

2024 Vison for SIR – President Elect

Fifteen years ago, when I joined SIR, I never imagined that I would be here today as the President-Elect for 2024 but I am immensely proud to have been elected to this positon. But the excitement I feel in what's in store for me requires me to tell you it's time for a reality check.I want to be fully transparent with you so we're all on the same page.

- One third of our Branches are very successful and continue to bring in new members, replacing those they lose, and showing some overall membership gains.
- A second one third of our Branches are holding the status quo – essentially maintaining their level of membership but not showing any overall gains.
- The final one third of our Branches are losing more members than they are bringing in and this is contributing to our overall membership decline.

This brings us to the current situation that the top one third of the Branches with their membership increases cannot carry the other two thirds if we are to survive as an organization - without a significant increase in Branch assessments.Only an overall increase in SIR membership can prevent this increase from being implemented -and we only have four months remaining this year to stop the overall decline.

However, I am reminded of a story from history, one that resonates with our current situation within SIR, and mirrors the challenge Branches face.

During World War II, Winston Churchill was confronted with a challenge from his Admirals – the devastating losses caused by German U-boats. His response was both ingenious and resolute:Bring the ocean to a boil, and the U-boats won't bother you." Churchill made it clear that while he had offered the solution the implementation was the responsibility of his Admirals.

In a similar vein, the solution to reverse the membership decline lies right before us – with the Branches. State has equipped Branches with an arsenal of tools, prominently located on the sirinc.org website, to attract guests and convert them into members. Marketing materials, recruiting tools and ideas, invitation and recipe cards and many more items and videos to help Branches reverse the trend of declining membership.

Furthermore, State has provided a collection of Best Practices culled from successful Branches, as well as a comprehensive SIR Luncheon Guide, designed to foster a welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere, thereby facilitating the conversion of guests into members and retaining current ones.

Let's not forget that each Branch is an **independent Corporation**, empowered by a license granted by the State of California and the charter bestowed upon them by SIR, Inc. This autonomous status brings with it the responsibility for the Branches to be responsible for their own success.

And yet I've heard time and time again that Branches need State-wide advertising to attract new members. That Branches cannot bring in new members without this.

Lets' be realistic:

The modern media landscape is as diverse as it is vast, with countless channels competing for attention. My own Dish Network has over 200 channels!

- Ask yourself - what channel would best convey State's message to check out SIR?
- And when should it be broadcast?
- And what channel do seniors watch the most? –
- Discovery, History, the Golf Channel, Judge Judy?

In my last year in the military I worked at the Northwest Relay Station in Everett, Washington the site was run by civilians and every lunch they watched Divorce Court!

Think about it. What channels do you watch the most and at what time of day?

The economics of such an endeavor also warrants consideration, as State funds are already allocated to essentials like insurance, software subscriptions and Branch licensing fees among other items. And advertising on TV can cost \$1,000 per minute! The solution is not advertising by State, but by the Branches in their own communities.

Let me tell you of a personal experience:

Eighteen years ago when I moved to Sonora it was by pure luck that I was introduced to a Sons in Retirement luncheon - after living here for five years. I had noticed an occasional mention of Branch 152 in Arnold, 35 miles away, published in the local Union Democrat newspaper advertising a Sons in Retirement Luncheon with a guest speaker.

This did not mean anything to me since I had my own part-time business and was not 'retired'. Only later did I discover the presence of two Sir Branches just 4 miles from my home, their existence not known to me due to a lack of local advertising and certainly no mention that being semi-retired I could join.

At the time of my joining in 2008, SIR boasted 20,636 members spanning over 100 Branches. Today, our ranks have dwindled to fewer than 8,800 members and 84 Branches.

The urgency of this matter cannot be overstated – it is imperative that each Branch take active measures to advertise locally in newspapers and free shopping circulars, setting up information tables at Home and Garden Shows, Farmer's Markets, car shows, and other community gatherings.

We must channel our efforts effectively to heighten awareness about our presence and purpose. This is how Branches can and should attract new members.

Consider this: at the close of the past year, the combined funds in all Branches' accounts amounted to an impressive \$500,581....Over a half a million dollars,

All while State is trying to continue supporting the Branches with only \$16,339 in discretionary funds. A few thousand dollars of this received from Branch closings. But State doesn't want to get money from Branch closings – We need the Branches to stay open and grow. For it is through increased overall membership that State can keep assessments reasonable.

And speaking about how much money Branches have in their accounts -35 Branches held funds ranging from \$5,000 to more than \$20,000. And 73 held funds exceeding \$2,500. Branches should use some of these funds to advertise locally.

You'd be surprised at what's available if you just look into it.

I recently uncovered an opportunity to place a 3 ¼" x 1 ½" Sir advertisement in my local newspaper. A very cost-effective investment, costing \$910, secures the publication of an ad every other week for an entire year in a local newspaper. The ad itself would be in a bi-weekly supplement on page 2 directly under the cover story article. And in the main newspaper with an exposure reaching 12,500 readers. It would also appear in their online newspaper with a readership of 500,000 monthly page views. This approach, both accessible and impactful, can serve as a blueprint for Branches seeking to broaden their reach. Remember, it just takes a phone call to your local newspaper to ask what's available.

But remember - advertising locally must emphasize a critical message: SIR welcomes all men, and retirement is by no means a prerequisite for membership. Clarity on this matter is paramount, ensuring that potential members are not deterred from exploring our organization due to any misconceptions. And that SIR is a social organization with many activities for both men and women in addition to monthly luncheons and special events.

While the State extends support, the role in a Branches' success rests with its Branch Executive Committee (BEC). The BEC is the governing body and it's their action or inaction that sets the tone of the Branch. And it is their action or inaction that predicts the future of the Branch.

Now, on a lighter note -

The overwhelming majority of Branches benefit from the guidance and support of Area Representatives, each assigned to work with them to resolve problems and enhance their presence in the community. And, all but 17 Branches have three Area Representatives on the State Board with voting rights, serving to convey Branches' wants, needs, and concerns. To those Branches without an Area Representative, the State Vice President stands ready to provide assistance and support.

And for all Branches State is working on implementing a Help Desk naming members that are subject matter experts that can be contacted. Additionally, our public-facing website, sirinc.org, stands as a testament to our values, mission, and activities. This website should be advertised locally along with Branch specific information as it offers so much more than a small ad can provide.

Now, let's shift our focus to the very heartbeat of SIR – the Volunteers and Leaders.

Volunteering is a dynamic force that offers a multitude of benefits, ranging from stress reduction to fostering social connections that combats isolation. As a social organization, SIR thrives on the dedication of volunteers.

Let's think of a model where a capable, business-oriented individual fulfills the role of Big Sir while a second individual excels and enjoys the entertainment factor of running the Branch luncheon and special events. As an independent corporation two individuals can run the Branch – one, the Big Sir is the legal face of the Branch and the other is The Entertainer. This approach reduces undue burdens placed on one person and injects a spirit of camaraderie into the role of Big Sir and splits the workload across two individuals that could each enjoy their positions more.

But be aware of the following:

It is crucial to uphold the minimum number of officers required by California State non-profit corporation law to safeguard Branch Charters. A Branch must have at least five officers – a Big Sir, Secretary, Treasurer, and two directors – any Branch, regardless of size, only requires this minimum. And the directors can be activity chairman that we name as directors. Also, the law says that the Secretary and Treasurer positions can be held by the same person. Thus the true minimum can be as low as four officers

A resounding message and warning underscores this directive: a Branch lacking the required minimum number of officers under State Law risks their Corporation license that is spelled out in in Policy 31.

And let's remember Insurance as it supports our Branches in defending them from any claims provided that they comply and document BEC minutes and approve all activities. Additionally, in having Insurance Agreements with caterers and food service certification in place at all times protects our members.

Let's also acknowledge that, while governmental and corporate bureaucracies possess inherent complexities, State is working to streamline processes. In this vein, State currently put a replacement of Form 27 on-line called 'Branch Membership Status' thus easing the burden on Branches and enhancing efficiency. Note however, that the Form 27 can remain in use for the Branch BEC to better understand in detail the health of their Branch but distribution to others outside the Branch is not required.

In conclusion, our united efforts can pave the way for an enriched SIR experience, resonating not only with our current members but also with their sons. As a parting thought, let's remember that SIR membership adds not just years to your life - but life to your days.

And on a lighter note, they say a dog adds 10 years to your life, and I am privileged to have two.

Thank you, and let's work together for the benefit of all and elevate SIR to its rightful place as the premier organization for senior men we know it can be.

Dale Decker