonic groups in your area. Someone is likely to have already set up a site for themselves and can assist you to finding a host for your Assembly's site. And they might even offer you space on their server. You will never know until you ask.

Second, check with your Internet Service provider. Many of them will provide a small amount of space for a personal web site. But the operative word here is "small". Still for a simple site it will be more than adequate. How much space you will need depends on many factors like the number of graphics, pictures, and pages.

The third option is to buy space on one of the many servers out there in cyberland. Now you will notice that I used the word "buy". There are many "free" host servers out there. The "catch" is that in return for some free web space you have to permit them to post an advertisement on every web page you have. These are not only annoying, but can and have led to inappropriate sites and materials. And you, as the webmaster, have absolutely no control over the kinds of advertising put on your site. Certainly not what we want in a Rainbow site. So Supreme Assembly has "recommended" and the Ohio Grand Assembly Web Site Committee has **required** that your Ohio Rainbow Assembly web site be ad-free. Yes, this means that you will have to pay for the privilege of being ad-free. But do not despair! Web space can be inexpensive and you won't have to sell the farm. Two examples, both Geocities and Angelfire have the "free" sites with ads, but they both also offer Plus accounts. Both offer a 25MB site (more than adequate I assure you) for only \$4.95 per month with NO ads. And you can use your browser to do a search and find even more. And here is a suggestion, if you do find that you will have to pay for a web site, why not ask your Assembly or sponsoring body to foot the bill? After all, no one said that the webmaster should be the one responsible to fund the site. Preferably the site should be "owned" by the Assembly and not by a individual.

A word about domain names. These are convenient but will cost you. A domain name is simply a shortcut to your site. You pay a fee, usually yearly, and your "name" is registered and nobody else can use it. OhioRainow.org is a registered domain name. When you type that into your browser you are automatically forwarded to the actual site on the Grand Lodge's servers where the pages reside which actually has a long URL, or address, that is long to type in and harder to remember. Much simpler to remember ohiorainbow.org. Should you get a domain name? Hard to say. If you have the funding to do so it might be a good idea. But if you are on

a limited budget you can certainly run a web site without it. Having your site linked to our OhioRainbow.org site will help with this as all a person need do is click on the link to your Assembly's site and they are automatically taken there. No long addresses to type in by using the link.

Step Four

Well now you are up and running online! Congratulations on getting this far! Now you need to register your new Assembly web site with the Ohio Grand Assembly Web Site committee. Registering will assure us that you are in compliance with our rules and will also get your new site "linked" on the OhioRainbow.org web site. This means that people will be able to find your site much easier through the link. OhioRainbow.org is probably the first place people will look when searching for information on Ohio Rainbow and its Assemblies.

The form for registration is available online at OhioRainbow.org in Acrobat Reader format. Print it out and then **read** it carefully. The requirements for Ohio Rainbow web sites are spelled out. Now is the time to make sure that your site is in compliance and to correct it if it is not. Note that the form requires several signatures. These include your Mother Advisor, Webmaster, and if the webmaster is a Rainbow Girls, and adult advisor, and Advisory Board for the web site. The form for District web sites is almost the same but has been adapted to apply to a District site rather than a local Assembly. As stated on the form, you will need to snail mail the form to me at the address indicated at the top. And most importantly the form **must** be kept up to date. E-mail addresses, postal addresses, and phone numbers do change as well as the people involved. The Mother Advisor can change once a year for example. So every March you will need to fill out and submit a new form.

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That's about it. I hope this article has helped you with your quest to start your own Assembly web site. I am here to help if I can so feel free to e-mail me at rjackson@ohiorainbow.org.

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Ohio Grand Assembly Web Site Committee