

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONS OF CONFEDERATE VETERANS

A Brief History of the SCV

The Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) are direct descendants of the United Confederate Veterans (UCV), a voluntary organization of many of the veterans who fought so gallantly for the Confederacy during its brief existence (1861-1865.) The SCV was organized at Richmond, Virginia in 1896 at the Convention of the UCV. Initially the SCV was charged with two duties. These were (1) assisting the UCV and its elderly members at their conventions and other activities and (2) ensuring that the true history of the Confederacy and its struggle be accurately documented.

The SCV continues to exist and grow as an historical, patriotic, and non-political organization dedicated to ensuring that a true history of the 1861-1865 period is preserved. It is driven by the Charge given to the Sons by General Stephen D. Lee. That Charge is as relevant today as it was 111 years ago.

"To you, Sons of Confederate Veterans, we submit the vindication of the Cause for which we fought; to your strength will be given the defense of the Confederate soldier's good name, the guardianship of his history, the emulation of his virtues, the perpetuation of those principles he loved and which made him glorious and which you also cherish."

Lieutenant General Stephen Dill Lee

Membership is open to all male descendants (direct or collateral) of any person who served honorably in the Confederate armed forces. The SCV is not affiliated with any organization.

Educating the Camp Membership about Our Heritage

The activities of the camp are based upon the assumption that each member has a thorough understanding of the ideals, culture, politics, and economics of the antebellum, wartime, and postwar South. Unless the member understands those things, the activities and even the very existence of the camp will seem meaningless to him. He will view the camp merely as a social club, and will likely only go through the motions of participating. The member learns about his heritage primarily through the lectures provided as entertainment at the camp meetings, his generalized reading about the South, his specialized research, and discussions with the other members before and after the meetings.

Educating the Community about Our Heritage

Include the camp's speakers bureau as a source for school systems, civic groups, as a liaison with newspapers, radio and television stations. Establish a camp officer as the local history expert and news source, write newspaper articles and/or column, establish a radio program, prepare TV one-shots, publish brochures about local heroes and battles for distribution at libraries, schools, and establish annual essay contests at local schools with a cash prize for the best essay on some topic concerning the Confederacy.

If your camp is the sole repository in your area for people who are interested in learning about Confederate history and the values of Southerners who lived in that era, then your camp will forever be swimming in a hostile sea. The more modern and progressive your area is, the more you will find the people take less interest in learning about "outdated eras" on their own and the more willingly they will accede to the demands of civil rights activists who say "offensive symbols" of the past must be removed. But even in conservative towns that treasure their Confederate heritage, there will be little real knowledge about why the South fought the war and what it is we are attempting to preserve. Quite simply this situation exists because the history books, written from the Northern viewpoint, have done a thorough job of distorting or eliminating discussion of our past.

The primary job of the SCV is to teach our fellow Southerners about the value system and the way of life that once existed in the South in order to provide them the ability to critically evaluate today's society, its value system and way of life. Only with that sharp contrast in mind will our people then be equipped to reject those present day values which are harmful, and to insist upon reemphasizing those Southern values which are beneficial, admirable, and perfectly attuned to the true nature of the Southerner.

Liaison with the Local Ness Media

It can be advantageous to have the local newspapers, radio stations and TV stations if any, consider your camp the resident experts on Confederate history. To establish that expertise, you should select the camp member who has the greatest overall knowledge of Confederate history, and the one who knows the most about local Confederate heroes and battles, and publicize them as your experts.

In small towns, you can identify the local media simply by checking the Yellow Pages in the telephone book. In large cities, your PR committee can check with the trade or professional associations of newspaper publishers and broadcasters.

Set up meetings with the editors and the newscast producers in your area and bring along your experts. Establish the credentials of your experts, have them exchange business cards with the news media people, and arrange for the news hounds to call them anytime the Confederacy comes up in the news and the news media people want to check the accuracy of the material they have written. This will make the news people aware that you are around and get your foot in the door for future dealings with them.

Media Coverage of Your Camp

The way this nation works is that if the media reports you are alive and well, you are; however, if the media ignores you, you do not exist. So it is up to your camp to say and do noteworthy things and get the news media to report them favorably. The rationale of why the media will not ordinarily come to you is because they already have more civic group business than they can handle, and that type of material is generally very dull and boring. You are competing for limited amounts of time and space with a huge number of other civic and social clubs: Kiwanis, Rotary, Moose, Elks, Pilot, Jaycees, Little Theater, Chamber of Commerce, church groups, and on and on. All of them want media coverage to promote their causes or beef up their recruiting or just to see their names in print; many go an entire year without getting any coverage at all. It must be understood that the SCV is an activist educational organization, and our organization is largely pointless without media coverage. Your camp can get plenty of media coverage if you give it a high priority and pan for it carefully. Occasionally, local media are actively hostile to the Cause.

The very first step is to ensure that any news coverage of your camp's activities will be positive in nature. And that can be tricky. One unwise remark by a camp member in an interview, opinion-editorial (op-ed) piece, or letter to the editor that can be considered racist, tasteless, or overly defensive, can ruin the image of your camp. You must lay down the law that no one but the camp commander, or some one he designates, may speak for the camp or for the SCV locally. You would do well to consider insisting that any member who delivers a speech, or speaks to the media about any issue normally associated with the SCV, must clear the material with the commander before releasing it. That is the only way you can control the camp's public image.

Next, you should establish a specific goal for the quantity of media coverage the camp will try to achieve in a particular period of time. In a sparsely populated area with little in the way of news media, a minimum goal might be six media generated reports (newspaper articles, newscast reporting) per year and six camp generated items (newspaper articles, op-ed pieces) per year. In an area with more population and news media, your goal should be one media report and one camp generated report per month. How can you accomplish that, when most civic groups are lucky to get one article per year? One way is by making friends with the news media and another is to ensure the camp's activities are

newsworthy.

The key to all this is an active camp Public Relations (PR) Committee. You have already laid the groundwork with the media by meeting with the editor and producers to establish one or two of your members as Confederate historians. Now the PR Committee should divide up the media among themselves. Each committeeman learns with whom to deal at a particular newspaper or radio station, gets to know those persons, determines the kinds of news he or she seeks, and periodically asks him/her for advice on how to make a camp event more newsworthy. Within the camp, the PR Committee works closely with the Commander and the Operations Committee to plan the camp's public activities in such a way as to make them newsworthy events that still present the kind of public image of the camp that you want to put across.

Whenever possible, such events should include pageantry and color, along with a touch of drama while avoiding being hokey, and introducing humor without being tasteless or ridiculous. The events should portray the camp as interesting, high-minded, and beneficent without being stodgy or stuffy. Dress and image are extremely important when possible members should wear uniforms, suits, sports clothes and avoid wearing tee shirts, jeans or camouflage to activities the media will cover. A typical event that could get media coverage is an outstanding speech of broad appeal that is relevant to contemporary regional issues. This could be a speech delivered at one of your camp meetings or by one of your members to another civic group or a public gathering. Media should only be invited to cover those speeches that you are confident will be well received.

Other events could include a ceremony to announce the results of the camp's annual fundraiser for charity, using a Confederate theme, the camp's annual banquet at which it presents Outstanding Southern Citizen plaques to prominent local citizens who are genuinely admired by the surrounding community. Other events could be a colorful celebration of Confederate Memorial Day, a protest by the camp of a heritage violation that is considered beyond reasonable by most of the local citizenry. These types of events, when planned from the start by the Commander, the Operations Committee and the PR Committee to avoid the typical cliché ridden civic group scenes and words that bore people to tears, can get you all the news coverage you want if your camp has the reputation among the media of a group that puts on a good show. And when the coverage keeps coming, month after month each news item will add to the luster of your camp's public image.

Your camp will also want to generate its own news items. The camp's PR Committee, drawing upon its knowledge of each member's grasp of various aspects of Southern history and contemporary events, his soundness of judgment, and his ability to write, can come up with appropriate story ideas for newspaper articles to be written by the camp's most talented writers in remembrance of battles fought locally, birthdays of local Confederate heroes, etc. If the camp member selected agrees to write the piece, the PR Committee clears it with the newspaper in question, and the camp is in business.

Ideally, the camp will have recruited a newspaperman or ex-newspaperman as a member (this should be a high priority). If no one in the camp has such experience, then the member who is writing the article should study the style and format of similar types of articles that are printed in the newspapers and use them as a guide for writing his pieces.

Working closely with the Intelligence Committee and the Commander, the PR Committee should also suggest ideas for op-ed pieces protesting gross heritage violations in your area. Of course, you will want to read every article and op-ed piece before it goes out, checking not only for accuracy, but also for the right tone. You do not want it to sound arrogant, uncivilized, strident or apologetic. The PR Committee should also provide the local newspapers and radio stations with public service announcements (PSA) announcing the date, time, and location of each upcoming camp meeting. If no one in the camp has written radio spots before, the member selected should tape record a number of PSA broadcast by the radio stations for other civic groups, study the style, and time them with a stopwatch. He should write his own PSA, copy in the same style to the length most commonly

broadcast (probably 30 seconds).

Good media coverage on a regular basis is like money in the bank. Aside from drawing in a steady stream of high caliber recruits, it will also dispose the local government and school authorities to be more cooperative when you need their permission or assistance to conduct certain camp activities. It will help you to educate the community about their Southern heritage, and it will make opposition activists less enthusiastic about perpetrating heritage violations. It will also place much of the community on your side when you do find it necessary to contest a heritage violation.

Brochures about Local Heroes and/or Battles

The most logical way to attract the interest of your community in their Southern heritage is by publicizing the exploits of a Confederate hero who came from their own hometown or county or perhaps by describing a battle fought within maybe a 60-mile radius of your location. The best way to present this information is in a brochure written and published by your camp, and displayed in the public library and elsewhere.

Your Genealogical Research Committee can generate the information for the brochure. The PR Committee can estimate the cost, select the format of the brochure, select someone to write it, identify a member of the camp (or a friend of a member) who has a computer with a desktop publishing capability, and decide whether to get the brochure photocopied or offset printed. The idea is to print the brochure in 3.5" wide landscape columns (sideways) in black and white on both sides of a single sheet of glossy or matte finish 8.5" by 14" paper, and then accordion fold it. That will give you eight panels 8.5" high by 3.5" wide, and this will provide plenty of space.

The cover panel should have the camp name, a title in big type that is easy to read at a glance, an illustration, and one or two lead-in paragraphs of interesting, colorful information to capture the reader's attention. The copy should consist of interesting facts that tell the story in colorful detail. Every paragraph should have at least one surprise for the reader. Write the copy for intelligent high school students who know nothing about the intricacies of battle tactics, military jargon, or Confederate history. In fact, after you have checked the copy, you should have half a dozen high school students read it to see if they can follow it and find it interesting.

Get the brochure printed or copied on high quality glossy or matte finish stock (depending upon which kind the printer says will be most compatible with the kind of ink he's using). Usually the highest quality stock is very expensive; generally there will be a grade that looks and feels almost the same, but costs only a fraction of that amount. You will also need counter top brochure holders to display the brochures and attract the interest of visitors. A pile of brochures left lying on a counter top goes unnoticed, and eventually gets thrown away. You can buy a few brochure holders from a company that sells advertising promotional materials or you can persuade the camp's resident woodworking artist to build some wooden ones for you. Arrange permission to display the brochures in their holders at the checkout desk of the public library and the school libraries, the Chamber of Commerce, restaurants around town, city hall, and at the county courthouse. Finally, schedule a ceremony to announce publication of the brochure, and arrange for coverage by the news media. You'll need to send somebody around to refill the brochure holders periodically.