

# UI survey takes look at WWII generation

GREG KLINE News-Gazette Staff Writer  
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When John Seagraves looked at the data, he saw his grandparents. Members of the World War II generation generally don't use credit cards to buy dinner or similar small financial transactions. "You and I are a lot more likely to use our credit cards as cash," said Seagraves, a University of Illinois graduate student. "I swear, I've never seen my grandparents' credit cards."

"The Greatest Generation" - as they've been characterized in the title of newscaster Tom Brokaw's book and in other places - tends to be frugal, according to a UI survey to be released next week. But it also likes to shop. "They rate it almost as fun as like young teen-agers do," Seagraves said this week.

The World War II generation may be getting up there in years, but it loves computers and the Internet, too.

Forged by war, its members are more confident and more likely to be leaders.

Having bonded with their fellows in combat, they value human relationships, tend to stay married longer and are prone to participating in civic, fraternal and service groups.

Approaching 60 years later, they still buy Fords, Betty Crocker food products, Colt firearms and other brands they associate with positive wartime experiences. Many of them still won't buy Japanese cars.

Students and faculty in the UI Food & Brand Lab have been working since last year on the survey of World War II veterans, and non-veterans who lived through the war, from all 50 states.

They're set to talk about the results from 3 to 6 p.m. Thursday at the Krannert Art Museum, 500 E. Peabody Drive, C, in an event expected to attract people who participated in the survey from as far away as Virginia and Colorado.

The public also is welcome to attend the presentation, titled "The Greatest Generation: Surveying Private Ryan," although it would be wise to preregister to secure a seat by faxing 244-7969 or mailing Professor Brian Wansink, 350 Wohlers Hall, Champaign, IL 61820. There's no fee.

The survey was something Wansink, who heads the Food & Brand Lab, only half-jokingly says he intended to make a retirement project. He grew up around relatives who had been involved in the war and in a neighborhood with many veterans.

"They always seemed to be a little different ... in terms of gravity and things like that," Wansink said. "I do just see this as the 'greatest generation' ... all the sacrifices they made." Wansink was struck by the need to do the survey now, before it's too late, when a Navy veteran neighbor of his died. "I saw this as the last chance there would be to do a large-scale study of these people," he said.

Moreover, while there's been a lot written anecdotally about the war, Wansink said, there hasn't been much in the way of quantitative studies since Samuel Stouffer's landmark work, "The American Soldier in World War II," was done for the U.S. War Department during the war years.

The UI's 16-page survey was mailed last August to a random sample of 6,000 veterans, 2,000 non-veterans of the war generation and 2,000 people who weren't around during the war for comparison purposes.

Sixty questions tested for the impact of the war on its generation, ranging from how social the members are to their shopping habits.

UI researcher Koert Van Ittersum analyzed the data and students working for the Food & Brand Lab used that and other research to prepare papers on 10 topics, which may eventually wind up collected as book. While some of the results may seem surprising, the students said they show the broad, deep impact of the war on people, veterans in particular, and especially combat veterans.

Take Internet use. Members of the World War II generation not only like the Net, but they're more likely than the general population to buy stuff on it, the UI survey shows. That may be because the war left a lot of veterans more open to new experiences, said Brian McFarland, one of two undergraduate students who worked on the project. "Especially if they went through heavy combat," McFarland said. "They sort of realized they could handle anything."

Graduate student Beth Anna Fegeley sees the same kind of thing in the results on marriage. "It kind of got all of your wild oats out of your system," she said of the war experience. "You come back and you're more content. You're less likely to take what you have for granted."