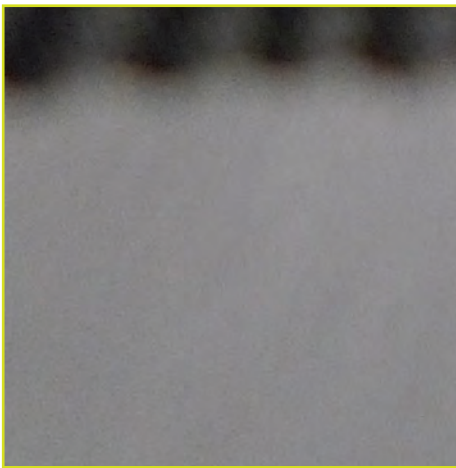


IDUS 711

Methods
of
Contextual Research



LEGIONNAIRES

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Stagnant Membership in
a
Vibrant Historic City:

An Ethnographic Study
of American Legion
Recruitment

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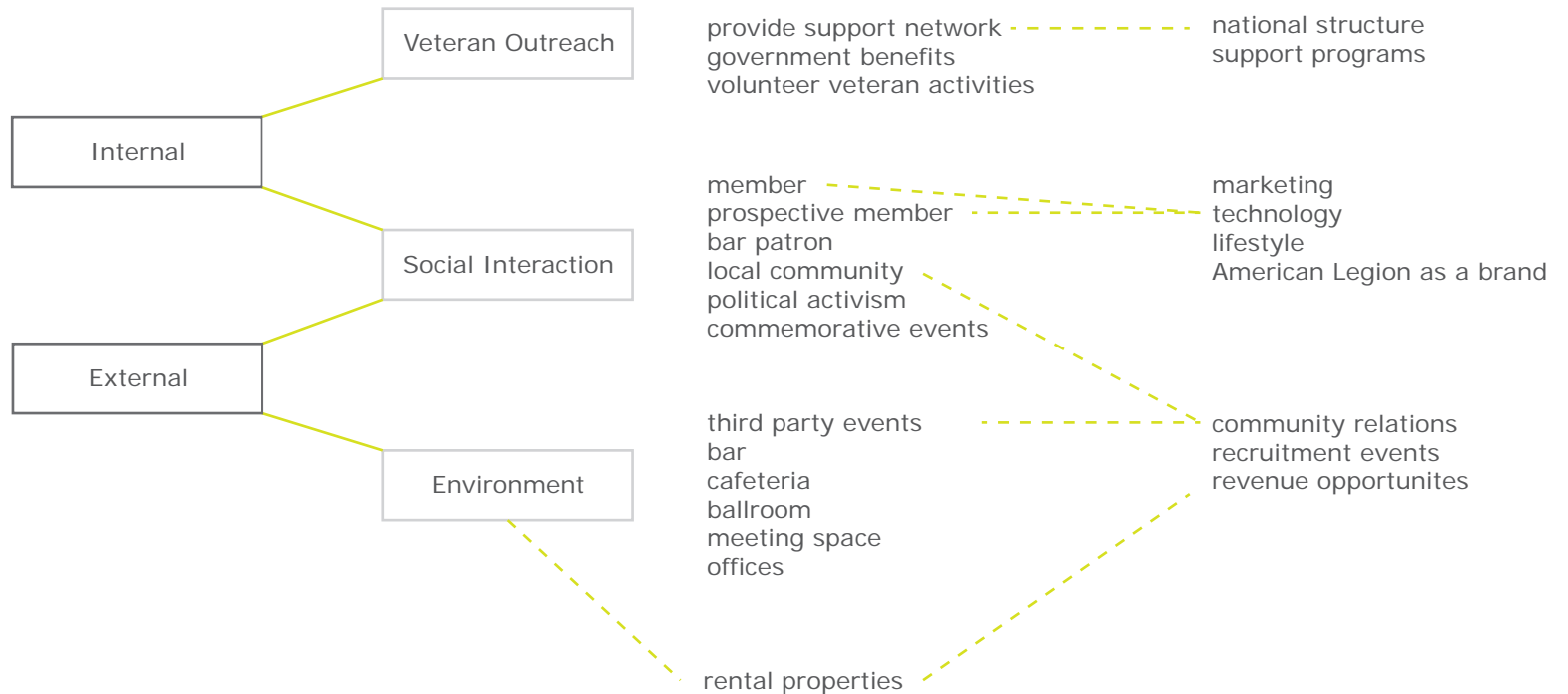
The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand the relationship between existing memberships and services of American Legion Post 135 and the conditions providing opportunities for holistic growth and organization development.

The American Legion was founded in 1919 by Congress to benefit veterans who served during a time of conflict. The Legion provides a variety of services and events, though their primary focus is in organizing commemorative ceremonies, offering a broad base of volunteer veteran support initiatives, and remaining active in U.S. politics.

The local American Legion Post 135 located in historic downtown Savannah, provides an opportunity-rich research site because it exists not only as an organization for the fellowship and benefit of military veterans, but is a community environment for interaction, outreach, and support.

Initial areas of contextual inquiry can be categorized into four categories:

- Membership recruitment and its effect on diversification and growth
- Services, technology, and lifestyle leading to a direct advertising and marketing plan, consequently modernizing American Legion as a brand
- Organization events and third-party revenue resulting in increased funding opportunities
- Benefit and grant opportunities offered for support programs that provide better and broader-reaching services for more veterans



This research study was structured to develop an in-depth understanding of the local American Legion Post 135 in order to ultimately provide insights and opportunities for holistic growth and organization development.

In order to obtain authenticated data from a sufficiently broad selection of sources, research findings were derived from inquiry methods including ethnographic interviews, active and passive field observations, and semi-structured surveys, and cultural probe.

Research Questions

Membership

Who are the current members?
- Demographics

What services are available to veterans?
- What programs are geared towards young veterans?

What is the process for becoming a member?
How do new members learn about membership?
Why did members decide to join?

What services are available to veterans?
- Are there different services available based on age and/or gender?

How are the services advertised to members and non-members?
What do members find particularly valuable/enjoy about the legion?
- What would they like to change?

What informal social interactions happen in the building?
How do current members feel about new membership and changes?
- Generational interactions-conflicts

What, if any, interactions occur between posts?

Recruitment

How is the legion trying to attract new members?
What kinds of activities and social interactions do younger veterans engage in?
What is the demographic makeup of veterans in the Savannah area?
What are they looking for that they are not engaging in?
Why is new membership not routinely growing?
Do they know about the legion, membership and what they can offer?

Business

What are obstacles the administration faces in starting and running programs?
What is the structure and division of labor?
- Who and what are the executive board?
How are they generating revenue?
What are their liabilities?
What are the day-to-day operations of the office?
What are the obstacles to allowing the business run more efficiently?

Research Design || Purpose

A diverse focus group comprised of current and prospective members was surveyed. The target group included active and inactive members, and displayed an appropriate diversity of age, race, and economic status.

Survey questions designed to collect neutrally-led and accurate data included traditional demographic questions combined with thought-provoking queries designed to have the respondent share experiences and feelings regarding the organization.

Research Questions

3rd Party Events

Who uses the spaces and how?
- What is the traffic flow?
What are the spaces?
How often are they used?
What is liked about the spaces?
- What can be improved?
Is there repeat business?
How do users hear about the space?
What are the rules and restrictions for the spaces?

Member Spaces

Who uses the spaces and how?
- What is the traffic flow?
How often are they used?
What is liked about the spaces?
- What can be improved?
What are the interactions between members and non-members?
- Where are they happening?
What are plans for changing the spaces in the near future?

Bar

What activities and interactions are happening in the bar?
Who is using the space and when?
- What is the traffic flow?
What areas of this space are most frequently utilized?
Why do the non-member respondents choose to go to the American Legion bar?

In order to maximize opportunities to implement contextual research methods, a variety of contextual inquiry and data collection methods including ethnographic interviews, casual field observations, and objective surveys were implemented. The research and data collection agents utilized a diverse range of digital ethnographic tools such as digital cameras, audio/video recorders, internet-based questionnaires and database resources.

Steps included meeting with existing members and the post's adjutant to develop a well-rounded historical landscape of how the post has evolved over the years since its inception, what economic and social events and trends have occurred that may have both directly and indirectly affected membership, and how the post has responded to these various influences.

Casual observations of American Legion members took place in an assortment of settings. Casual meetings and conversations were used not only to gather information, but to set the stage for a comfortable, yet more structured interview. Becoming immersed in a veteran's environment meant an opportunity for first-hand interaction and observation, which enabled the collected data to be analyzed with greater context and a deeper understanding.

Digital photographs were taken in communal settings of The American Legion and supported written observations. Personal characteristics and individual descriptions are more accurately and objectively shared via photographs than the written word, and clearly communicate the correct context in which to interpret and understand settings and emotions. The photographs also captured current views that were compared to older pictures for historical purposes, including illustrating a change in physical environment, culture, people, economics, and industry.

Combining traditional study methodology with this virtual ethnography created a rich and descriptive database of written and visual field-notes used to ensure accuracy of findings.

A systematic process of observing and analyzing patterns of participant or respondent behavior was planned. This resulted in the research team's ability to identify clues regarding where problems and weakness existed during the contextual findings analysis project phase.

The research team developed a passive observation model for recording specific participant interactions within the American Legion facilities. The model is used to map a breadth of participant behavior, interactions, and traffic flow patterns incrementally on multiple days.

The passive observation and experience worksheet details the date and time of study, number of participants, general age range, location of interaction point within the space, and the specific artifacts and stimuli respondents connected with. In continuing the passive observation, the research team studied the activities, participants, and artifacts within the administration offices. This research was completed via informal interviews and correspondence with the office staff.

Participatory observation involved a series of informal conversations and assessments with members, prospective members, and unaffiliated bar patrons while casually conversing at the bar to gain an authentic, first-hand tangible customer experience.



Interview Questions

In planning for the ethnographic interview phase of the research, it was important to establish a discussion guide of critical patterns and perceptions drawn from the research design focus and focus setting sessions.

The discussion guide was used to develop neutral interview questions and aided the researchers in concentrating on research statement resolution, having a relaxed interview disposition, and ultimately avoiding questions that revealed a content-specific preference or content-driven assumptions.

It was important to choose a native and neutral study environment for the interviews, and the American Legion bar area provided an ideal setting as it kept the participants comfortable while interacting within their own surroundings.

Military Veterans/Legion Members

- Name
- Age
- Branch
- Rank
- Active Duty Dates
- When did you join the legion?
- Why did you decide to join?
- How often do you come to the legion?
- What kinds of things do you do here?
- What do you enjoy about being a member?
- What do you like about the building and rooms?
- What do you think could be changed?
- How do you feel about recruiting newer members?
- Do you use any of the services offered through the legion?
- What would you say the greatest benefits of membership are to someone who might be thinking of joining the legion?

In order to understand the benefit and grant opportunities for providing better services for more veterans as well as the current recruitment initiatives, twelve interviews were conducted with American Legion members and young veteran prospective members.

In addition, we conducted two cultural probes. One, where a team member applied for membership into the Ladies Auxiliary, which was participatory in nature. In the other, a young membership-eligible veteran, of acquaintance to a team member, agreed to attempt to join the post, but was given no prior guidance in how to do so. Both subjects kept diaries of all their interactions.

Military Veterans/Non-Legion Members

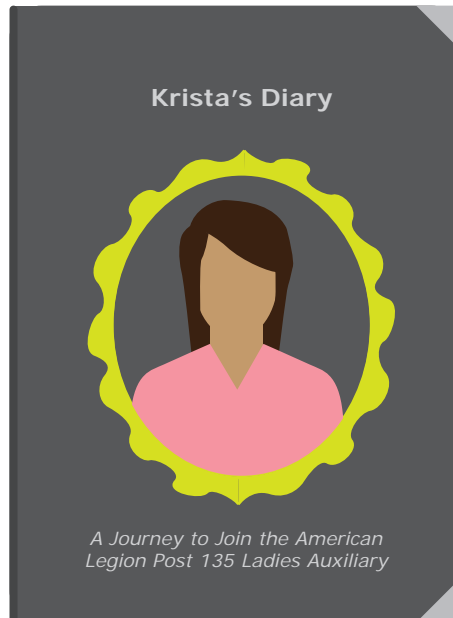
- Name
- Age
- Marital Status
- Children
- Branch
- Rank
- Active Duty Dates
- Are you familiar with the American Legion Post 135 and the services they offer?
(Ever been? Ever consider going? Been contacted?)
- What is your impression of the American Legion Post 135?
- What would influence you to join the legion?
(Any specific services, programs, benefits?)
- Being a military veteran, what kinds of activities or social interactions do you currently engage in?

Survey questions designed to collect neutrally-led and accurate data will include traditional demographic questions combined with thought-provoking queries designed to have the respondent share experiences and feelings regarding the organization. Questions to garner specific feedback on how a veteran views and uses the American Legion now, compared to the past, began with an explanation regarding the study.

Survey Questions

- Gender
- Age
- Marital Status
- Number of Children
- Children's Ages
- Military Branch
- Dates of Active Service
- Military Rank
- What, if any, organizations are you currently an active participant?
- What are your hobbies or activities you partake in your spare time?
- How do you prefer to receive communications from organizations you are involved in?
- Have you ever been asked to join an American Legion post?
- Are you currently a member of a veterans' organization?
- What are your impressions of the American Legion?
- What activities and benefits would you hope to participate in by joining a veterans' organization?
- If the American Legion were a car, what kind of car would it be and why?
- Reflecting on your time in the service, what are the most important memories that come to mind?
- Why did you join the military?
- What recommendations did you receive in seeking your VA benefits and programs?
- Location

Because the American Legion administration did not allow researchers to attend the executive board meeting, an additional passive observation technique was implemented to gain an elaborate understanding of the processes and interactions a prospective member experiences while seeking membership, specifically at the American Legion Post 135. The case study is recorded in the form of a diary, detailing entire interactions between a prospective member and the membership administration.



Develop a purpose of study and a direct research focus statement.

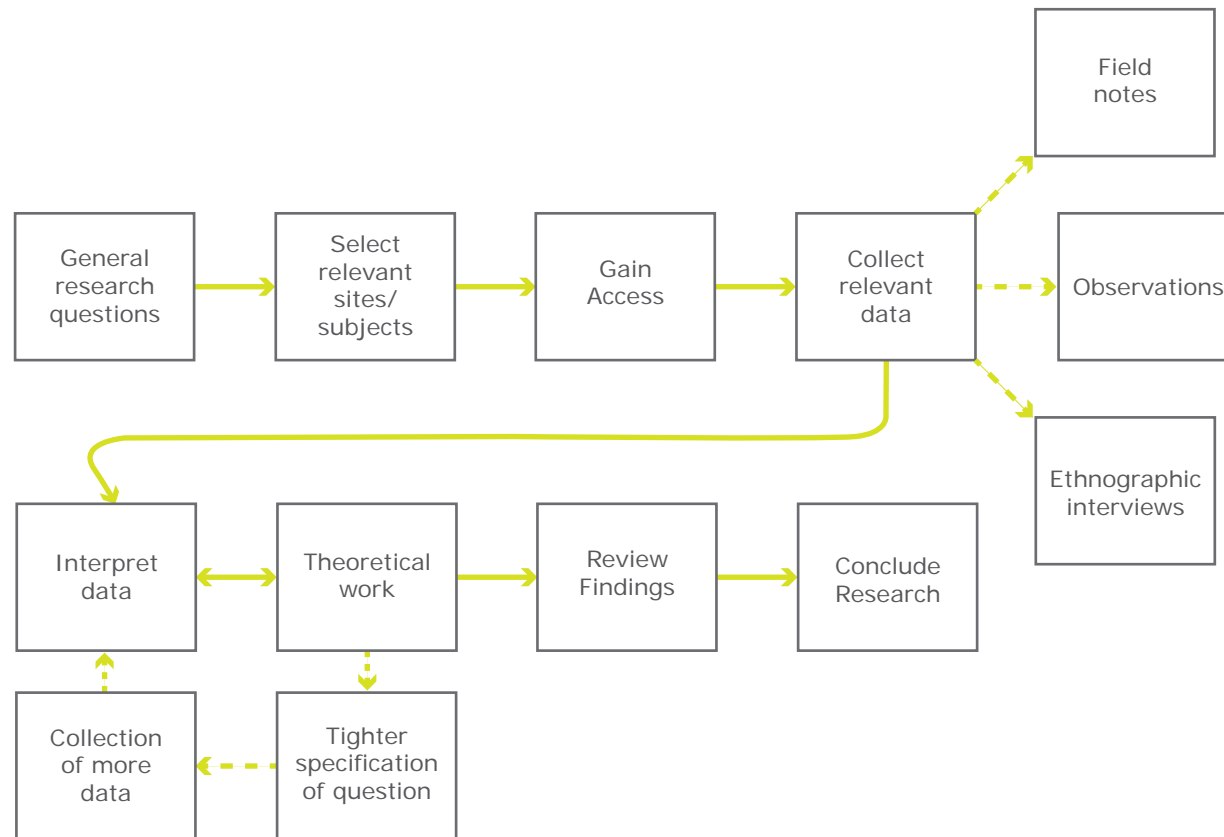
- Establish team direction through affinity and focus setting session.

Explore contextual inquiry through primary data and artifact collection during active and passive research observations and ethnographic interviews.

- Conduct passive observations of respondent behavior, interactions, and traffic flow patterns.
- Design a semi-constructed survey for neutrally directed responses.
- Execute passive observations of the activities, participants, and artifacts within administration offices.
- Direct the case study of a young veteran prospective member pursuing membership.

Analyze breadth of database and interpret opportunities for service and innovation while identifying existing barriers.

- Uncover behavior and data patterns, member recruitment targets, and constraints within the organization—noting deviations.
- Map perspectives and opportunities for innovation and service, exploring the key sources, opportunities, and constraints.



Participatory observation involving a series of informal conversations and assessments was a successful research method. The respondents voluntarily agreed to participate in the interviews, surveys, and inquiries; however many were uncomfortable with providing their full name or even being photographed. As a result of this observation, a decision was made not to attempt to get signed informed consent forms, as it was concluded to try and do so would limit the availability and quality of the interviews.

This natural and relaxed interview style was critical in creating a non-clinical, comfortable research atmosphere and aided in receiving the most authentic information.

The interview target group comprised of current and prospective Legion members did not include any females. No female interviews could be conducted, as there was no assistance from the American Legion recruitment administration or access to the member database information.

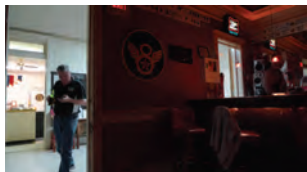
Corresponding and meeting with current membership and recruitment administrators in order to develop a well-rounded understanding of the organization proved to be difficult, even with multiple contact techniques implemented. This, however, was not a complete surprise as in week 5 of the study, under direction of the Post's commander, they extracted themselves from the study as he felt they could not participate due to all the other projects they were already involved in. This was resolved by a chance meeting when a team member won a raffle gift basket and was able to convince the commander to keep the project going, but at a much more limited scale. This obstacle redirected portions of the research study and overall contextual inquiry, such as developing initial workflow and sequence model inquiries because of the lack of access to administration and executive input, correspondence exchange, and research cooperation.



The model made it possible to map a breadth of participant behavior, interactions, and traffic flow patterns incrementally on multiple days to gain a holistic understanding of the target audience utilizing the American Legion bar space. Collection of this information is particularly important once the observational research is complete, as it allows the data and research analysts to identify and map opportunities for service and innovation within the space.

Field Work

M



6:00pm-7:30pm

Av. Total Bar Patrons: 7
 Av. Total Men: 4
 Av. Total Women: 3
 Av. Age Range: mid-40s

Most Frequent Activities:
 -conversing
 -reading
 -light drinking
 -travel to smoking deck
 -playing of billiards
 -cell phone usage

T



6:30pm-8:00pm

Av. Total Bar Patrons: 8
 Av. Total Men: 4
 Av. Total Women: 4
 Av. Age Range: 40s-50s

Most Frequent Activities:
 -conversing
 -reading
 -studying
 -laptop usage
 -light drinking
 -travel to smoking deck
 -playing of billiards

W



6:30pm-9:00pm

Av. Total Bar Patrons: 11
 Av. Total Men: 8
 Av. Total Women: 3
 Av. Age Range: 30s-50s

Most Frequent Activities:
 -conversing
 -studying
 -laptop usage
 -moderate drinking
 -travel to smoking deck
 -playing of billiards

R



10:00pm-12:00pm

Av. Total Bar Patrons: 33
 Av. Total Men: 21
 Av. Total Women: 11
 Av. Age Range: 20s-40s

Most Frequent Activities:
 -conversing
 -heavy drinking
 -travel to smoking deck
 -playing of billiards

F



10:00pm-12:00pm

Av. Total Bar Patrons: 28
 Av. Total Men: 19
 Av. Total Women: 9
 Av. Age Range: 20s-40s

Most Frequent Activities:
 -conversing
 -heavy drinking
 -travel to smoking deck
 -playing of billiards

S



10:00pm-12:00pm

Av. Total Bar Patrons: 25
 Av. Total Men: 15
 Av. Total Women: 10
 Av. Age Range: 20s-40s

Most Frequent Activities:
 -conversing
 -heavy drinking
 -travel to smoking deck
 -playing of billiards

*Chart reflects periods of most frequent activity throughout entire field observation process.

Interviewers referenced an established discussion guide used to identify critical patterns and perceptions from the research design focus and focus setting sessions. The discussion guide also aided the interviewers and researchers in focusing on research statement resolution, having a natural and relaxed interview disposition, and ultimately avoiding questions that revealed a content-specific preference or content-driven assumptions.

All interviews took place in a native and neutral study environment. The American Legion bar area provided an ideal setting as it kept the participants comfortable while interacting within their own surroundings. In order to understand the benefit and grant opportunities for providing better services for more veterans as well as the current recruitment initiatives, twelve interviews were conducted with American Legion members and young veteran prospective members

Field Sites



The American Legion Post 135

Total Interviews Conducted: 9



Ruby Tuesday Savannah Mall

Total Interviews Conducted: 2



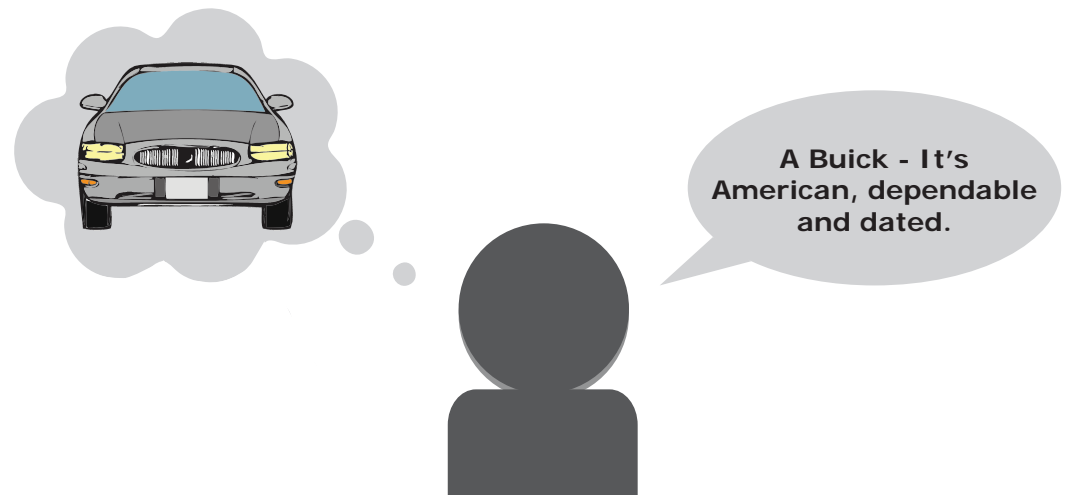
Armed Forces Recruiting Center

Total Interviews Conducted: 1

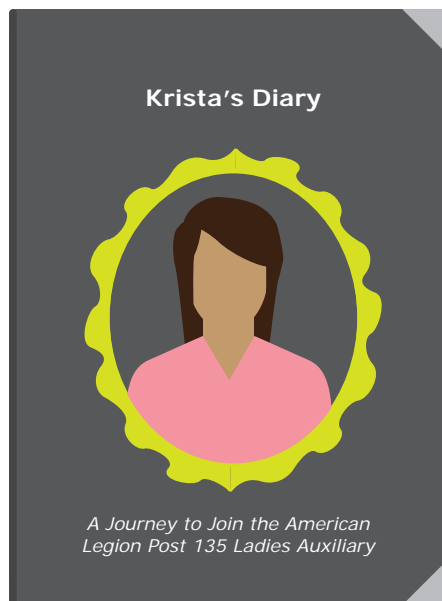
“What are your impressions of the American Legion?”



“If the American Legion were a car, what kind of car would it be and why?”



Krista's Diary



Begin Date: January 20, 2011

End Date: March 3, 2011

January 20 – While looking through brochures collected from the American Legion, I learn that I am eligible for membership in the Ladies Auxiliary through the military service of my grandfather during WWII. Based on the literature, the Auxiliary seems to be a great opportunity for volunteer service and community involvement. I'm interested in joining and begin pursuing membership.

January 31 – I visited the Legion at 11am this morning. The building was locked and no one was around. I know that the Legion is open everyday after 4pm for the bar, but I'm not sure when or if they have business hours. I'm a little confused by this and not really sure how to contact someone about membership.

February 2 – I visited the Legion this afternoon to talk to someone about membership. The bartender did not have any information. She handed me Debbie's (the Adjutant) business card and suggested that I email her.

February 11 – I visited the Legion this afternoon to find Debbie, but she was not around.

February 16 – I emailed Debbie about joining the Ladies Auxiliary – no response.

February 18 – I visited the Legion this afternoon to conduct interviews with Marshall. Debbie was not around to talk about membership.

Krista's Diary

February 22 – While meeting with my group members at the Legion, I ran into Debbie and talked to her about joining the Ladies Auxiliary. She introduced me to the Commander's wife who is a member. After a brief conversation, I was invited to the dinner being held on March 3. I also learned that I will need a copy of my grandfather's discharge papers along with my application. Debbie informed me that I should be able to get a copy of the paperwork online if I have his social security number. This is the first time that I hear about the requirement of additional paperwork as it is not mentioned in the application or information I found online.

February 25 – I called my grandmother to get my grandfather's social security number. I learn that my grandmother attempted to get a copy of my grandfather's discharge papers 17 years ago after he passed away but she was not successful.

February 26 – I try to fill out the online form to obtain a copy of my grandfather's army discharge papers. I learn that I need his service number in addition to his social security number. I call my grandmother again but she does not have a copy of his service number anywhere. This process seems much more complicated than it needs to be and I am entirely on my own for obtaining the necessary documentation information. This is all very new to me and a little guidance through this process would have been appreciated.

February 28 – I emailed Debbie to ask about the Ladies Auxiliary dinner and request to be put on the guest list.

March 3 – The Ladies Auxiliary dinner was tonight, but I never heard back from Debbie so I didn't attend.

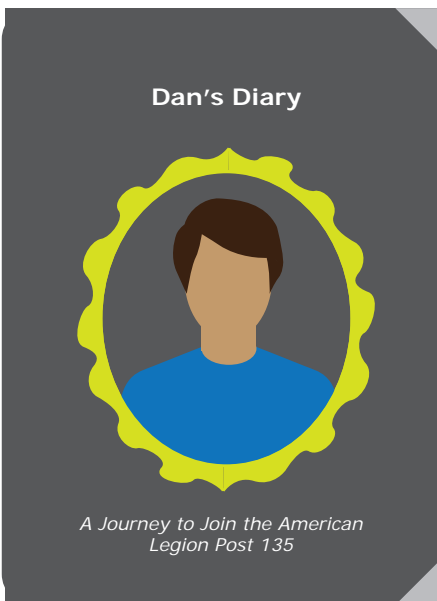
Conclusions:

I'm not sure if there are any other channels by which I can obtain my grandfather's discharge paper, so I think that's a dead end. And based on my last conversation with Debbie, I can't become a member without that documentation. So, I will not be joining the American Legion, Ladies Auxiliary.

Throughout this process, the vast majority of the information that I received, I obtained was through my own research. I was able to find general information about the Ladies Auxiliary, but I don't know much about the membership and activities at Post 135 — information and details were never very forthcoming. I was very persistent in my pursuit of membership and don't feel like most people would have put in the same amount of effort.

I never felt shunned, but also didn't feel embraced by the members of the Legions during any of my visits or conversations. The current members were not at all proactive in their pursuit of new members. At no time, did they ask any questions about my interest in joining, offer or ask for contact information, or tell me about the benefits of membership. I was simply handed a brochure and business card. If it not for the project we are working on, I probably would have lost interest in membership after the first few weeks.

Dan's Diary



Begin Date: February 2, 2011

End Date: February 28, 2011

February 2, 2011 4:45pm:
 I stopped by the American Legion Post 135 and asked the red-haired female bartender what I needed to do to become a member. She handed me the application which I've photocopied front and back on the right. She told me the fees are \$25 and to bring the application and the \$25 back to them along with a copy of my military ID if I'm still on active duty or my DD 214, which is paperwork showing that you have been discharged from the military. She also provided me a business card for another woman, Deborah Kessler and she told me that if I had any questions, I can contact Ms. Kessler.

The American Legion (Membership) Application

Name _____ (Phone) _____
 Mailing Address _____ (State) _____
 (City) _____ (State) _____ (Zip) _____ (Post #) _____
 (Mailing Address) _____ (Email Address) _____ (Dates) _____

Please check appropriate eligibility dates and branch of service below
 Aug 5, 1929 - member of household as determined by U.S. Government
 Aug 29, 1929 - Jan. 31, 1950 U.S. Army
 Feb. 21, 1937 - July 31, 1954 U.S. Navy
 Feb. 29, 1943 - May 1, 1945 U.S. Air Force
 June 25, 1950 - Jan. 31, 1955 U.S. Marines
 May 3, 1941 - Dec. 31, 1946 U.S. Coast Guard
 Aug 5, 1917 - Nov 31, 1918 Merchant Marines 12/7/41 - 12/31/46 (only eligibility)

I certify that I served at least one day of active military duty during the dates marked above and was honorably discharged or am still serving honorably.

Signature of applicant _____ Name of recruiter _____
 a 100 (2006)

Recruits of Base (Please Print)

From _____ For 20 _____ Post # _____
 Recruiter's Name _____
 Recruiter's Signature _____
 Recruiter's Phone # _____

Listed below are just a few of the many programs The American Legion sponsors. Please check the ones that are of interest to you. If the program you like is not listed, please indicate it in the "Other" area.

Volunteer work at VA Hospital
 Work with youth
 Help participate in Post's social activities... dances, dinners, etc.
 Participate in educational activities... essay contests, oratorical contests, scholasticship
 Work with sports teams.
 Supervise groups, drill team, drum & bugle, scouts, etc.
 Post improvement projects.
 Membership drives.
 Community projects.
 Other: _____

Wife would be interested in the Auxiliary.
 Son would be interested in the Sons of The American Legion.

Post Name _____
 Post Address: _____
 Post Phone #: _____
 Post Web site: _____
 Post e-mail: _____



Deborah Kessler
 Event Coordinator
 912.507.2083
 ec@alpost135.com

American Legion Post 135
 108 Bull Street
 Savannah, GA 31401
 912.233.9277

Dan's Diary

Begin Date: February 2, 2011

2/4/2011 Gmail - American Legion Membership
 Dan D'Isidoro <dan.disidoro@gmail.com>

American Legion Membership

deborah kessler <bigdsconcessions@yahoo.com> Fri, Feb 4, 2011 at 8:42 AM
 To: Dan D'Isidoro <dan.disidoro@gmail.com>

Dan,

I am so glad you chose our to visit and maybe join!! Our Legion is second to none because we are a close knit group and we spend alot of our time giving back to the veterans and the community! We donate our time and space to local charities like haircuts for the homeless and the susan koman cancer group. As for veterans services, we dedicate most of our time to assisting veterans that are in need of help ranging from getting copies of their military records to getting them the medical care they need and deserve.

Our Legion is looking for military veterans who want to give back and become active in continuing Post 135 history of dedicated vets! I hope you consider us and please call if you have any other questions! (912)507-2083

Deborah Kessler
 Event Coordinator
 American Legion Post 135

"SEMPER PARATUS"

— On Thu, 2/3/11, Dan D'Isidoro <dan.disidoro@gmail.com> wrote:

From: Dan D'Isidoro <dan.disidoro@gmail.com>
 Subject: American Legion Membership
 To: ec@alpost135.com
 Date: Thursday, February 3, 2011, 4:03 PM
 [Quoted text hidden]

2/3/2011 Gmail - American Legion Membership
 Dan D'Isidoro <dan.disidoro@gmail.com>

American Legion Membership

1 message

Dan D'Isidoro <dan.disidoro@gmail.com> Thu, Feb 3, 2011 at 4:03 PM
 To: ec@alpost135.com

Ms. Kessler,

I stopped by the American Legion Post 135 yesterday and picked up a membership application from the woman working at the bar. She also provided me your business card if I had any questions. I am currently on active duty in the Army, but I will be separating soon and I was curious as to what membership with the Legion entails. I've checked out your post's Web site and the national organization's Web site, so I think I understand what the Legion represents and I would like to become a member.

Is there anything else about membership with Post 135 that you think I need to know before I return my application and my dues?

Thank you for your time,

Dan D'Isidoro

Dan's Diary

Begin Date: February 2, 2011

End Date: February 28, 2011

February 9, 2011 4:30pm

- Returned to the American Legion with my completed application.
- Bought it to the same female bartender who gave me the application form.
- Before accepting my application, she called someone to confirm that she could accept my application without my DD 214 as I showed a copy of my military ID. She said the ID was fine.
- The person on the phone confirmed my e-mail address was on the application form with the bartender.
- The bartender took my \$25 and I was on my way.



3/4/2011

Re: Legion Post 135 Membership - Yah

YAHOO! MAIL
CLASSIC

Re: Legion Post 135 Membership

Monday, February 28, 2011 10:13 AM

"deborah kessler" <bigdsconcessions@yahoo.com>
"Dan D'Isidoro" <d_disido@yahoo.com>

Daniel

Hey, just wanted to let you know your membership will be put up for approval at the next eboard meeting. I will have your card mailed as soon as that is done. Thanks for your interest!! You are invited to our Legin Birthday party on Thursday March 3rd, cocktails (open bar) is at 6, diner at 7 and then the ceremony. Bar will be closed to public til 9pm. Hope to see you there!!

Deborah Kessler
Event Coordinator
American Legion Post 135

"SEMPER FI"

— On Wed, 2/23/11, Dan D'Isidoro <d_disido@yahoo.com> wrote:

From: Dan D'Isidoro <d_disido@yahoo.com>
Subject: Legion Post 135 Membership
To: ec@alpost135.com
Date: Wednesday, February 23, 2011, 10:12 AM

Deborah,

A couple of weeks ago, I dropped of my application for membership and dues at the Post 135 bar. I just wanted to make sure everything has been accepted and to inquire as to what I should expect next.

Thanks,

Daniel D'Isidoro

Field Work || Research Encounters || Diaries

Dan D'Isidoro
Army JAG core officer
Joined service 4 years ago
30 years old
Married, no children

From interview:

He knew about the American Legion and had thought about joining. Grew up around veteran organizations, like VFW.

Knew about Post 135 through the bar and socializing there.

[On his experience trying to join Post 135]

"I felt like there could have been more information up front as to what joining the organization was about. They didn't really provide you with much. You walk in and say I'm interested in joining and they hand you this little application and tell you to come back with 25 bucks. And So...Even, I think, that auxiliary membership which is for spouses of service members, they had like a brochure. But I never saw a brochure for straight on American Legion membership. Even if it came from the National office to say this is what the Legion stands for or a local one that says this is what Post 135 does. This is some events we've done in Savannah to support service members or veterans or whatever. I felt like there was a little bit of, like, I had to find out on my own what the full membership meant."

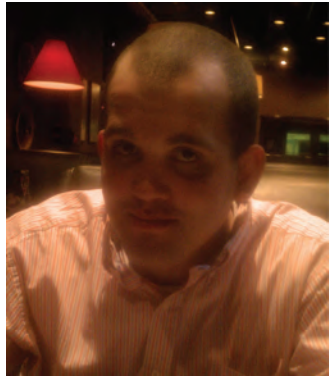
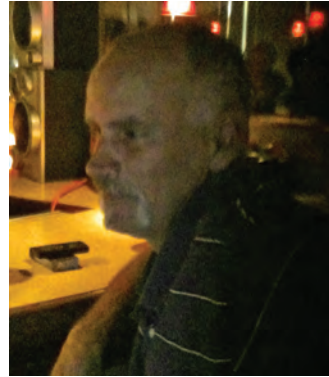
Is now moving to Washington DC and is planning on joining up there to meet people hoping to network for a job search.

[When asked how he would rate the process of joining Post 135 to his experience of joining any other organization]

"I'd say like a 7. It's a simple process, it seems, but I just felt like there was a little bit of lack of information as to what you're actually joining"



Participants



Selection Criteria

Method: Random Sampling

Eligibility: Military Veteran

Total Participants: 12



Participants were selected based on availability within the American Legion bar space. The research team worked to interact with a target group that displayed an appropriate diversity of age, race, gender and economic status.

Interview Questions

Members

Demographics

- Name
- Age
- Branch
- Rank
- Active Duty Dates

When did you join the legion?
Why did you decide to join?
How often do you come to the legion?
What kinds of things do you do here?
What do you enjoy about being a member?
What do you like about the building and rooms?
What do you think could be changed?
How do you feel about recruiting newer members?
Do you use any of the services offered through the legion?
What would you say the greatest benefits of membership are to someone who might be thinking of joining the legion?

Non-Members

Demographics

- Name
- Age
- Marital Status
- Children
- Branch
- Rank
- Active Duty Dates

Are you familiar with the American Legion Post 135 and the services they offer?
(Ever been? Ever consider going? Been contacted?)
What is your impression of the American Legion Post 135?
What would influence you to join the legion?
(Any specific services, programs, benefits?)
Being a military veteran, what kinds of activities or social interactions do you currently engage in?

Member Interview



Date: February 8, 2011

Begin Time: 19:15am

End Time: 19:30am

Demographics

Name: Nicholas Pagano

Gender: Male

Marital Status: Married

Children: (He has a "couple")

Branch: Air Force

Rank: Sergeant 1st class

American Legion Member Interview, Nicholas Pagano, February 8, 2011

Marshall: You were in the service?

Nick: (nods)

Marshall: Which branch?

Nick: I was in the army and then I was in the United States Air Force.

Marshall: What years were you in there?

Nick: oh, 60 to 63 in the army and then 64 to 78 in the Air Force.

Marshall: So, Vietnam?

Nick: Yes.

Marshall: What rank?

Nick: I was an E Sat.

Marshall: What's that?

Nick: That's a sergeant 1st class.

Marshall: And then when did you join the American Legion?

Nick: Well, you know, I actually joined it once a long time ago in 1964 for a year and then I lost...and then I only became recently active in the American Legion 5 years ago.

Marshall: Mmhmm. You joined somewhere else originally?

Nick: A long time ago. In Boston.

Marshall: An, uh, why did you join back in Boston.

Nick: It was...I was a young man, and I uh, had just come back from Vietnam and I was patriotic and I thought I was just asked to do that so I thought I would just join without really understanding what the organization was about.

Marshall: Somebody asked you. (pause) They said, "This was something you should do"? A friend of yours?

Nick: Yes.

Marshall: And then you joined here? (pause) So...you must have maybe had different reasons for joining here?

Nick: No, a friend of mine, Jeb Newton asked me if I wanted to join and I said yeah. And I started when I did...I started getting involved because we stand for something...We stand for keeping our country strong and for perpetuating certain concepts that make our country great. (pause) As an older man and having seen many things in my time, I think we're losing what we call our freedom, what we call liberty. And getting to see a decline in our economic and military strength in a world wide basis. And these things are important to me. These things are important because I think they are important to you as a young man. I want to leave you with a...and what I hope would that you would have an opportunity to (pause) achieve what you desire to achieve in life and develop the personal desire and ambition to pursue you goals and that you're able to pursue your goals and achieve your goals.

Marshall: So (pause) do you think you're able to make inroads in that sort of thing here and how do you do that?

Nick: By participating in the community. Recently this past year I was involved in the American Legion oratorical contest where I tried to get students to partake...to give a speech concerning their duties, rights, and obligations under the constitution. I've been able to go out and I've been able to talk to young people. I've been able to inculcate, or at least able to (pause) expound on my zeal in this area to my fellow legionaires and anybody else who will listen. Does that make any sense?

Marshall: It makes perfect sense. Um. So what do you think about trying to get new members in here? Younger members of the service.

Nick: That is of necessity. You know, in this post here, our members you know, age 60 all the way up to 90. We need to look at the future. We need to get young leadership. We need to get bright young men and bright young women in here to assume the responsibility. Particularly with this post here in that we're very fortunate. Our forefathers, and when I say our forefathers I'm talking about the past commanders whose photographs are up on these (points to walls). They had the where with all to buy this building (pause) in 1940's. As a result of that, this particular post is financially well off as compared to other posts in that we have rental businesses on the streets here. We got a bar here. We got a hall that we are just completing redecorating which we're going to rent out. We have been renting out to the community. So besides having an American Legion post, this post here, post 135 is a business entity as well as a social entity.

Marshall: Yes.

Nick: So we need bright young people here that can not only lead this post, but also run these businesses.

Marshall: Do you know any young members? Younger members?

Nick: We have a few of them, but I have not been able to really get in and talk with these young people at this point in time.

Marshall: Do you have any thoughts on ways to get them in here?

Nick: We...have...basically a military community here. We have the Hunter Army Air Force base. We got Fort Stewart which is not too distant. We got a large retirement community made up of military individuals or retired military individuals so there is a large body of individuals that we...once we put out mind to it, get focused on getting individuals in here but we have to make it interesting for them. We need to make this not necessarily a business club, but we need to make this a social organization for its members while at the same time doing something good for the community living up to our preamble. Doing what we believe the American Legion was established to do.

Marshall: Do you think you're on track? Do you think the organization is on track?

Nick: We're going in that direction. We need to go in that direction a lot harder. Uh. Yeah, we have gone there. I would like to see more progress, but right now... (pause) I'm just a member here. I must deal with the organization.

Marshall: That's great. And what's your full name?

Nick: Nicko

Marshall: Thank you.

Non-Member Interview



Date: February 28, 2011

Begin Time: 10:31am

End Time: 10:36am

Demographics

Name: Grady Burnette

Age: 36

Gender: Male

Marital Status: Married

Children: (He has a "couple")

Branch: Air Force

Rank: E-7 (Master Sergeant)

Active Duty Dates: Spring 2006 –
Spring 2010

(4 years active duty)

00:00:15 - Cary: Ok, so your name is Grady Burnette, correct?

00:00:16 – Grady: Yes.

00:00:20 - Cary: Alright, your age?

00:00:21 – Grady: Thirty (pause)... six. (36) – hesitant

00:00:23 - Cary: Thirty-six.

00:00:25 – Cary: Marital status?

00:00:26 – Grady: Married.

00:00:27 – Cary: Any children?

00:00:29 – Grady: Yeah, I've got a couple.

00:00:31 – Cary: Ok.

00:00:36 – Cary: What is your rank?

00:00:38 – Grady: I'm a Master Sergeant.

00:00:41 – Cary: May I ask what that position entails?

00:00:45 – Grady: It's an E-7.

00:00:48 – Cary: And, what were your active duty dates?

00:00:52 – Grady: (stuck in thought) I can't remember. (chuckles)

00:00:53 – Cary: You can't remember? (laughs)

00:00:55 – Cary: It's been a while, huh? (chuckles)

00:00:56 – Grady: Yeah. (chuckles)

00:01:02 – Cary: So, you say you aren't familiar with the American Legion Post 135 or the services they offer to veterans?

00:01:07 – Grady: No.

00:01:08 – Cary: Ok. Just a small, little brief synopsis: it's a veteran, non-partisan organization. They have a branch here in Savannah - Post 135, it's located on Bull and Park St., and they offer a variety of different services for veterans. They provide mutual support and cooperation. A little bit about the specifics: They offer full medical, educational and insurance benefits sponsored by the Department of Veteran Affairs. They also have several activities that take place there, like different fish fries, bingo nights and they sponsor youth programs in the communities. They also have a bar that has some of the best drink specials in Savannah, I was told.

And although the lives and backgrounds, like you said, vary tremendously the Legion provides them a place for all the military veterans to get along on one accord, and to share their experiences with each other and provide support for one another.

00:02:10 – Cary: So, what is your impression of the American Legion?

00:02:13 – Grady: Like I said, I really don't know much about it. (chuckles)

00:02:15 – Cary: (chuckles)

00:02:17 – Grady: Or anything about it rather. I was gone' do some research this weekend before, but I just got too busy

00:02:22 – Cary: (laughs)

00:02:23 – Grady: So, I really don't know nothing about it. So, I really can't say anything about it.

00:02:28 – Cary: Ok. And umm.. would there be anything to influence you go to the Legion? Say for instance if they were to contact you and say, "Hey, come on out! We have a meeting and we want you to attend."

00:02:36 – Grady: Yeah. Umm, you know ummm, maybe. I'm fixing to leave here pretty soon. I ain't gonna be here too much longer, so maybe if I, when I retire or something like that, you know? Maybe getting in with an organization like that you know wouldn't be bad, you know? Hanging out with former veterans and stuff, so.

00:02:54 – Cary: Ok.

00:02:54 – Grady: It's probably a good place to have there... stuff that I like to do anyway... help out young kids and stuff. So, ummm... whether it be coaching baseball, or football, or whatever. Ummm, I like being involved with the community. So, if they're supporting community events, ummm, then I'll probably be a part of it.

00:03:14 – Cary: Awesome. Ok, so you say you like softball and football? Do you participate in any of those activities now?

00:03:21 – Grady: Yeah.

00:03:23 – Cary: And other recreational activities as well?

00:03:23 – Grady: Uhhh, Yeah, Richmond Hill.

00:03:25 – Cary: Richmond Hill.... Ok. Are there any other like... extracurricular activities that you like to partake in?

00:03:29 – Grady: I play golf.

00:03:31 – Cary: Golf! Oh, awesome! My dad's a "star" golfer. He literally thinks he's Tiger Woods.

00:03:35 – Grady: (laughs excitedly)

00:03:35 – Cary: He plays golf day-in and day-out, whether it be in rain, sleet or snow.

00:03:38 – Grady: Hopefully it was the Tiger Woods before all that crap started!

00:03:40 – Cary: Yeah! Before that lil' scandal. (laughs)

00:03:43 – Grady: I mean, cause he, he... That man's having a struggle right now. And I like, and I like Tiger man...

00:03:48 – Cary: Yeah, I do too! That's like one of my idols or something.

00:03:48 – Grady: It broke my heart when he went from number one in the world, I was just like... man!

00:03:52 – Cary: Ugh! Come on now, yes he's gotta get back on the ball... Get back on top soon...

00:03:55 – Grady: America's gotta be representing, so...

00:03:56 – Cary: Exactly...

00:03:57 – Grady: Cause, now they've got like... what? Uhhh, I think the top three... uhhh, Europe people.

00:04:02 – Cary: Aw, man!

00:04:03 – Grady: Yeah...

00:04:05 – Cary: Yes, Tiger better get back in the game before he gets left behind!

00:04:10 – Cary: Let's see, ummm...so, based on our brief discussion, would you ever consider visiting the American Legion space? Just to check it out?

00:04:18 – Grady: Yeah! (with confidence)

00:04:19 – Cary: Ok.

00:04:22 – Cary: Well, I think that's pretty much it. That's all the questions I have for you, sir. Are there any questions you have for me? Or?

00:04:26 - Grady: No. Not really. Just wanted to help you out.

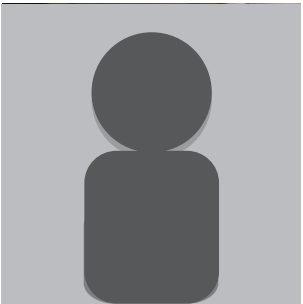
00:04:30 – Cary: Oh, well I greatly appreciate your time sir! Thanks a lot!

Member Interviews



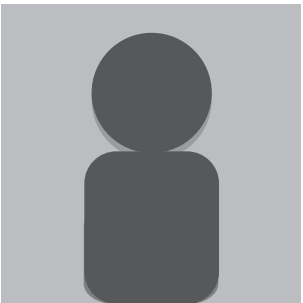
Likes the “amenities” of membership, “bar is the best bar in town.”

-Lloyd, early 60s,
member of Sons of the American Legion



“Lots of frustration and people having their own ways of doing things.” (Comments on E-board and change)

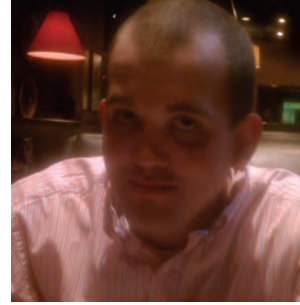
-Pembroke, 55, member of Post 135,
former E-board member



“There is a vitality right now in this post and it continues to grow. More so than anytime in the last 25 to 30 years. That’s because they have a group of leaders that is proactive.”

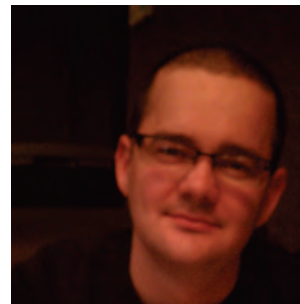
-Jaime, mid 60s,
member of Sons of the American Legion

Non-Member Interviews



“Oh, I wasn’t paying that much attention. I don’t know what it is. Ain’t no military person know what it is”

-Andrew, 24, army national guard 2006-10



“I wouldn’t need any kinda support besides getting a job”

-Spencer, 26, navy 2003-05



“I’ve Been around the legion and VFW my whole life”

“Great unwinding place to enjoy a beer, camaraderie, people that understand you.”

-Matt, 33, active army

What are your impressions of the American Legion?

“Military Veterans, generally of an older generation, who get together for patriotic causes and camaraderie.”

- Male, 45-54

“I have heard of it but am not familiar of the purpose of goals of the organization.”

- Male, 35-44

“Honestly... senior citizen vets.”

- Female, 35-44

What activities and benefits would you hope to participate in by joining a veterans' organization?

“...I would be inclined to participate in social activities if there were other people my age present.”

- Female, 18-24

“Community projects that are typically under-funded: e.g. beach/park clean ups, home renovations, park development; particularly if those events reach out to include young, enlisted active duty personnel to engage them in interacting with the veterans and helping community at the same time.”

- Female, 45-54

“Supporting benefits for veterans. Supporting veterans returning from combat with injuries.”

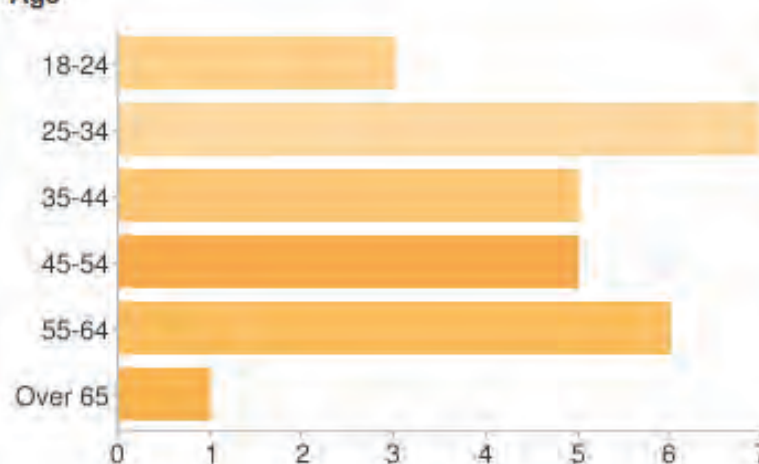
- Male, 25-34

Gender



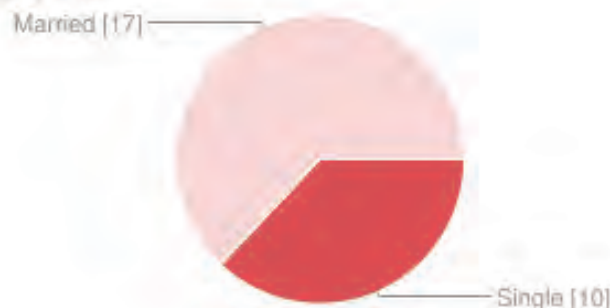
Male	21	78%
Female	6	22%

Age



18-24	3	11%
25-34	7	26%
35-44	5	19%
45-54	5	19%
55-64	6	22%
Over 65	1	4%

Marital Status



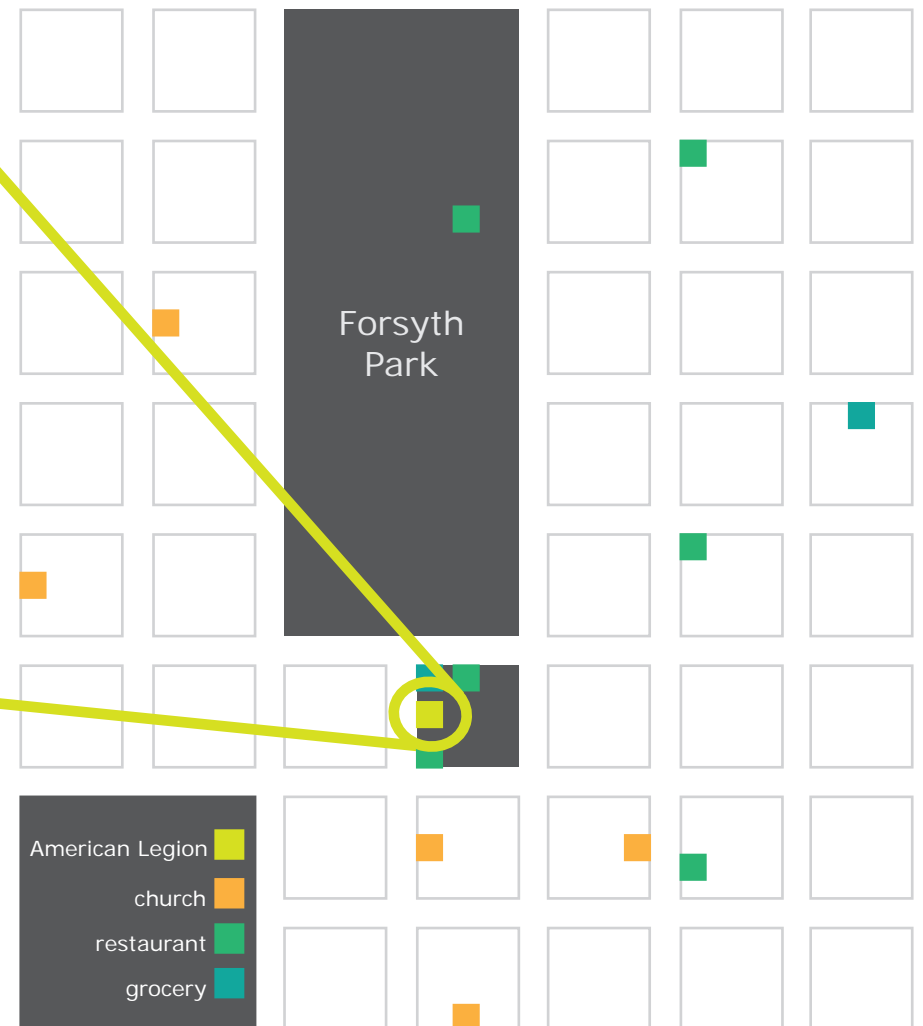
Single	10	37%
Married	17	63%



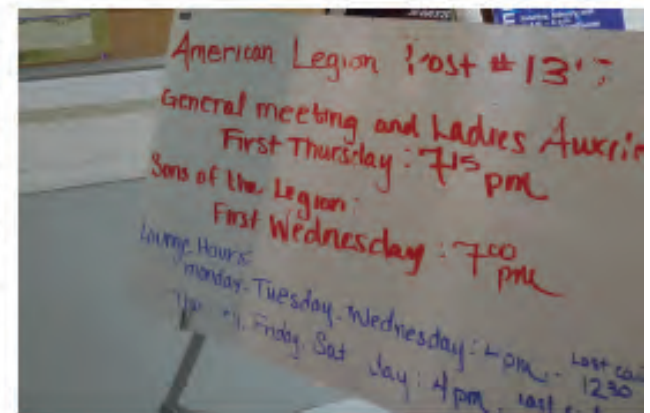
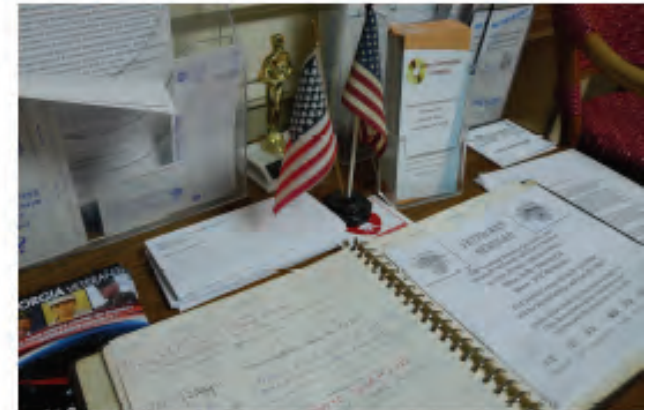
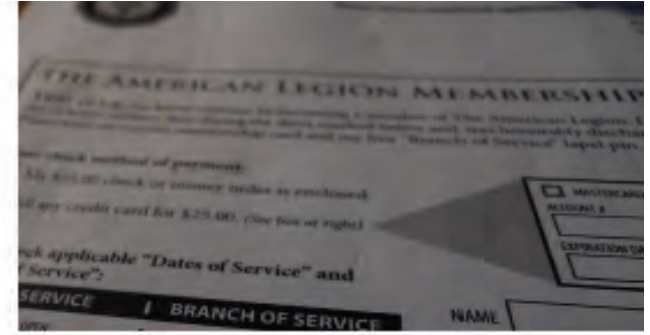
Field Site

American Legion Post 135, located in historic downtown Savannah, is a prime location surrounded by retail, residential, recreation, and community spaces, and features a high volume of foot and vehicle traffic. Related to this, the Legion owns a portion of the retail spaces on Park Avenue which acts as a unique forum for business partnerships and revenue opportunities. Businesses currently in the American Legion retail rental spaces include an organic food store and a coffee shop, which are located directly across the street from Forsyth Park.

All interviews and active and passive observations were conducted at American Legion Post 135 in Savannah, GA. The semi-structured research survey had responses from all regions within the continental U.S. and was the only form of internet-based ethnography. Regions with military service academy's or large military bases had the highest concentration of survey responses.



Artifacts || Key Objects





The American Legion national organization structure of independent posts allows each community post to develop programs and events to benefit the specific local membership community. The local American Legion Post 135 in Savannah is unique in having public and private member-specific spaces and events. This non-traditional post arrangement allows the post to be a true community environment to provide interaction, outreach, and support not limited to just American Legion members.

- The administration and executive board has not implemented any visibly proactive prospective membership and recruitment strategies. This negatively impacts the growth of the member base and the overall member-base sustainability of Post 135.
- From casual interactions and interviews with current Post 135 members, they were satisfied with the events and benefits this American Legion had to offer them, and had seen noted administration improvement throughout the years of membership.
- There was no initiative to increase government funded benefit and grant opportunities for veterans. There are currently no plans to update any of the offered for support programs in place for providing better and broader-reaching services for more veterans. There is interest in pursuing federal grant programs, but the Legion is lacking in resources and grant writing skills to do so.
- The administration, while quite aware they need to focus on membership recruitment, are currently more concerned with building renovations (i.e. the ballroom) and a contentious reorganization effort taking place behind the scenes.

Research Findings || Unexpected Insights

- Overall lack of female members.
- The large non-member young adult demographic routinely utilizing the bar facilities.
- Non-member, eligible veterans in bar space with no desire to join.
- Administration and executive board's lack of interest to recruit or interact with perspective members especially in the public bar space.
- Level of member satisfaction with current events, benefits, and administration.
- General in-familiarity with the American Legion organization.
- Though many of the members expressed interest in benefits and services, few of them were aware of those already offered to them by the American Legion.

|| Unique Terminology

Commander – military rank, commanding officer of a unit.

- At the American Legion, this person is at the top of the reporting structure.

Adjutant – military rank or appointment, an officer who assists more senior officers.

- At the American Legion, this is the person who runs day-to-day operations.

Ladies Auxiliary – an organization within the American Legion for women in support of veterans.

- Wives, Mothers, Sisters, Daughters, Grandmothers, and Granddaughters of persons who served in the military during a time of conflict.

Sons of the American Legion – an organization within the American Legion for men in support of veterans.

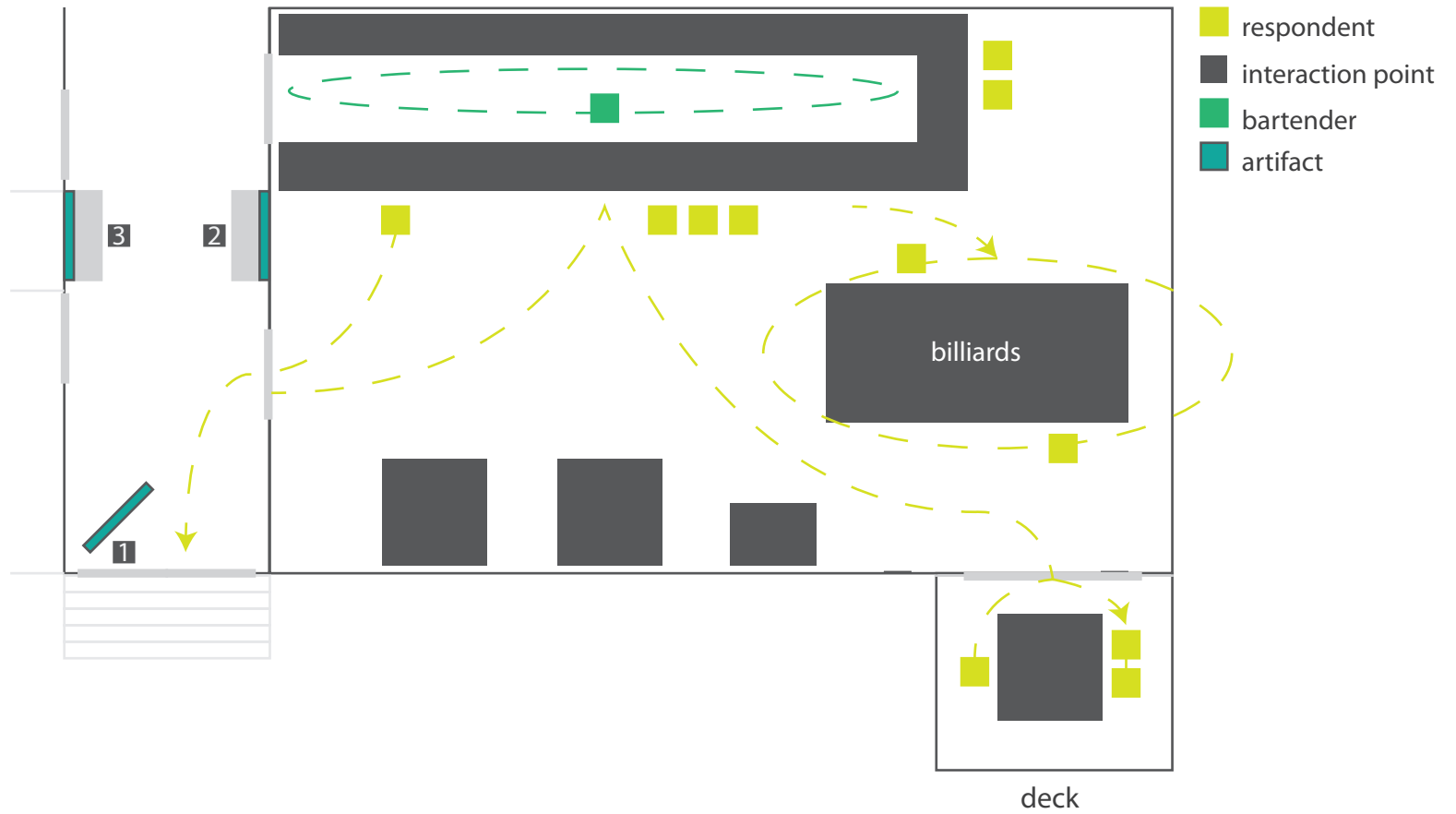
- Sons and grandsons of persons who served in the military during a time of conflict.

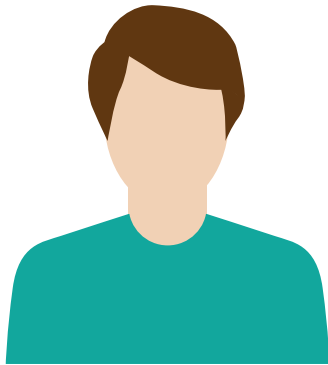
V.F.W. – Veterans of Foreign Wars.

- An organization for veterans who served overseas in a time of military conflict and decoration with an expeditionary medal, a campaign medal or ribbon

M.O.A.A. – Military Officers Association of America

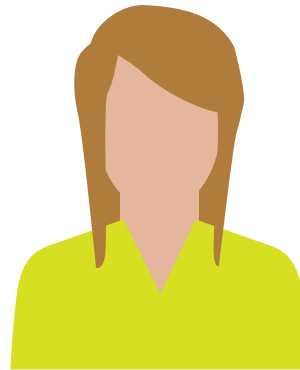
- An association for active and retired military officers and their families.





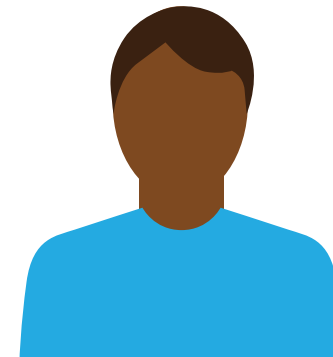
"Joe"
44 years old
Married
2 Children - 12, 14 yrs
Retired Officer
Army, Captain

- Actively involved in church
- Concerned about national state of affairs
- Plays golf
- Involved with sons' Boy Scout Troop
- Desert Storm Vet
- Autistic Son



"Brenda"
32 years old
Divorced
1 Child - 5 yrs
Retired Officer
Army, First Lieutenant

- Elementary school teacher
- Likes to travel
- Community volunteer worker
- Recently moved to new city
 - wants to meet new people

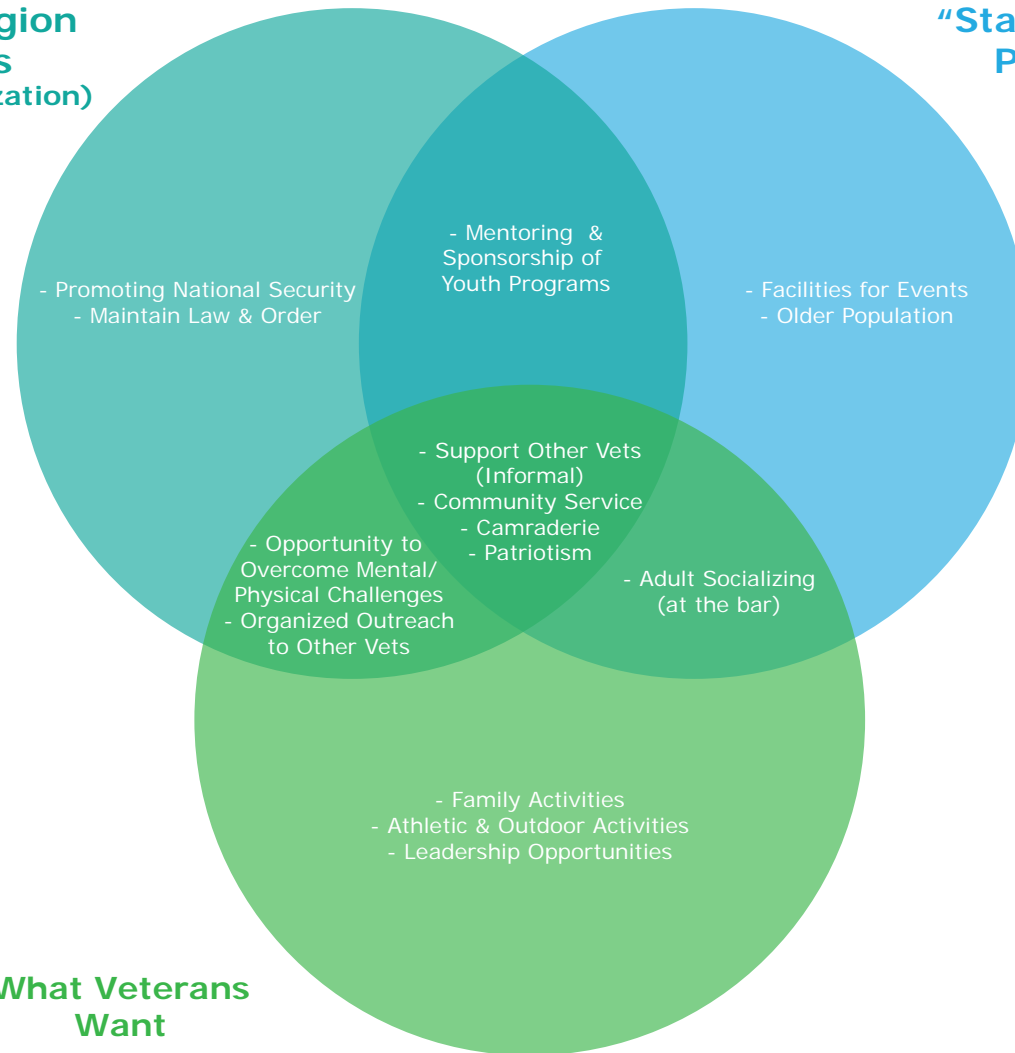


"Jimmy"
27 years old
Single
No Children
Active Enlisted
Navy, Petty Officer 2nd Class

- Plays Rugby
- Likes going out & drinking with friends on weekends
- Recently returned from deployment in Iraq
 - Seeking counseling for PTSD
- Interested in going to college after the service

**American Legion Directives
(National Organization)**

**“Stark Reality”
Post 135**



What Veterans Want

Research Findings || Research Models || Recommendations

- Communications through email and social media.
 - o 96% of survey respondents stated that they prefer to receive communications through email.
- Proactive recruitment of new members by current members.
 - o Actively engage patrons at the bar
 - o Form a "New Member" committee within the organization.
 - o Single point of contact for member recruitment and application.
 - o Guidance/assistance through the application process.
- Advertise/Promote the American Legion
 - o Neighborhood businesses
 - o Social Media
 - o Forsyth Park Events
 - Tables at Farmer's Market for non-profits
 - o Update marketing materials
 - Print
 - Online presence
- Build relationship with Ft. Stewart and VA hospital
- Events for veterans of all ages
 - o Athletics
 - o Family events
 - o Social events

Research Findings || Research Models || Further Research

- What ways do the Administration and Executive Board think current prospective members to find out about American Legion services and activities?

- Ask members and prospective members:

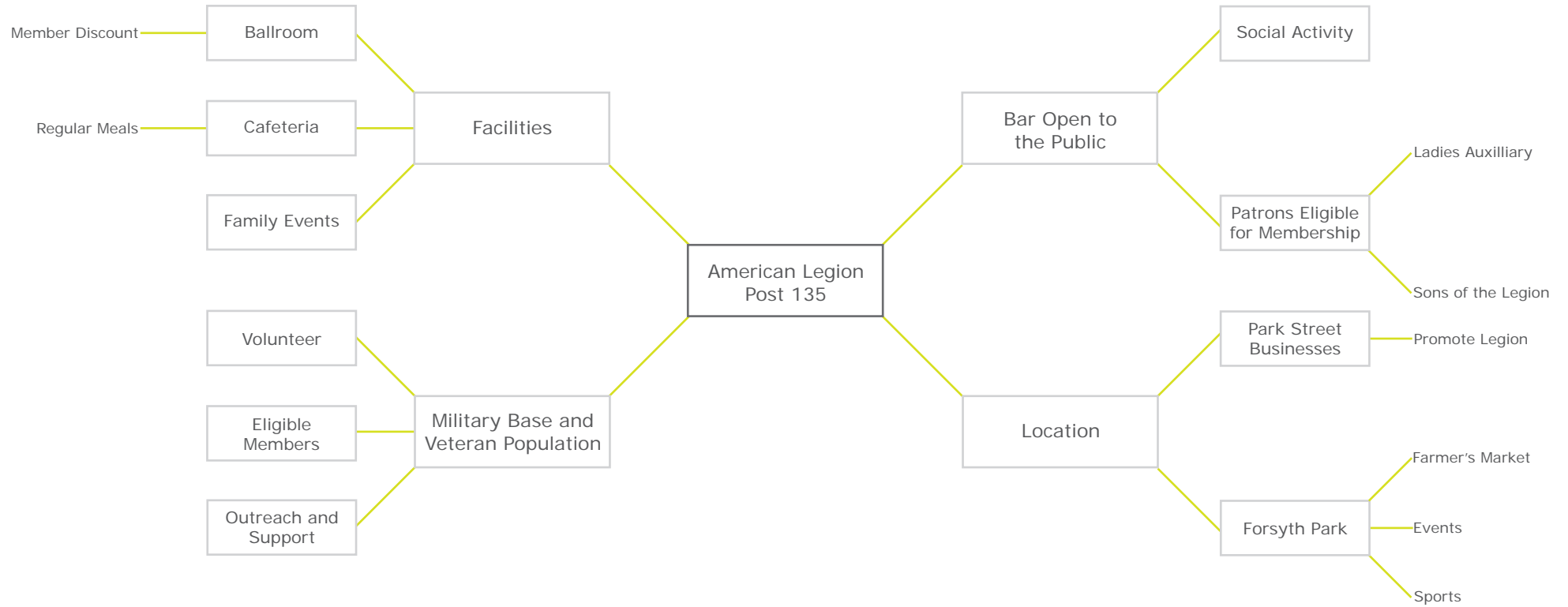
Look at a piece of ordinary American Legion literature. Walk the researcher through it and identify what is interesting, and what catches your eye. Is there anything you'd like to know about the American Legion that this doesn't tell you?

If you were telling a friend about an experience that you had with the American Legion, how would you describe it to them?

Provide an example of the kind of American Legion service or event you find yourself remembering the most?

How does this compare to what you recall from when you first joined the organization?

How would you rate the American Legion experiences in their ability to impact your daily life?





The University for Creative Careers®

Participants and respondents have verbally agreed to voluntarily agree to participate in an interview/inquiry performed by students at the Savannah College of Art and Design. They understand that this interview/inquiry is being conducted by researchers, in order to identify opportunities for design.

Participants understand that the evaluation methods which may involve me include:

1. the recorded (audio and/or video) observations of our work
2. the completion of a brief questionnaire(s) and/or
3. his or her participation in a 5-10 minute interview.

Participants have granted permission for the interview/inquiry to be recorded and transcribed, and to be used only by researchers for analysis of interview data. They granted permission for the evaluation data generated from the above methods to be used in an educational setting.

Participants understand that **any identifiable** information in regard to his or her name and/or company name **will be removed** from any material that is made available to those not directly involved in this study.

February 5, 2011 – March 4, 2011