

# Membership Taskforce Recommendation Plan



**August 2013**

## **BACKGROUND:**

In May of 2013, Chef de Chemin de Fer Barry Bovee expressed his desire to form a special taskforce to address the overall membership concerns of the 40&8. To that end, Chef Bovee directed Correspondant Nationale Bernie Sampson, with the input of National Membership Committee Advisor Terry Sims (Chef de Chemin de Fer Passé), and the assistance of Voiture Nationale Staff members Bill Beaumont and Butch Miller, to identify a cadre of voyageurs who were both experienced and involved in the membership efforts of La Societe, at either the Nationale, Grande or Locale levels. Chef Bovee also stressed that the individuals nominated must be motivated to serve on the taskforce, and have indicated their willingness to devote the time and energy to do so. The potential taskforce members were presented to Chef Bovee, and the final taskforce members were chosen. On behalf of Chef Bovee, Correspondant Nationale Sampson once again contacted each individual chosen for the taskforce, and once again asked them if they would be willing so serve on the taskforce. Each accepted the challenge willingly, and the taskforce was officially established. The membership of the taskforce is detailed in Attachment A.

Three conditions were immediately recognized, either one of which, could render the taskforce helpless, and annihilate any possibility of success. The first condition was that the taskforce members were geographically disbursed from California to Maine and from Florida to South Dakota; with Virginia, Oklahoma, Arizona, Wisconsin, Missouri, Tennessee and Indiana sprinkled in between. The second condition was that the taskforce would obviously need to meet, for the purpose of discussing, deliberating and deciding on the issues, ideas, questions and concerns that would surely be raised. And lately, the condition of greatest concern was simply that the 40&8 did NOT have the available financial recourses which would allow each taskforce member to travel to a central location, for whatever amount of time was needed, to address its mission. Fortunately, Voiture Nationale had already been looking at a number of cost saving and avoidance measures, which held promise for the future in allowing the 40&8 to meet and discuss matters of organizational concern, without suffering the need for more traditional travel expenditures.

One such measure was the use of a dial-in conference call service. Upon the advent of the taskforce, Voiture Nationale entered into an agreement with the service provider company. This agreement and the service it covers, has allowed the taskforce to perform its responsibilities thus far, unencumbered and at a total cost of little more than two tanks of gasoline.

Once the taskforce had been established, and its members determined, a narrative document which detailed the taskforce mission, objective and strategy; and the schedule to be followed, was released to all the members. The first conference call meeting took place on June 3<sup>rd</sup>, at 1:00 PM. The “kick-off” conference call meeting really had two main purposes. The first was to verify that each taskforce member had access to the call, and to provide basic instruction on how each call participant could manage their individual conference call environment. The second was to provide motivation “push” to the taskforce members, and to issue their first assignment. The call began with a roll call of those present, followed immediately by the introduction of Chef Bovee.

The Chef began by thanking the taskforce members, advisors and consultants for, first, accepting the responsibility of serving on the taskforce, one which the future of the 40&8 so critically depended upon; and second, for their overall and continued service to La Societe. He went on to challenge the taskforce to “think outside the box”, to be innovative, imaginative and bold in approaching the topic of 40&8 membership. To be fearless in their consideration of 40&8 practice, policy and tradition, as it relates to the membership program of the 40&8. To strive to reach beyond the pitfall of, “If we keep doing the same things, we will suffer the same results!”

A short discussion of the overall purpose and scope of the taskforce took place. That discussion quickly fell into a discussion of the taskforce members’ first assignment, which was to answer the question, “40&8 Membership Could be Improved / Increased if we ...?” The members were instructed to submit their answers to the question electronically, and in as much detail as possible. Members could submit as many answers (ideas), as they wished. It was stressed that EACH taskforce member was expected to submit at least one response to the question at hand. The submissions were to be sent electronically to Voiture Nationale by June 14<sup>th</sup>. Per the schedule, by June 21<sup>st</sup> the raw submissions had been collected and redistributed to each taskforce member.

On June 25<sup>th</sup>, the taskforce began a series of two conference call meetings, to discuss the ideas/suggestions which has been submitted, and to collectively determine what was believed to be the best 5 ideas. However, during the June 25<sup>th</sup> call, it was suggested and agreed that due to the enormous scope of the ideas which had been submitted, it would be more manageable, beneficial and productive, if the entire package of ideas were broken down into applicable categories. Then, each taskforce member would statistically rank the ideas within each category. Those individual rankings would be provided to Voiture Nationale staff, which would create an overall matrix document which would display the most popular ideas within each category. The full taskforce would then discuss the general value and applicability of each idea. The taskforce would then determine if the idea in question warranted inclusion in the taskforce recommendation package, which would be forwarded to the Nationale Membership Committee for consideration, and action as applicable.

The entire package of 17 general ideas, many with associated or related issues and ideas, were divided into five (5) categories, listed in no specific order of value or priority, below.

1. Youth.
2. Public Relations.
3. Renewal and Retention.
4. Recruitment.
5. Education and Orientation.

It must be accepted and recognized that a number of ideas, in their broadest sense, would easily cross over category boundaries, in such situations, there was no mitigating criteria established or employed to determine in to which category the idea was to be placed, other than a “first come, first serve” determination. Such was done mostly to avoid the duplication of presentation and discussion. The ideas / suggestions included in each category, and their associated

recommendation, will be presented in no particular order of value, worth, urgency or priority. Each should be measured on its own merit, in relation to the taskforce charter question, that being, “40&8 Membership Could be Improved / Increased if we ...?”

## **1 - YOUTH**

One could easily fall into to the trap of thinking that as categories go, this one would be the “Duh!” category. But like I said, that would be a trap! In considering the category of “Youth”, the taskforce believed it would be more correct to maintain a frame of mind where the word “Youth” was not only interpreted as being a term associated with time (age), but also one associated with a mind set (young at heart), or of popularity (social activities and practices).

In the past, the main place of social interaction that supported 40&8 membership were gatherings (daily, weekly, seasonally, or what have you), involving mostly veterans and their families. Such usually took place at Chateaus or Legion Posts. In today’s world however, such events are NOT the social norm they once were. The brick and mortar Chateaus and Post are disappearing. The “club” scene isn’t the membership “farm” it once was.

If we want 'younger' Vets who are still raising families, to become interested in the 40&8, we need to establish, reestablish or revitalize programs which would have us become more involved in local schools, and particularly Youth Sports (both boys and girls) with the schools, churches and local leagues.

**RECOMMENDATON 1-A: Establish, Revitalize and/or refocus our emphasis on Voiture, Grande and Nationale level programs that will attract younger veterans ... AND ... their families.**

Remember when you went through basic training and got your first haircut and basic issue of clothing. Well in today’s world, military inductees are also issued an email address (“\*.GOV” or “\*.MIL”). The “younger” veteran of today has no point of reference to a world without e-mail and other such electronic social media capabilities.

People, especially the young veterans we are encouraging to join, increasingly expect an organization to have a website and other social media tools. Online search has become the most common and easiest way to research an organization for more information. The first impression left by an organizations presence, or absence thereof, online, will very likely determine if a veteran’s interest results in membership. The 40&8 needs to insure that we are not missing out on valuable, cost effective, online exposure opportunities. Setting up a Voiture or Grande website is also a valuable resource for current members (Voyageurs and Dames) who need to find timely information quickly and easily.

**RECOMMENDATION 1-B: Encourage each Voiture Locale and Grande Voiture to set up a website and Facebook page. Get involved with Social Media of every form.**

If you put a group of veterans together, one from each period of conflict (WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Granada, Desert Storm and OEF/OIF), and asked them to plan and organize an event involving food, entertainment, music and dancing, the event would NEVER happen. It wouldn’t

happen because they didn't know how to plan or organize it; and it wouldn't fail because they were not willing to do it. No! It would most likely fail because there would be a serious "disconnect" on every issue. They would probably not agree on a single thing, be it the food to be served (what's a "Moon Pie"?), the entertainment (who the #\*%# are the Beach Boys?), the music (Rap?), etc. Their personal experience and points of reference would be so dissimilar, that they would be lost as a cohesive group.

The same situation occurs in organizations such as the 40&8, whenever a new period of veterans is introduced into the general citizen population. It happened at the end of WWII; the end of Korea, Vietnam, etc., and it's happening today, if we don't stress that as a veteran's organization, the 40&8 cannot afford to hold on to a "Good Ole Boys Club" attitude. In its most simple and dangerous form, a "Good Ole Boys Club" attitude is one where the current members have NO interest in recruiting or attracting new members, because the new veterans are different. The current members believe they have nothing in common with the new veterans, and worst of all, the current members have NO desire to search for common ground upon which to build a relationship. The saddest and cruelest aspect of this condition is that the strongest bond that could exist between citizens ... WE ARE BOTH VETERANS ... is never given the recognition it deserves, and that sacred bond doesn't have the opportunity to flourish.

**RECOMMENDATION 1-C: As an organization, the 40&8 must do all that it can to eliminate the "Good Ole Boys Club" attitude at all levels of the 40&8.**

## **2 - PUBLIC RELATIONS**

I know that each of us could probably name a few exceptions, but as a rule, the general population of veterans is not a loud bunch. Veterans simply want those things that they feel they have earned as the result of their service and sacrifice to America. No more, and no less. That is an honorable and enviable attitude to carry, if you're a veteran, but for a veterans organization such as the 40&8, to believe so is both dangerous, and a BIG mistake. In today's world, every veteran's organization in the USA lives under the constant pressure of remaining viable and relevant. That pressure for viability and relevance, plus that of recognition is especially acute for the 40&8, since its membership has been declining for more than a decade. It's terribly difficult for those outside the 40&8 to recognize us, when we fail to do so ourselves. The 40&8, at all levels of the organization, needs to adopt a more aggressive attitude in promoting itself, both within and outside the 40&8.

As an organization, the 40&8 is no longer able to achieve success and demand recognition, by simply devoting resources to the effort at hand. There was a time when one could have said that the 40&8 was "fat and sassy", but that time is GONE! In today's world, the 40&8 is at best, "lean and mean". The 40&8 has reached a point when organizationally, it has no choice but to "work smarter ... but not necessarily harder". The 40&8 may not be the biggest fish in the veteran's organization "pond", but that doesn't mean that we are no longer able to swim right alongside those that are. And given the opportunity, it doesn't mean that we can't be the lead fish in the school.

At EVERY level of the 40&8, we need to make everything we do a "Media Event". We need to "toot our own horn" loud and often. And in so doing, take advantage of every possible Public Relations "tool" available, be it print, TV, radio, social media or, internet web presence to name but a few. Every Grande and Voiture should publish a regular newsletter, either in printed or electronically.

**RECOMMENDATION 2-A: Public relations needs to be established as a paramount priority at all levels of La Societe.**

Potential members (veterans in general), to see the 40&8 as a "Non-Political, Community based and involved, Charitable Organization of American Veterans". Most Veterans want to be able to give something back to their Communities, and most of the programs supported by the 40&8 offer them the perfect opportunity to do so. We need to promote our programs, both within and outside the 40&8. And in so doing, raise awareness to the fact that the majority of our funds are used within the community in which they are generated. When someone sees a 40&8 chapeau they should immediately think that the 40&8 is an active organization that is involved, and takes pride in being part of the community. The perception should also be that the 40&8 organization is willing, able and available to serve the community, in whatever way would be most beneficial.

**RECOMMENDATION 2-B: The 40&8 MUST promote itself as a community "partner" which can be relied upon to provide community leadership, support and assistance.**

As a national veteran's organization, the 40&8 needs to seek out veteran friendly partnerships with public and private corporations and foundations which foster the same patriotic and community values as La Societe. Such partnerships should be pursued with the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense. Such partnerships would provide additional opportunities to raise awareness of the 40&8 as a relevant and viable stakeholder in the national veteran's community.

**RECOMMENDATION 2-C: The 40&8 national organization should initiate an effort to enter into a partnering agreement with interested public and private organizations and foundations, as well as the Federal government, to participate and support in activities directly benefiting veterans.**

### **3 - RENEWAL/RETENTION**

The recommendations offered for this category are considered to be self-explanatory.

**RECOMMENDATION 3-A: Establish a process or procedure that would allow members to renew their membership on-line.**

**RECOMMENDATION 3-B: Exercise a much more aggressive and direct approach in pursuing non-renewals and delinquent members.**

**RECOMMENDATION 3-C: Return to the Ritual of a Promenade.**

## **4 - RECRUITMENT**

Membership recruitment is, and always will be, a “Just Ask!” kind of job. It’s really THAT simple. However, in today’s world with automation and social media, “Just Ask!” is no longer THAT simple. “Just Ask!” has always been perceived as a simple face-to-face activity. But then again, in today’s world, face-to-face . . . isn’t. In today’s world, an individual can discover an organization; join the organization and attend meetings of that organization, without EVER having left the comfort of their home. We are truly no longer a “Front Porch” culture. The 40&8 must recognize this cultural shift, and incorporate it into its overall membership recruitment plan. It is the common business practice of nearly every major veteran’s organization in the USA, to solicit new members through direct mail solicitation. However, unlike most every other veteran’s organization, membership in the 40&8 is by invitation ONLY. This fact, it would seem, would eliminate any possibility of using direct mail marketing to perform open membership solicitations. But it would not however, eliminate the possibility of using direct mail marketing to solicit, not to recruit membership, but to recruit a positive response. Should an individual respond to the direct mail solicitation, the Voiture Locale in that applicable area would be notified, and they would contact the individual . . . face-to-face . . . and if appropriate, extend the invitation for membership. The establishment of such a process would obviously need to be well thought out and planned. But, as mentioned before, such procedures have been successfully employed by nearly every major veteran’s organization in the USA.

**RECOMMENDATION 4-A: Conduct a limited trial of an Invitation By Mail (IBM) direct mail marketing program. Based on the success of the trial, expand the program as applicable.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4-B: Establish an awards program by which a member could earn a free Paid Up For Life membership (P.U.F.L.), for recruiting a pre-set number of new members. The period for doing so could be limited or open.**

**RECOMMENDATION 4-C: Annually, publish a “State of our Membership” article in the 40&8’er. Tell it like it is; the good, the bad and the ugly, but do so in such a manner that is positive and implies that while the situation is serious, it is NOT TERMINAL!**

## **5 - EDUCATION/ORIENTATION**

The 40&8 needs more individual education about our programs and less “harassment” of the membership applicants during the initiatory process. For nearly 100 years we have taught the P.G.’S how to throw “stuff” on each other, drink beer, and eat a banquet meal, with little being said about our programs and what being a Voyageur really encompasses. It has always been the responsibility of the Locales to nurture and educate the new Voyageurs and assists them in this so important educational process. Unfortunately the practice of educating the membership has become the exception rather than the rule. It a time proven fact that by teaching a new Voyageur about who we are, and what we do, they will be better prepared to go into their Locales and become (and stay) active, perhaps even inspired enough to volunteer to work a program that is not being worked at that time. And, it is also a time proven fact that with such an education, the Voyageur more likely to feel like he/she is a valuable part of the Voiture and more likely to remain a member.

**RECOMMENDATION 5-A: The need for individual member education, training and/or orientation needs to be recognized, and a major effort to implement such needs to be undertaken at all levels of La Society.**

The 40&8 must recognize that today’s Veterans are members of the first generation of soldiers, whose opinion and perception of “initiations” is not necessarily a positive one. While in the past the initiation process required by many organizations was considered a necessary and honorable rite of passage, that same consideration simply does not exist in today’s society.

**RECOMMENDATION 5-B: Each membership applicant should receive a through and complete explanation of both a Tradition (Active) Wreck, and a Formal Wreck. After receiving the explanation, the applicant should be given the option of choosing (without threat of reprisal), the form of Wreck in which they wished to participate.**

Under no circumstances should a Voiture Locale be allowed to require a new member to go through a Traditional (Active) Wreck as the ONLY Wreck option. Nor should a Voiture Locale imply to an applicant that by choosing a Formal Wreck, the applicant is somehow not an equal member within that Locale.

**RECOMMENDATION 5-C: Traditional Wrecks MUST be closely supervised by a well-trained Wrecking Crew and never forced upon a membership applicant.**

**ATTACHMENT A**

<b>NAME</b>	<b>VL</b>	<b>GRANDE</b>	<b>POSITION / TITLE</b>	
Bovee	Barry	997	MI	Chairman (Chef de Chemin de Fer)
Sampson	Bernie	534	NY	Consultant
Sims	Terry	37	IN	Consultant
Lanning	Terry	448	MO	Advisor (Finance Committee)
Beaumont	Bill	***	***	Advisor (Voiture Nationale Staff)
Miller	Butch	1415	IN	Advisor (Voiture Nationale Staff)
Smith	David	735	TN	National Membership Directeur
Asher	Carl	1406	CA	Taskforce Member
Beamer	Pat	215	FL	Taskforce Member
Freeman	Ross	1024	ME	Taskforce Member
Gallagher	Tony	333	MO	Taskforce Member
Hall	Greg	522	SD	Taskforce Member
Orval	Tom	750	WI	Taskforce Member
Reed	Don	1466	AZ	Taskforce Member
Rolfes	Ron	1546	GR	Taskforce Member
Sorrentino	Paul	1390	IN	Taskforce Member
Steil	Joe	1298	OK	Taskforce Member
Wood	Mike	977	VA	Taskforce Member