

Signal Mountain Lions & Signal Mountain Veterans Group



Service to others has many faces

Those who serve their country have made great contributions and great sacrifices. Lions Clubs International recognizes the commitment and passion of these individuals. As a way of welcoming them into the global family of Lions, the organization offers veterans and active duty service members an entrance or charter fee waiver when joining a Lions Club.

Lions International provides opportunities for leadership, personal fulfillment, and relationship building through community and global service activities, easing the transition to civilian life, and connecting individuals who share similar life experiences. Veterans and active duty service members have incredible experience to offer any Lions Club they join, or any new club they bring together.

They don't just know how to get the job done - they know how to do it with teamwork and strong leadership. Their adaptability and practical service experience can create tangible contributions to their community, continuing the momentum of a life led in service to others. Lions International is a place where kindness matters, and the 'Involve a Veteran' program offers servicemen and women the opportunity to be a part of our global service mission.

VETERANS WHO BECAME BEST FRIENDS

Tribalism

Everyone needs a tribe, a group of people with whom they feel safe. Within this tribe, each member can become the person they want to be. From it, they can learn to be a person who contributes to the community around them. Informally, norms develop, and relationships prosper.

For many people, their tribe is their family of origin, and coupled with their own extended families, becomes their primary source of confidence and security. Once they grow up, they find their tribes in their workplaces and churches, but what happens when they retire?

Like it, or not, this is the primary source of the gangs that proliferate in our cities, a social consequence of the need to belong not met in safer environments. Wonder why we don't have gangs of seniors? Without a deliberate plan, a new tribe was formed on Signal Mountain more than a decade ago. It began with three Amigo's (Bill Leonard, Jerry Pala, and Jim Wade). They were all Vietnam-era veterans and met once a week for breakfast. The tribe grew like Topsy! (from Uncle Tom's Cabin, Topsy became a humorous way of describing how something developed without any particular intention or plan.)

Their purpose was simple; share experiences, build camaraderie and have a good time doing so! Initially, they met at a mountain fixture called "Lynn's", a combination sandwich bar, honky tonk, and place for the socialization of young and old around a pint or two of the barkeep's lager. Over time, this group expanded, and slowly other veterans began attending the Thursday morning gathering. It was not a group that excluded non-veterans, or members of the local Lions Club, and more than one visitor who attended later became a Lion. It would be fair to credit the group as an informal recruiting gang, for little is much more attractive than the combination of service and camaraderie.

To be sure, a fair amount of Lion business is conducted, informally, at these fun-filled Thursday morning gatherings, and the subculture here is a sign of the strength of the SM Lions club. As Lynn's closed, (a sad day for the group) we moved to McDonalds, and from there shifted to Raffaele's, (too many kids filling the playground area; the nerve!). All too soon, it shut down!

Subsequently, we moved to The Double Barrel Restaurant, which also closed! (and has now burned down) Next, we shifted to The Family Diner, which seemed perfect, including a large nook where we could act out without disturbing too many other patrons. And then it was shuttered. Our next move was to Max's, which was crowded, but had a good breakfast. And then Max's closed! So, we moved to Pruitt's, and hopefully our history of closing venues is

behind us. (Does our tribe have a dark cloud over it?)

One of our members, Ron Galante, took the leadership to produce a Challenge Coin for members of this unofficial tribe. We also purchased a Signal Mountain Veterans coffee mug and were disconcerted when the Family Diner closed with our mugs inside.

Our rowdy breakfast chatter has filled almost 10 years of police blotter wannabe's. The average attendance, which is not taken, but noticed, is usually at least a dozen and often more. There is no membership roll, no dues, just a group of aging men enjoying each other's company and making an unholy din once a week. The Challenge Coin is the most formal (and costly) symbol of the group, and we seldom mention our branch of service or rank (hah!).

Periodically a pol shows up to work the crowd; and there have been some warm political discussions that seldom resort to violence. Did I mention that the average age is somewhere close to 70? The group was not an intentional or formal outgrowth of any organization. It has few rule (which one usually discovers when they break one), but such a group is a vital adjunct to the community none-the-less. Breaking bread together on a regular basis is a major component of any healthy family, and this tribe contributes to a healthy community! It's open to any member of the community who enjoys the war stories of some aging warriors and doesn't have any hearing problems (like aversion to loud noises).

by George Davenport

**A GREAT DAY STARTS WITH A GOOD BREAKFAST
WITH YOUR BEST FRIENDS!**

