**Executive Summary:**

The Independence Day Celebration is a long standing tradition with the Fort Gordon community. The primary goal of the event is a means to increase morale and to meet the missions of the Army, Fort Gordon and MWR. Through top notch programming and excellent customer service, event attendance increases every year.

The Independence Day Celebration offers a wide range of children’s activities, entertainment and food to appeal to the entire family. New activities are introduced every year to attract new and retain current patrons. Trends are researched via needs assessments to ensure Fort Gordon incorporates the most current programming and activities.

The targeted market of the event is the entire Fort Gordon community which includes active duty, family members, retirees, contractors, DoD employees and civilians. There is not a certain demographic targeted for this event as everyone is welcome to attend.

Marketing and advertising of the event are completed via a variety of digital and print platforms on the installation and in the community. The event is advertised throughout the installation via “MWR Happenings” boards located within each MWR facility and activity, gate marquees, plasma screens in select activities, Social Media, the FYI magazine, FYI webzine and the website. To target those off of the installation, radio, print, television, and digital billboard advertisements are run throughout the CSRA.

Needs assessments are ongoing to ensure the programming and activities identified through surveys meet the needs and wants of patrons. Online surveys are available year round while in-person surveys are conducted on a quarterly basis.

**Market Review:**

It is the mission of Family and MWR to serve the needs, interests and responsibilities of each individual in the Army community with support and leisure services designed to enhance the quality of their lives for as long as they are associated with the Army. Fort Gordon MWR has over 30 facilities that range from children and family services to recreational and financial services to help the Army family stay physically, financially and mentally fit. MWR hosts four big special events each year to provide a source of social and recreational activities; Spring Fest, Independence Day Celebration, Oktoberfest, and a Christmas Festival. All MWR facilities on Fort Gordon, with the exception of Pointes West Army Resort and Woodworth Consolidated Library, are open to the public; however, programs offered through Army Community Services and Child Youth School Services are only available for active duty, dependents, retirees and DoD civilians.

Business Overview:

Family and MWR hosts an annual Independence Day Celebration every July for Service Members and their families on Fort Gordon. The special event is not only open to all Service Members and their families but the entire Fort Gordon community including DoD civilians, contractors, retirees and the surrounding residents of the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA). The special event is geared to offer a fun and safe environment while celebrating the independence of our great nation; a nation that our Fort Gordon Service Members fight to preserve independence for. The annual event supports the Command’s mission as an outlet for recreational and leisurely activities on the installation. On average, 35,000 people attend the Independence Day Celebration on Barton Field each year. This event has become a long standing tradition in the CSRA with more and more festivities added each year.

Financial Review:

The Independence Day Celebration has an increasing number of patrons every year with a record number in attendance in 2014 of over 40,000 patrons and/or spectators. Since the event is held prior to the 4th of July, there are not any local competing events.

A big source of revenue for the Independence Day Celebration is Sponsorship (both cash and in kind). The sponsorship received greatly offsets the cost of the event. With Sponsorship averaging at around $64,775 per year for this one event, the amount of activities offered for children and adults has increased. For example, inflatable water rides were added to the event in 2012 along with the traditional carnival. Other attributes that generate revenue during this eight hour event are through concessionaires, carnival ticket sales, and food/beverages sold via MWR activities.

Every successful event comes at great expense with major expenses being entertainment and fireworks. Between the two, the expense hovers around $30,200 each year. This expense is absolutely necessary as Fort Gordon is known to put on the best fireworks show in the CSRA. In order to keep the patrons/spectators interest, entertainment and fireworks are vital to the livelihood of the event and revenue generated. Other expenses incurred are rentals of equipment (sound equipment and generator), Port-a-lets, off post advertising, labor and other miscellaneous supplies.

Trends and Changes:

Overall, revenue has increased every year within the past three years with expenses remaining relatively similar. With an installation increase of over 5,000 service members by 2016, there is an expectation that the event attendance will continue to grow, thus increasing revenue. However, with gate regulations becoming more stringent and 85% of those attending living off of the installation, there is a fear that some may not want the hassle and will wait and attend an event off post. At this time, individuals are only able to receive a one day pass. Prior to receiving a pass to access the installation, they must go through the Visitor’s Center at the main gate which, depending on the time of day, can take several hours.

Changes in Battalion Commanders also greatly impact the overall attendance of the Independence Day Celebration. In the past, some Commanders have not allowed their AIT Soldiers to attend events that serve alcohol. More recently, all AIT Soldiers have not been allowed out past a curfew which depends on the training shift – days, swing, or mids.

The date of the event almost always falls on the training holiday prior to the 4th of July. Most Service members and their families go “home” for long weekends which can cause a potential decrease in attendance. However, due to the event being held the day prior to the 4th of July, there are no other competing events in the CSRA.

Program Overview:

Fort Gordon celebrates Independence Day with more than just fireworks. This event is filled with fantastic live entertainment from local artists and the Signal Corps Band. Various military units hold demonstrations, such as K9 and Military Police units. AIT Soldiers from the 15th Signal Brigade are able to participate in the event by competing in the Team 15 Talent Show. All talent is judged by a panel of three judges and one lucky winner receives $500! The event is made complete with a wide variety of family-oriented activities, games, water rides and carnival rides. Craft areas, such a shirt tie dye and face painting, for children are set up around the field. Vendors are on site to sell everything from homemade crafts to candles. MWR activities and concessionaires offer a variety of food and drinks to please even the pickiest of children. The event culminates with the largest fireworks show in the CSRA.

Entrance to the event is free which allows our patrons to enjoy the live entertainment, children’s crafts, and fireworks show at no cost. However, wrist bands must be purchased ($10 for children 48” and below and $20 for children 49” and higher) to enjoy the carnival and water rides. Food and beverages are also available at a cost.

All vendors on site are required to take credit/debit cards as a means of payment from patrons. This eases the ability to make payment without the hassle of having to ensure they have enough cash on hand.

All MWR team members on the field are equipped with radios at all times during the event. This allows for automatic communication and “eyes” all over Barton Field in the event of an emergency or a child becomes lost.

With having an outdoor event, comes the possibility of bad weather. The location of the event, Barton Field, is equipped with a threat detection system which can detect impending bad weather. Once the storm is within a certain radius of the field, a voice will come over a loud speaker informing all patrons of the looming weather and for them to evacuate immediately. Sirens will then blare across the entire field.

The event is advertised throughout the installation via “MWR Happenings” boards located within each MWR facility and activity, gate marquees, plasma screens in select activities, Social Media, the FYI magazine, FYI webzine and the website. To target those off of the installation, radio, print, television, and digital billboard advertisements are run throughout the CSRA.

Market Segmentation:

The Independence Day Celebration is attended by everyone in the Fort Gordon community – active duty, dependents, retirees, DoD civilians, contractors, and residents of the CSRA. The event serves as a way to pull the entire community together. Fort Gordon finds as many ways as possible to give back to the community and this is one way we do so. There is not a certain demographic or market segment that we target for this event. Everyone is welcome regardless or education and income level or gender and age. What is most important is to get as many men, women, and children to the event to enjoy!

According to the 2012 Demographics report there are over 900 families and 4,500 trainees living on Fort Gordon. Each family has an average of 2.5 children. The average age of residents is 21 and the average income is $42,451. A total of approximately 9,900 military, 8,100 civilians and 1,400 reservists make up the Fort Gordon workforce. The majority of the population is white at 51%, 32% is African American, 11% Hispanic and 2% Asian.

According to the Augusta Metropolitan Statistical Area, the CSRA has a population of 709,864. Aiken County, SC, is the largest country in the CSRA while McDuffie County, GA, is the smallest. Men and women make up approximately a quarter of the population each at 27% and 28% respectively. Children (17 years of age and younger) make up slightly half of the population at 46%. The average age of a resident is 34 and the average income is $34,301. The majority of the population is white at 61%, 35% is African American, 3% is Hispanic or Latino, and 2% is Asian.

Needs Assessment:

In the most recent Leisure Needs Survey, family events were listed within the top 10 interests of 35% of all respondents and 54% of spouses. The number of responses is much lower than in other categories. Through online surveys, before and after events, and during events, more information can be gained as to how family events can be improved which will increase attendance. The information is instrumental in bringing back repeat and new patrons.

**Competitive Review:**

Fort Gordon MWR hosts the Independence Day Celebration prior to the 4th of July so all Service Members and their families going home for the long weekend can stay and celebrate prior to leaving the installation. Having the event prior to the actual holiday diminishes all direct competition of any events held with the surrounding community.

There is indirect competition to the Independence Day Celebration within the community. Patrons are afforded the opportunity to wait until the actual holiday before attending other local celebrations. The events are held 15-25 minutes from Fort Gordon in downtown Augusta, Evans, and Thomson.

The major strength for the celebration in downtown Augusta is the amount of vendors on site. The event boasts over 75 food and craft vendors as opposed to the 30 vendors at the Fort Gordon event. Although there is more variety through the vendors, their prices are approximately 20% higher than those at the Fort Gordon Independence Day Celebration. Another weakness is the lack of children’s activities at the downtown Augusta event. Other than having a permanent water feature on site for children to play in and vendors who sell items targeted towards children, there isn’t much for children to participate in where as Fort Gordon offers water and carnival rides. In addition, Fort Gordon has initiated a children’s corner that offers many free crafts throughout the evening for all children. Another weakness for the Augusta event is the lack of entertainment. With small showcases of musical talent here and there throughout the event, there isn’t a main stage as opposed to Fort Gordon. Fort Gordon has a permanent stage in which a DJ, the Signal Corps Band, and the main entertainment perform on. Similarly to Fort Gordon, the downtown Augusta event in advertised via radio, social media and community calendars located on various Chamber of Commerce and news sites. Mainly, both events rely heavily on word of mouth and being a long standing tradition within the CSRA. This event rivals the attendance of the Fort Gordon Independence Day Celebration with a slightly higher attendance of 40,000 people.

The event in Evans was new in 2014 as it was previously held in a different location within the town for the past several years. As the event grew, more space was needed but drew confusion to most patrons as the location was changed at the last minute and was not adequately advertised which created a major weakness for the event in 2014. However, with the new space came the ability to bring on more vendors and activities. The Evans event has limited vendors on site as opposed to Fort Gordon but offers a wide range of free children’s activities. Children are able to participate in water rides and crafts at no cost as opposed to Fort Gordon. At the Fort Gordon event, parent’s pay $1 for every child to ride one time. Other than water rides, the pricing for food and glow products is relatively the same. The major strength for the Evans event is the top notch entertainment selected year after year and the huge, permanent playground located on the event grounds. One of Fort Gordon’s major weaknesses is selecting entertainment that appeals to the crowd. The Evans event is advertised on social media, radio, broadcast, print, and digital formats as is the Fort Gordon event. Other than the events in Augusta and Fort Gordon, this event has the third highest attendance with approximately 18,000 in attendance.

The 4th of July event in Thomson is much different than any other 4th of July event held in the CSRA. The fireworks are set off over a lake which allows individuals to enjoy the show from a boat on the lake or on land. This creates a major advantage over the Fort Gordon event. For those on land, there are limited vendors on site as opposed to Fort Gordon and virtually no children’s activities. Major weaknesses include the perception that the event is geared more towards adults than families and the possibility of those drinking and driving watercrafts creates a great risk for safety issues. With alcohol being one of the main sales, the Thomson event averages at being 8-10% higher in cost than the Fort Gordon event. Other than advertising on radio, social media, and event calendars, advertising is relatively limited for this event unlike the bulk of advertising Fort Gordon does year after year. This is event has the lowest attendance out of the four local Independence Day festivals with 11,000 in attendance.

Overall, the advertising message for all the Independence Day events in the CSRA, including the Fort Gordon Independence Day Celebration, is relatively the same. All four events are marketed in a way to appeal to the entire family sense; ultimately, all events target the exact same market. The main focus of advertising for the events is entertainment, children’s activities, and, of course, the fireworks show.

**External Review:**

Economic Factors:

The unemployment rate for the CSRA is above average which means the patrons within the community do not have a disposable income to pay for activities at events. Other factors include sequestration, whether contracts will be renewed for those who work as Army contractors and the current downsizing of the Army. Because of the fear of the unknown, more patrons are staying home and saving their money. For this reason, admission to the event is free and patrons are able to bring in outside food and beverages to alleviate any money spent.

Sponsorship, which is used to enhance the event, is also affected by the economic uncertainties. Sponsors have greatly reduced their budgets over the past several years. Without the support of sponsors, the event may ultimately be deemed less attractive by some patrons since some programs and/or activities may need to be cut. Maintaining good relationships with sponsors is key as they are more likely to continue sponsoring Fort Gordon events even if their budget is significantly lower.

Technological Factors:

All vendors on site are required to take credit/debit cards as a means of payment from patrons. This eases the ability to make payment without the hassle of having to ensure they have enough cash on hand.

All MWR team members on the field during the event carry radios at all times. This gives automatic communication with “eyes” all over Barton Field in the event of an emergency or a child becomes lost. This has proved to be successful in the past during incidents of heat exhaustion, lost children, and minor scrapes and bruises.

The location of the event, Barton Field, is equipped with a threat detection system which can detect impending bad weather. Once the storm is within a certain radius of the field, a voice will come over a loud speaker informing all patrons of the looming weather and for them to evacuate immediately. Sirens will then blare across the entire field.

Political Factors:

There are no regulations in place that determine who can attend the event. Those without a military or DoD ID card are welcome to attend the event after showing a valid ID, registration, and insurance card at the gate.

There is always a chance that an incoming Commanding General or Garrison Commander could express some opposition for the Independence Day Celebration event. In the past, there has never been an issue with a new CG and GC coming onboard every two years.

Social Factors:

Locality of the event is a major contributing factor in regards to the attendance of the event. 85% of those in attendance live off of the installation. For most individuals who work on Fort Gordon, coming back on to the installation on a day off (training holiday) is unwarranted. Along with the stigma of coming back to “work”, there is also a wait time of up to two and a half hours during the evening hours of the event to enter the gates. For some within the civilian community of the CSRA, there is a negative connotation in place about encountering the gates. Some feel as though they will be turned away if they are not affiliated with Fort Gordon even though all advertising of the event states that it is open to the public.

**SWOT Analysis**

The information in the below SWOT analysis was generated from verbal feedback from patrons during the event, surveys conducted during the event and found online afterwards, event AAR, and feedback from others within MWR.

Strengths:

* Customer Satisfaction/Service – The planning team starts meeting six months prior to the event to start finalizing all details. It is the goal of the planning team to make the Independence Day Celebration better than it was the previous year. On and off Barton field, MWR provides our patrons with the best professional, polite and courteous attitudes.
* Weather/Emergency Detection – Having Barton Field equipped with a threat detection system allows patrons to stay on the field and enjoy the festivities for longer. Patrons feel safer knowing that they will be notified if/when impending weather becomes an issue.
* Volunteers – There are many volunteers that help out with this event every year. This aids in keeping expenses low.
* Sponsorship – The wonderful reputation Fort Gordon has built for the Independence Day Celebration has become the main reason why this event pulls in more sponsorship dollars than any other event every year. The sponsorship dollars make a huge impact on the ability to be able to expand the programming and activities.
* Barton Field location – The location of the field is roughly 5 times bigger than the space used for the celebration. This allows for the event to be expanded, space wise, if need be.
* Patriotism – Incorporating the Team 15 Talent Show, K9 demonstrations, accessibility to military vehicles and having the Signal Corps Band perform creates a sense of patriotism no other event in the area can rival.
* Vendors – The quality and variety of vendors at the event are top notch. Every type of food and beverage is available. Patrons are able to shop on the field as well from the numerous crafters on site. The vendors are located all around the field not just in one location. Regardless of where patrons sit on Barton Field, they will have a vendor within close proximity.

Weaknesses:

* Event date – Since the event is held on a training holiday and many service members travel out of the area for the holiday, attendance is not as high as it could possibly be.
* Gate access – Patrons can wait up to two and a half hours to get through the gates.
* Entertainment – For the past several years, the same major entertainment has been used. The band does not appeal to the younger demographic.
* Ticket Lines – There is an ongoing issue with the contracted carnival vendor to bring enough staff to work multiple ticket booths. Normally, only one ticket booth is on site which houses only one worker. This contributes to extremely long lines.
* Carnival workers – Year after year, there are complaints about the carnival workers smoking around children in line. Via the contract, workers are told to refrain from doing so but the rule is often ignored.
* ATM on field – Due to current regulations, MWR is unable to place an ATM on the field. This would aid patrons with payment option.

Opportunities:

* Event date – Move the event date to the last working day prior to the 4th of July. This would encourage more of our service members and their families to attend prior to going out of town.
* Location – The ability to expand the programming and activities on the field is always available.
* Expansion - The new Cyber Command on Fort Gordon is expected to grow by approximately 1,800 service members and contractors within the next two years. The growing population will increase attendance and programming.

Threats:

* Weather – An outdoor event comes with the possibility of bad weather which can delay or completely cancel the event.
* Gate Restrictions – If there is not an ease in gate restrictions during the event, the attendance of those that live off of the installation will dissipate.

**Goals and Objectives:**

Short Term Goals:

* Goal 1: Conduct a needs assessment.
* Objective: Place a survey online and conduct in person surveys during busy hours of operation at the PX, commissary and several MWR facilities.
* Identify how many service members and their families go out of town for the Independence Day holiday.
* Identify if the date of the event was changed in the future, would patrons still attend.
* Identify the programming needs/wants of patrons for the event (possible gaming tent, more children’s activities, etc.).
* Goal 2: Generate a higher attendance from within the CSRA
* Objective: Focus on two separate ad campaigns.
* Focus one campaign on children; including pictures of carnival and water rides as well as the children’s activities.
* Focus an additional ad campaign on adults including information on entertainment, shopping, and adult beverages.
* Expand reach of adult ad campaign to local “hotspots” in downtown Augusta.
* Objective: Ensure programming and activities are changed from year to year to avoid loss of interest.
* Use surveys as a reference to gauge the interest of our patrons
* Determine which activities are most successful
* Drop the activities least effective and put that money into making the most successful activities even better
* Objective: Focus on the marketing efforts which proved to be successful for previous events.
	+ Use previously completed event surveys as a reference.
* Goal 3: Reach more of the 18-24 age demographic
* Objective: Secure better entertainment
* Hold online surveys via Social Media asking for input on favorite musical artists
* Work with the Entertainment Director on reaching out to B list musical talent
* Incorporate a gaming tent and contest
* Goal 4: Streamline pricing
* Objective: Ensure pricing is the same for identical menu items at all MWR food vendor tents
* Mandate all MWR food vendors use the same Prime Vendor
* Remove all unpopular menu items
* Goal 5: Transition carnival and food/craft vendor contracts to planning committee
* Objective: Have the Business Operations Division (currently completes contracts) hold an informal training for all planning committee members to attend.
* The training will give an overview on how all aspects of the contracts are completed.
* Have select members of the planning committee shadow BOD personnel during the Tree Lighting Festival to get firsthand experience on handling event contracts and outside vendors.

Long Term Goals:

* Goal 1: Purchase additional audio equipment
* Quality audio support will enhance and provide better entertainment audio on the entire field
* Speakers can be posted on the same poles as the Emergency Service System already in place.
* Goal 2: Create more seating
* Objective: Purchase a 80’ x 120’ fest tent
* House small musical acts within the tent to create a more intimate atmosphere
* Provide more shaded seating

Financial Objectives:

* Gross Sales: Increase sales by 30% within the next three years via MWR vendor and arm band sales.
* Cost of Goods: Decrease COGS by maximizing the use of one Prime Vendor through all MWR food sales. Although the menus will vary, the price and portion control will aid in a decrease of COGS by 6%.
* Net Income before Depreciation: Increase the total amount of sponsorship by 10% to remain within the scope of expectations of the MWR Director.
* Return on Investment: Overall, achieve a 25% ROI increase through more food and arm band sales, as well as sponsorship, within the next three years.
* Marketing Objectives:
* Sales Dollars: Increase vendor revenue by requiring more MWR activities to run food service, adult beverage, glow product, or a children’s activity tent at the event. Achieve an increase of MWR vendor revenue by 20% within the next two years.
* Sales Units: Increase the amount of carnival arm bands purchased by 15% within the next three years by focusing on a separate marketing campaign for the carnival. Distribute flyers to each of the children that attend the K-8 school and other schools in the surrounding area. Promote the event through FRG meetings.
* Market Share: Increase the number of AIT Soldiers attending the event by bringing in better entertainment known within the 18-24 age demographic. Work with local sponsor about bringing in a gaming tent and offer a contest to entice young Soldiers to attend. Attend AIT briefings to inform 1SGs, CSMs, and BOSS representatives on the event.
* Distribution Levels/Channels: Make more contact with local units on the installation who have classes that need volunteer hours in order to graduate. More volunteering will lead to a significant decline in labor for the event.
* Advertising Awareness: Add more advertising off of the installation to encourage the community to attend the event. Based on past surveys, increase the marketing efforts that have proved to be successful and eliminate those that haven’t.

**Strategies**

Product:

* The Fort Gordon Independence Day Celebration is widely known as having the best fireworks show in the CSRA. Patrons come to Fort Gordon to experience a sense of patriotism that only a military installation can offer. From the Signal Corps Band, to military demonstrations and cannons firing, Fort Gordon provides a great way to celebrate our nation’s independence. Attending an event on a military installation gives our patrons a sense of ease and security as they feel safer in such a huge crowd.
* There are products offered at the event that are free of charge and those that come at a price. Free children’s activities entice patronage which leads to yearly record breaking attendances. Once on Barton Field, patrons can see that there is a lot more going on than just free activities. Food, beverages, glow products, carnival and water wrist bands, crafts and other miscellaneous items are available for purchase. The most current “at home” businesses are on site to sell products, the entertainment is live, and new carnival rides are available every year. Our goal is to change the event every year enough to keep our patrons coming back. Nobody wants to attend the same ol’ same ol’ event year after year.
* Through online and event surveys completed on the field, we are always asking for feedback. Not just positive feedback either. We want to know how to make the event better and the aspects of the event we shouldn’t change. In the end, how can we keep you coming back?

Pricing:

* Pricing for wristbands for the carnival are dictated by the carnival company. Although the best carnivals come at a price, MWR does receive 20% of the sales. Wristbands for children 48” and lower is $10 and $20 for those 49” and above. With approximately 2,850 wristbands sold each year, over $5,000 goes back into MWR activities.
* Over 50 non-MWR food and drink vendors are on Barton Field during the event. MWR does not regulate the pricing charged to patrons. However, each vendor pays MWR anywhere from $375 to $500 to have a presence on the field depending on their footprint (amount of space on field). Again, this money goes back into MWR activities. Vendor pricing is comparable to food and beverage items for purchase at concerts or sporting events.
* For MWR food and beverage vendors, prices have dropped significantly over the past year which allows our patrons to enjoy more for less! Food and drink prices are now competitive with at cost prices. The idea behind the low prices is for patrons to see that MWR pricing is considerably lower so they keep coming back.
* “At home” vendors and crafters sell products during the event without a mark up. The items can be purchased for the same catalog and/or online pricing. On average, there are 10-12 vendors at this event and they are required to pay MWR a $75 fee for having a presence on the field. The costs of items vary depending upon the product.

Place:

* Barton Field, the location of the Independence Day Celebration, is conveniently located at the center of post. There is signage in place directing those without military affiliation to the event from the main gate. The field is within walking distance from many housing areas and there are buses to transport patrons back and forth from the field who have to park long distances from the location. Handicapped parking is accessible as is VIP parking for special guests.
* The gate restrictions and wait time to enter the installation the day of the event pose serious issues. In many instances, there are still long lines at the gate (without the ability to turn around) while the fireworks are going off because of a lack of awareness of gate restrictions. In these types of situations, patronage is lost because they will not want to encounter the same issues to following year.

Promotion/Communication:

* Although, promotional campaigns haven’t been a primary focus in the past since word of mouth is our primary advertising tool, there has been a push in digital advertising the past few years. Trying to reach a younger demographic, we have focused on Social Media, Geo-fencing, and online advertising. Recent advertising in all four dining facilities and all major waiting rooms within the post hospital has also broadened our reach.
* In addition to digital advertising, informational posters are placed on all “MWR Happenings” boards within over 30 facilities/activities, on four banner structures around the installation, gate marquees, FYI Magazine, and a direct mailer is sent to all on post housing. Off the installation, advertising is completed via radio, cable, print and digital billboards.
* There are still numerous potential patrons that are unaware that this event is open to the public. With having an event on a military installation comes the stigma and fear of entering the gates. Even though all promotional materials list “Open to the public”, there needs to be a focus on ensuring the message is received.