

# Focus groups aim to keep Electric Boat workers in the area



BUY PHOTO

The lights of General Dynamics Electric Boat in Groton, Conn., reflect on the Thames River as seen from New London Monday, January 9, 2017. The Virginia-class attack submarine South Dakota is under construction on the waterfront. Not visible is the Colorado in graving dock and the Vermont is under construction inside. (Sean D. Elliot/The Day)

Published August 01, 2017 9:00PM | Updated August 02, 2017 8:34AM

By **Erica Moser** (/apps/pbcs.dll/personalia?ID=e.moser) Day staff writer

✉ e.moser@theday.com (mailto:e.moser@theday.com) 🐦 Erica\_Faith13  
([http://www.twitter.com/Erica\\_Faith13](http://www.twitter.com/Erica_Faith13))

Groton — Among a few Electric Boat employees, there is a desire for more local transportation options, more dating opportunities and more unique events.

These were some thoughts that five men — ages 30, 31 and 51 — shared during a focus group the **Southeastern Connecticut Cultural Coalition** (<http://culturesect.org/>) hosted Tuesday evening. Its goal was to ascertain how employees feel about area happenings, and what could increase their chances of staying.

"We have lots of things to do," said Wendy Bury, executive director of the coalition. "We have a disconnect in making sure people know what's available to them."

The focus group took place at Outer Light Brewing Company — beer was an incentive — and was the first of two the Cultural Coalition has organized with Electric Boat workers.

The second will take place at Hot Rod Café from 4 to 6 p.m. Thursday.

The goal of the focus groups, Bury said, was to "drill down a little bit more" on some of the questions asked in a survey of Electric Boat employees last fall, which garnered 1,500 responses.

She feels the feedback will help with the "Community Concierge" project of the Thames River Innovation Place, and other initiatives.

One thing that surprised Bury was the extent to which participants are engineers by day and artists by night — or by weekend.

Three men respectively expressed interest in drawing, dancing and photography, and another said he just became a member of the Eastern Connecticut Symphony Orchestra.

Jason Simms, 30, said he takes a drawing class at Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts on Saturday mornings, and two weeks ago, he went to an art event in Noank he found through the Meetup app.

On weekends, he also enjoys going to the shooting range in Salem or to the mall.

But he doesn't think the area has enough to keep him around in the long term because the demographics don't suit his dating needs. Simms hasn't found enough educated young professionals, despite being a member of a couple of groups targeting this demographic.

He added, "It's more of a hipster region, and I don't judge, because I've met a lot of very nice hipsters, but sometimes we don't connect."

Simms said he finds out about places and activities from email lists, word of mouth, Facebook and Instagram, Yelp and the New London Times.

Eric Cooper, a 51-year-old who moved to Ledyard 10 months ago, went to a Coast Guard Band performance he read about in the Thames River Times.

Cooper said of his decision to move to Ledyard, "It was proximity to work. Frankly, I ruled out New London because the tax rate was higher than the surrounding areas."

When Bury asked about the "special sauce" that keeps him in the area, he said it's the history, wineries and farms.

One 31-year-old, who declined to give his full name, said his top reasons to go somewhere are Pokémon Go, visiting family or friends, playing Dungeons and Dragons at a bar through the group Drinking and Dragons, and employee going-away parties.

Douglas Marshall, also 31, said some of his local favorites are the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center, Ocean Beach, Bluff Point, and Hygienic Art, which Simms also cited.

Marshall would like more transportation options, saying that while "Uber being here has opened up a lot of opportunities," he sees gaps in the train service to Providence and New York.

Reflecting on his 10 years in the area, Marshall said, "One thing that's dramatically changed is how less conservative the beer/liquor industry is."

After living in the area for 29 years, Doug Turney said he thinks a lot of offerings are repetitive. He feels there are no surprises.

Turney, 51, would like to see a place that makes him think, "Let's go down there and see what's happening."

He envisions sitting outside at a restaurant or bar in New London on a Tuesday night and then going to a concert, beer tasting or yoga on Parade Plaza. And while he has three kids, ages 13 and 20, he expressed a desire for more events that aren't necessarily family events.

Turney said that when he retires in eight or nine years, "We're probably going to move, because we find a lack of things to do."

Bury pushed back on this point and asked how she could better communicate the "thousands of things" there are to do.

Rejecting the notion of advertising, Turney replied by offering what Bury dubbed an "if you build it, they will come" approach.

A few people in the focus group commended the Electric Boat Athletic Club. Answers to a question about "hidden gems" in the region included the Dutch Tavern, music on Sunday evenings at Maugle Sierra Vineyards in Ledyard, dance lessons at the Coast Guard Academy and waterfalls off the beaten path.

**[e.moser@theday.com](mailto:e.moser@theday.com) (mailto:e.moser@theday.com)**