

## A Tale of Two Units

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. Two Scout units (a pack and a troop) were chartered by the same institution. Each unit had approximately 30 youth. Both units had monthly activities. The troop supplied den chiefs for the pack. Scouts from the troop made presentations at the pack's blue and gold banquet. At the fall School Night to Join Scouting event, 15 boys joined the pack (five Tigers, two Wolves, three Bears, and five Webelos).

- Eight boys who had been Webelos earned the Arrow of Light and joined the troop, while two more joined a different troop in the community. Twenty-five members of the pack signed up to attend day camp and 21 Boy Scouts attended summer camp.

The leadership in the pack and troop are quite different.

- Bob has been a Cubmaster for one year. He was previously a Tiger adult partner, Wolf den leader, and assistant Cubmaster. Bob was never a Scout; he got involved when his son asked about Tigers after seeing a school flier. Besides Youth Protection Training (YPT), Bob has taken the online Cub Scout leader training, attends roundtable, and has signed up to take Wood Badge. He has encouraged all parents in the pack to take YPT, and planned a parent night where they could take Cub Scout leader training and discuss the implications for the pack. Bob's philosophy is that the more parents are involved in Scouting, the better the program will be for the boys in the unit.
- George has been Scoutmaster for the past 10 years. George is an Eagle Scout and a member of the Order of the Arrow. He earned the Scoutmaster's Key, has taken Wood Badge, and was awarded the District Award of Merit. Because of his Scouting experience and dynamic personality, the parents in the troop are willing to "let George do it" and do not register as assistant Scoutmasters. The troop has become a "one-man show."
- Recently, in May, Bob and George informed their respective committee chairs that they would be transferring to other states by June 1. Which of these units will probably experience a difficult transition period, either before or after they have a new unit leader? Why or why not? What can be done to prevent this situation from occurring in the future?
- For parents to be involved in their son's unit, they must:
  - Realize Scouting is to their son's benefit
  - Understand that Scouting is not child care, but an active family program
  - Realize they need to be trained (YPT and *This Is Scouting* as a minimum)
  - Know Scouting does not end when a Webelos Scout crosses the bridge to Boy Scouts

Be welcomed into the troop

- Be given a leadership position that is appropriate to their talents, experience, time, and energy
- Be offered a description of the position and a mentor to help with questions
- Know the time limit of the position
- Healthy leadership transitions may follow this pattern in order to keep a vibrant and engaged volunteer base:
  - Year 1, learning the position
  - Year 2, performing the position
  - Year 3, training their successor

## Scouters' advice on convincing parents to serve as unit leaders

From the January 1, 2005 issue of Scouting magazine, Illustrations by Bill Basso

Scouter T.H. wrote, in our October issue, that his troop was finding it hard to recruit parents as leaders. "How," he asked, "can we instill some sense of volunteerism and commitment to Scouting among these parents?"

Sometimes simply letting parents know that they are needed to make an activity successful will spark a desire to serve the troop or the Scouts.

Everyone has interests or hobbies or is an expert in a certain field of study or occupation. But some are apprehensive about volunteering because they feel inadequate.

By finding out more about the parents of his Scouts and becoming interested in them as individuals, T.H. will find opportunities to invite them to share their talents in a merit badge class, camp-out, hike, or in service opportunities.

Never overlook people in the neighborhood who may not have Scout-age sons. You may find someone who has spectacular talents and can draw a crowd of not just boys but entire families. Our troop has someone who, as a hobby, makes equipment for horses—saddles, bridles, and other tack.

Another is the chief groundskeeper at Utah State University and is an expert on plants. We also have an electrician, a dairy farmer, and an independent environmental consultant.

T.H. should take a look around and draw on the expertise in his community.

When we discovered that more than 75 percent of the Scouts who dropped out of our troop had never had a parent volunteer to help, we made a rule: Every family must volunteer for at least one job. Now our troop has almost 100 percent parent volunteerism.

We have an annual parents' meeting (the week Scouts have school finals) during which each family must sign up for a task or be assigned.

No one likes to be pressured, especially when it comes to volunteering time from busy lives. Start by taking the pressure off the parents by having family nights and other activities that involve them.

As parents become more comfortable around the Scouts, you other possibilities for recruiting leaders. will be able to casually address the troop committee's needs. Point out that it is easy to put in a couple of hours a week as a volunteer. Recognize the parents who are already volunteering, and show the new parents how supportive the troop will be. Show how rewarding Scouting is. My best advice is: **Lead by example.**

Try to show parents how much pleasure they will find in working with the Scouts to improve the community. For example, some of our Cub Scouts have been involved in reseeded parts of burned-out forests on both public and private lands. My den has cleaned up the area along a stream.

After we performed the service project, we talked about the benefits to the environment and the community. Such are the rewards of volunteering and making a commitment to Scouting.

I tell parents, "Organization is what you make it. If you give nothing, there soon may be nothing for your son."

Some parents say, "My son doesn't want me breathing down his neck." However, they could come on outings without hanging around him, and could observe him with his peers, learning, applying, and teaching skills.

A Scout might surprise his parent as my son did, at age 16 when he woke me at dawn on a bicycling overnight. He wanted to share the silvery gray dawn, the mist indistinguishable from the river's surface, the croak of a heron, the splash of a fish feeding in the shallows. His showing me those things was a high point in my life as a parent.

I invite parents to attend troop committee meetings. For uninvolved parents, the committee's work might seem to require special knowledge. Demystify it by inviting parents, telling them, "We'd love to have your input."

The vast majority of adult leaders are parents of boys in the pack or troop, but remember, they don't have to be. The *Cub Scout Leader Book* (BSA No. 33221B) points out

other possibilities for recruiting leaders. In a section called *Recruiting Leaders*, the Leader Book says: "Many times a former leader or a member of the National Eagle Scout Association may be willing to help. Grandparents or other relatives make good leaders, too. Many Cub Scout leaders don't even have sons. There are senior citizens and retirees who would be glad to help." The book advises considering all possibilities. It also notes that a folder titled "*Selecting Cub Scout Leaders*" (No. 13-500) is available from your local council to aid in selecting and recruiting adult leaders.

