Growing Up Right, Growing Up Strong

parents, kids, and scouting

Thanks to the following for their contributions in the writing of this book
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BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

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Dedication

In Scouting it is all about "role models," and Gerald Lawhorn was the quintessential role model. His life served as a beacon to all in describing how we should live our lives. He was a passionate volunteer, a most responsible corporate citizen, a visionary philanthropist, and, most especially, an extraordinarily decent human being.

Robert J. Mazzuca

Chief Scout Executive, Boy Scouts of America

At 9:31 P.M. on October 8, 2008, Eagle Scout, entrepreneur, philanthropist, father, husband, and friend Gerald Lawhorn earned the one reward that surpassed his beloved Eagle Scout badge. He was called home to be with his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As a true larger-than-life figure, he traveled to every corner of the globe, journeying to some of the most remote regions on earth and touring the largest cities in the world. Compelled by an insatiable curiosity, he was a lifelong learner. Very little escaped his keen mind, and he put his incredible intellect to good work that has made a difference for the better in thousands upon thousands of lives from every walk of life and will continue to do so for many decades to come.

Only his loving heart surpassed his remarkable intellect. Gerald—or Mr. g as he was known lovingly by many—had an extraordinary capacity to love. He would readily share his love for God with any and all. He deeply loved his family and friends, many of whom he treated as family for he understood better than most that real wealth is found in relationships. Whenever he was contemplating a major decision, one of the guiding principles he utilized in the process was the probable impact on others.

Mr. g was that rare type of leader who worked selflessly. As a leader, he had both vision and the ability to grow the talents of those around him. A shining example of the American dream, he started from scratch and built a truly remarkable business in PetroSouth, Inc. Through that organization he helped many others start their own small business and realize their version of the American dream. Using the profits of his company, he gave generously to many causes and nonprofit organizations. The only expectation he ever had was that the money be used wisely and to benefit others.

On June 6, 2005, Gerald was given the greatest test of his life. He was diagnosed with ALS/ Lou Gehrig's disease and told he had six months to get his affairs in order. Of course, he was initially shocked and devastated by the blow, but in the true spirit of a "Be Prepared" Scout and man of faith, and with the support of loving family and friends, he quickly set to work on some of the most important projects of his life. He had, in typical fashion, turned a death sentence into a zeal for life that was nothing short of miraculous. In the next two and a half years, he started initiatives for networking support for people who have been diagnosed with ALS and their families, a Christian outreach project, and ScoutParents. Later he would comment that he had been focused by his circumstances and had achieved more in the last two and a half years than he had in the last 10.

It is to this extraordinary loving and generous man and founder of the ScoutParents initiative that this book is dedicated. Mr. g, you will be with us in spirit always!

Foreword

Robert J. Mazzuca, Chief Scout Executive

In the spring of 1958, my best friend invited me to a meeting of Boy Scout Troop 28 in my hometown of San Juan Bautista, California. At 11 years old, I knew little about Scouting, but I was fascinated by what I saw at that meeting.

I quickly joined Troop 28, not exactly sure where I would get the money for a uniform, a handbook, or a mess kit. I knew it couldn't come from my father, Guiseppi. A hardworking Italian immigrant, he had eight children to feed, but he didn't have two nickels to rub together.

Miraculously, a uniform and a handbook and a mess kit all appeared. Although no one ever explained, I suspect that old Milton Harrel, the godfather of Scouting in our little town, had something to do with it.

And so began my grand adventure in Scouting.

The real magic, however, happened when our Scoutmaster, Roy Pederson, approached my dad one day. He asked Dad to drive our troop's equipment up to summer camp in his 1949 Studebaker truck—one of the few real trucks in town. Dad said yes and got his first taste of old-fashioned, honest-to-God, American volunteerism.

On that trip to camp, my dad was transformed before my eyes, although I didn't really recognize it at the time. He connected with what was going on around him, he saw the magic, he drank the bug juice. And he truly learned what it means to be a citizen of this great nation.

That fall, Dad was asked to become a member of the troop committee and, *voilà*, a volunteer was born. He still couldn't rub two nickels together, but he was now a Scout leader, and he was bound and determined to be a good one. Dad's involvement in Scouting changed his life forever. Before long, he was a member of the local men's club, Troop 28's sponsor, and a real participating citizen of our little town.

Fast forward to the night in 1963 when he and my mom pinned an Eagle Scout badge on my uniform. I saw a sense of pride and accomplishment in their eyes that can only be described as the fulfillment of the American dream—through the eyes of an immigrant.

When I left for college in 1965—the first of Dad's children to do so—he reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled $20 bill. It was more than he could afford, but he gave it to me along with a kiss, a huge bear hug, and a simple admonition: "Remember, son, you are an Eagle Scout."

I've always remembered I'm an Eagle Scout, and I've always remembered the people who helped me become one. People like Roy Pederson, who led our Scout troop week in and week out. People like Milton Harrel, who provided the resources to make the program possible. And people like my dad, who simply said yes.

Fifty years on, my dad's story may seem like ancient history, but it's not. Somewhere today, a mother will catch the magic of Scouting. Somewhere tomorrow, a father will drink the bug juice. And sometime in the future, our great nation will be a different, better place because of their involvement.

I can't think of a time when the principles Scouting teaches have been needed more. Principles like duty to God, service to others, patriotism, honor, respect, and kindness are sorely lacking in our world today. Scouting is one of the few places left where sons and daughters, fathers and mothers, grandparents and mentors can come together to learn those principles and live those values.

That's why I'm so excited to introduce the ScoutParents initiative. Through ScoutParents, we are embracing and celebrating truths my dad learned so long ago: Scouting transforms the lives of kids and adults alike. That kids and adults who are transformed build strong families. And that strong families banding together can make our great nation even greater.

Scouting has the proven ability to build character, citizenship, and fitness in its young members. ScoutParents has the tools to help parents and mentors become engaged in the Scouting experience. All it takes is for someone to say yes—someone, perhaps, like you. Scout's honor!

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Introduction

It takes a village to raise a child.

Many of us can remember a time when those words were a reality, not a proverb or a political slogan. Because many of us were raised by a village. Our village might have been on the dusty plains of Texas or the craggy coast of Maine, it might have been in the bustling boroughs of New York City or the teeming barrios of Los Angeles, but it was a village nonetheless.

Perhaps it had a name—Little Italy or Chinatown, the South Side or the West End—or perhaps it was nameless. Either way, we knew its borders well: the house where we lived, the homes of friends and relatives, our school, our place of worship, perhaps a ballpark or a community center. And we knew its citizens, too: parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, friends and neighbors, teachers and preachers, police officers, and grocers.

Within our village we felt safe, we felt loved, we felt at home. Within our village lived scores of adults who knew our names, who knew our stories, who kept a watchful eye on us. When we had a need, they came to our aid. When we got into trouble, they held us accountable. We were the nieces and nephews of a hundred aunts and uncles, and whether we were blood relatives or not mattered little. Life had a comfortable, predictable rhythm. Right and wrong were easy to distinguish.

Villages today are harder to find. Bigger and better jobs take us far from the support structures of extended families. Commutes and commitments crimp our schedules, sucking up our time and draining our energy. Family dinners seem as quaint as Norman Rockwell paintings, and, when they do occur, conversation is often replaced by the insistent noise of a television. We have precious little time to learn our neighbors' names, much less get involved in our communities.

So we outsource our parenting, letting someone else experience that first word, those first steps. Or we raise our kids on Sesame Street and Nickelodeon, hoping (even if we don't really believe) that they'll absorb our values by osmosis. Or we juggle kids and careers with the aplomb of a circus veteran, scheduling quality time like we schedule doctor appointments. Always connected—yet strangely disconnected—we take our laptops to the beach, our Blackberries to the ballpark. We hold conference calls during soccer practice.

Like *Alice in Wonderland,* it takes all the running we can manage just to stay in one place. But we know we aren't in Wonderland. And we want to do more than just run in place and mark time.

In the midst of all our running, our children need us now more than ever. For they aren't just kids anymore—they are an audience for broadcasters, a market for retailers, and a target for pedophiles. They are valued for their ability to spend money, to win at games, and to perform well on standardized tests. They become adults too soon without quite growing up. They absorb words and images they're not at all ready to comprehend.

Like us, they become maestros of multitasking. They juggle school and sports and after-school activities with the deftness of an air-traffic controller on the day before Thanksgiving. Always connected—yet strangely disconnected—they receive from movies and music, television, and the Internet, a million different messages about how to live their lives.

Some Americans lament the implosion of the nuclear family, asking how a single parent can raise a child successfully. Others realize that even two parents aren't enough in these challenging days. And so they look for help, they look for support, they look for a village.

Millions find their village in Scouting. Because Scouting is not just for boys. It's for parents and mentors and families as well. It's diverse people finding common ground in shared values, interests, and challenges. It's people coming together to help raise each other's kids. It's people united by a vital purpose: to create a caring, nurturing, loving environment where their kids can flourish. And whether those kids are blood relatives or not matters little.

You'll meet some of those people in this book. They are single dads and working moms, third-generation Scout leaders and the greenest of tenderfoots, stepmothers and grandfathers, Generation Xers and senior citizens, minimum-wage workers and corporate executives. There is much that divides them but two things that unite them: a concern for kids and a commitment to this village called Scouting.

It does take a village to raise a child. Won't you move in today?

Gerald Lawhorn
1946-2008

A Legacy of Love: The Gerald Lawhorn Story

Since its founding in 1910, more than 111 million young people have enrolled in the programs of the Boy Scouts of America. Today, nearly three million youth participate in Cub Scouting, Boy Scouting, Varsity Scouting, and Venturing. Condensing their experiences into a single story is an impossibility. Nevertheless, Gerald Lawhorn's story offers a stellar example of the power of Scouting.

A Loose Cannon with a BB Gun

What happens to a kid—a very smart kid—who has plenty of energy but little structure and direction? For that matter, what happens to any kid, no matter his circumstances, who lacks sufficient support and guidance? At best, he will fail to reach his full potential. At worst, he will get into trouble—trouble at school, trouble at home, even trouble with the law. He might fall prey to substance abuse, becoming a victim or victimizing others. The list goes on and on.

Growing up in Sylvester, Ga., in the 1950s, Gerald Lawhorn was bright, energetic, and directionless. He had time on his hands and a BB gun, too—a dangerous combination. At age 7, Gerald carried his BB gun to the football field at Worth County High School, where the rows of towering floodlights called to him like the Sirens of Greek mythology. With the intensity of Sam Houston at the Alamo, Gerald went to work. He cocked the gun, aimed carefully, squeezed the trigger, and watched the glass shatter and fall to the ground. One foe vanquished, he moved on to the next target.

It's amazing how much damage a loose cannon with a BB gun can cause. Gerald had destroyed more than half the field's lights before an adult happened along and brought his mischief to an abrupt end.

In an era when schools can become killing grounds (think Columbine High School and Virginia Tech), Gerald Lawhorn's long-ago actions on that remote football field might seem quaint and almost harmless. But we can't know what might have happened had not fate intervened and offered Gerald the best opportunity of his young life.

Good Material to Work With

Fate can appear in many forms. In Gerald's case, it appeared in the person of his aunt and uncle.

Gervaise and Thomas "Boots" Lawhorn knew their small town offered kids more opportunities to get in trouble than to get ahead in life. In the mid-1950s, they began searching for a good youth program for their son Tommy and his friends. They found what they were looking for in Cub Scouting. "It could be handled at home, and it worked with our schedule," Boots said recently. Moreover, the couple believed that Scouting aligned with their values more than any other youth organization, and that it offered the best opportunity for boys to build meaningful and constructive lives.

And so, in 1954 Aunt Gervaise and Uncle Boots became Cub Scout den parents for Tommy, Gerald, and six other boys. They weren't wealthy adults leading lives of leisure; in fact, they were hard-working people with limited time. They didn't have advanced degrees in child development; instead, they understood instinctively the importance of investing in children at a critical stage of development. They saw a window of opportunity in the boys' lives that would soon close forever, and they recognized that Scouting could provide the structure, content, and meaningful activities the boys needed to grow to become fine men.

"We had pretty good material to work with in those boys," Boots said. "It was, I guess, a little bit of a chore at the time, but when you look back now it was actually a joy to do what we tried to do in association with them."

While the program was fun, the focus was always on making men. Not long after Gerald signed up—or was conscripted (history isn't entirely clear on this point)—Aunt Gervaise brought her Cub Scouts together and announced that they would all become Eagle Scouts one day. It's impossible to know whether any of the boys understood what she'd said, or the commitment she was making to them, but over the years they would come to appreciate her and Uncle Boots in the deepest possible way.

"Aunt Gervaise introduced me and my Scouting buddies to God in her den meetings," Gerald later wrote. "This above all is what I value the most of my *great* Scouting experience."

Eventually, Gerald and six of the other Cub Scouts earned the Eagle Scout Award—an astounding 88 percent. (The eighth boy moved to a community without a Scouting program, but he said years later that his time in Cub Scouting had produced lasting benefits.) To put the boys' achievements in perspective, only about 5 percent of all Boy Scouts become Eagle Scouts; the percentage of Cub Scouts who go on to earn Scouting's highest rank is even smaller.

"I don't want to brag on what we did," Boots said. "I just thank the good Lord we were able to do it."

The boys' accomplishments went far beyond the badges they earned, however. Each became a success in his profession and a pillar of his community. Several, including Gerald, continued their involvement with Scouting and repaid their debt to the program many times over.

Countless people contributed to this successful outcome, but none more than Aunt Gervaise and Uncle Boots. They believed in the boys until the boys believed in themselves. They helped the boys find and develop their unique gifts and build the confidence they would need to take on whatever challenges lay ahead. They taught skills and fostered qualities that would serve not only the boys, but also their families and communities for years to come. As living, breathing role models, they demonstrated that action is the manifestation of belief.

Aunt Gervaise and Uncle Boots were people of vision. They knew that they could make a difference for the better by investing in these boys and partnering with a values-based institution like Scouting. Through their lifelong influence on Gerald and the others, they planted seeds that would bear fruit many years later.

***Dedicated Scout* is the name of this monument that stands at the entrance of ScoutParent park, Gerald I. Lawhorn Scouting Base near Griffin, Ga.**

Moving on and Giving Back

After graduating from Worth County High School (where the lights at the football field had long since been repaired), Gerald attended the University of Georgia and earned a business degree. He taught school for a year before founding OK Oil in Griffin, Ga. Eventually, that small company became PetroSouth, a chain of some 300 fuel centers across Georgia, Florida, and Alabama.

Unlike his aunt and uncle, Gerald was now a wealthy man. But, like them, he was no man of leisure. Instead, he was a hard worker with limited time and a deep commitment to Scouting.

Over the years, Gerald served the Boy Scouts in many capacities, giving generously of his limited time, boundless energy, and considerable talent. He served as a Scoutmaster for many years and received some of Scouting's highest awards: the Silver Beaver, the Silver Antelope, and the Distinguished Eagle Scout Award. Remembering the difference Aunt Gervaise and Uncle Boots had made in his life, he recruited and mentored thousands of boys, working tirelessly to see that they learned the ageless values embodied in the Scout Oath and Law. He imagined a world where everyone conducted themselves by those standards every day.

But he did more than imagine such a world. He laid its cornerstone on the banks of the Flint River.

About 30 miles from Griffin, tucked in a bend of that meandering river, lies the Gerald I. Lawhorn Scouting Base, named for Gerald but built in the spirit of Aunt Gervaise and Uncle Boots. This sprawling facility includes a canoe base, a challenge course, rappelling and climbing towers, hiking trails, several lakes, and more than three miles of river frontage. Since 1988, the base has welcomed tens of thousands of Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Venturers, along with participants in other civic and religious youth programs. Each weekend of the year, visitors to the base build memories and glean experiences that will serve them for a lifetime.

Gerald didn't just provide the money to build the camp. He ensured its long-term financial support through an arrangement with PetroSouth. Thanks to his foresight, generations to come will be able to enjoy the Scout base as much as today's Scouts do.

The Challenge of a Lifetime

Gerald had always credited the Boy Scouts with turning his life around and giving his life meaning and purpose. In 2005 he would need everything he had learned in Scouting, including his abiding faith in God. That year, he began experiencing troubling health problems. His tongue felt thick and his speech was slurred as if he were drunk, even though he'd had nothing to drink.

He soon began a round of visits to neurologists, undergoing numerous tests with no definitive results. Then, in June, he got his answer. He had bulbar amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), commonly known as Lou Gehrig's Disease.

ALS is a degenerative condition that leads to paralysis and ultimately to death by suffocation. Along the way, the individual becomes unable to eat. He must be fed through a tube and breathe through a respirator. The intellect, for better or worse, remains intact.

Gerald asked the obvious question—"How long do I have?"—to which his doctors replied, "Possibly six months." They gently suggested that he go home and get his affairs in order.

He did that, but not in the way the doctors expected. Taking care of family and financial affairs took a backseat to another, larger calling. While Gerald's diagnosis stopped him cold, it also energized him. For a long time, he'd had an idea percolating in the back of his mind—an idea that would benefit young people far beyond south Georgia. If he were ever going to make this idea a reality, it would have to be now.

Gerald soon brought together a group of experts to hear about his dream. They were people in Scouting, people from universities, people from the private sector, many of whom had dedicated their lives to serving young people. In a series of meetings, he told them about his dream. Over the next two years—long after doctors had written him off—he and the group refined that dream until, little by little, it became a reality.

That dream was ScoutParents, an initiative that would encourage and celebrate the involvement of parents, guardians, and mentors in Scouting. As a Scoutmaster, Gerald had long ago realized that Scouts with drop-off parents generally drop out of the program. Moreover, he knew that parents who fully understand and appreciate the benefits of Scouting were more likely to participate and persevere with their children in Scouting—and to reap the benefits of Scouting themselves.

And so ScoutParents was born. After field testing in three local councils, it became an integral part of the National Parent Initiative of the Boy Scouts of America in 2008. Today, the ScoutParents slogan—"Scouting Makes Great Parents, Too"—is becoming a rallying cry in communities far removed in time and space from the small Georgia town where Aunt Gervaise and Uncle Boots planted its seeds so many years ago.

Making Choices

Condensing the experiences of millions of Scouts into a single story is indeed impossible. Yet each of them—like each of us—faces the same sorts of choices Gerald Lawhorn faced: To yield to temptation or give in to despair. To spend our time, talent, and treasures on others or lavish them on ourselves. To plant seeds or to pull up what has been planted. To weep or to laugh.

In the face of a death sentence, Gerald Lawhorn chose to live fully. At a time when he could have easily turned inward, he has continued to reach out and to share with others the magic and the power of Scouting.

It was a legacy of love, passed down to him from his aunt and uncle and passed on by him to all of us.

In Memoriam

On Oct. 8, 2008, three years after his diagnosis, Gerald Lawhorn lost his battle with ALS. Although he didn't live long enough to see the publication of this book, his spirit infuses every page.

Julian

Kids and Parents Today

Although it's easy to read the childhood stories of someone like Gerald Lawhorn through rose-colored glasses, there's no doubt that kids and parents face challenges today that would have been unimaginable even a generation ago.

In school, kids spend more and more time preparing for standardized tests, shouldering the responsibility not just for their own futures but for the future of their schools. At home, kids spend more time than ever in front of televisions and computers, absorbing ideas and images that often run counter to the values their parents espouse. On the playing field, gifted athletes are recruited by college coaches in middle school, while less-talented athletes are given trophies just for showing up—a cheap and vain attempt to raise their self-esteem. And everywhere, marketers view kids as consumers in training, valued not for the content of their character but the content of their (or their parents') wallets.

Parents face their own challenges. As two-income households become the norm and single-parent families become more common, many parents rely on surrogates to help raise their kids, praying that those surrogates share their priorities and values. Others squeeze parenting time into schedules already crimped by long workdays and long commutes, hoping that a little quality time will hold their kids over until a later day that may never come.

Of course, many families overcome these challenges. Some live close to relatives who can share in raising the children. Some step off the high-achievement merry-go-round and put their families first, even if that means driving an older car or sending their kids to less prestigious schools. Some find in their faith communities like-minded folks who care for each other—and each other's kids—in remarkable ways. And some make such connections through Scouting.

This book is all about Scouting and the ways that the Scouting program benefits kids, families, and parents. Throughout these pages, you'll meet people who, through Scouting, have overcome the sorts of challenges that you and your kids may be facing today. Before we introduce them, however, let's take a quick tour of some situations many kids and parents face today and the role Scouting can play in improving those situations.

Parent Employment Trends

The glass ceiling was shattered in the last half of the 20th century as more and more women entered the workforce. According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 72.9 percent of mothers of children under 18 now work outside the home, compared with fewer than half in 1975.

While families and society benefit greatly from having women in the workforce, "that cuts in dramatically into the time that parents and kids are able to spend together," said Laurence Steinberg, a professor of psychology at Temple University and the author of *The 10 Basic Principles of Good Parenting*.

Scouting, Steinberg said, can help in a very simple way. "One of the things that Scouting and similar activities do is force families to put time that they spend together on their permanent calendar," he said. "Any kind of structured activity that is on the family's schedule, in which parents and kids share some time and some interest is really great for kids. Scouting can do that."

The Decline of Authoritative Communities

Kids need time with their parents, but they also need time with other adults. As Steinberg explained, "during the stage when kids are naturally going to be separating from their parents, they often benefit tremendously by having some adult around who is not their parent."

Unfortunately, those nonparental adults are less likely to be around these days. As the YMCA of the USA has found, "those U.S. social institutions that most directly build and sustain our connectedness to one another and to shared meaning have deteriorated significantly in recent decades." In fact, the YMCA's report "Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities," argues that the decline of so-called authoritative communities is the main reason growing numbers of American children are failing to flourish.

We'll return to the concept of authoritative communities in the next chapter. As you'll discover, a Cub Scout pack, Boy Scout troop, Varsity Scout team, Venturing crew, or Sea Scout ship can become a powerful authoritative community, impacting kids far beyond the activities they participate in or the badges they earn.

A Decline in Productive Free Time

A study by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan found that children's free time declined by

12 hours per week from 1981 to 1997, while play time dropped by three hours a week. Statistics like that are a concern to Steinberg, who said kids need plenty of structured, non-school activities.

"The time when they report the most positive mood is when they're in structured nonschool activities," he said. "When they're in school, they typically report very high levels of concentration, but low levels of positive affect. When they're at home watching television and doing whatever else kids are doing, they report low levels of both concentration and affect. If they're with their friends, they report high levels of positive affect, but low levels of concentration. It's only when they're in these structured, nonschool activities—whether it's athletics or dramatics or Scouting—that you get this good combination of both."

Pressure to Perform

There was a time in America when a bad report card would get a student grounded. Today, the stakes are much higher. As David Elkind writes in *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*, "Accountability and test scores are what schools are about today, and children know it. They have to produce or else . . . Their failure is more public and therefore more humiliating than ever before."

What's more, Elkind argues, students who perform poorly let down "their peers, their teachers, the principal, the superintendent, and the community. This is a heavy burden for many children to bear . . . "

Scouting can't change America's educational system, but it can offer kids a different, gentler path to achievement. One of the first things a Cub Scout learns is the Cub Scout motto—"Do Your Best"—and that motto is the cornerstone of the Cub Scout advancement program. As boys move into Boy Scouting, requirements become more rigorous, but even then boys don't have to race the clock or each other to succeed.

Couch-potato Culture

The average life expectancy among Americans rose to 78 years in 2005, up from 47 years a century before. It may not keep increasing, however. Pediatricians are seeing alarming numbers of young patients with heart disease and diabetes, conditions usually found primarily in adults. "Everybody's very concerned about this because it's a huge problem," Steinberg said.

Although many factors may be involved, there's little doubt that our "couch-potato" culture is part of the problem. One study found that 60 percent of teens spend 20 hours a week in front of a computer or television, a third spend 40 hours, and 7 percent spent a shocking 50 hours. That's an average of seven hours a day.

Another factor is the decreasing amount of time at school that's devoted to recess and physical education. According to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, just 28 percent of high-schoolers participated in daily physical education in 2003, down from 42 percent in 1991.

Scouting, of course, offers an effective replacement for P.E. and an alternative to vegging out on the couch. At every stage of the program, activity is emphasized and celebrated. Moreover, activity levels increase naturally as Scouts grow. For example, a boy could seamlessly move from nature hikes as a Cub Scout to overnight camps as a younger Boy Scout to week-long backpacking treks as an older Boy Scout or Venturer.

Marketing to Children and Teens

Kids who are spending three, five, or seven hours a day in front of televisions and computers are absorbing hundreds of messages every day to buy certain products. In some cities, they even hear advertisements on the school bus thanks to a commercial service called BusRadio.

And those messages work. In a study described in *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine* in 2007, preschoolers in a taste test preferred carrots, milk, and apple juice in McDonald's packaging over the same foods without the packaging. Although Scouting's primary goal is not to turn kids into smart consumers, the program can play a role. Starting in Tiger Cubs (first grade), boys learn about healthy eating and the food guide pyramid. Boy Scouts who earn the Personal Management merit badge, which is required for the Eagle Scout Award, must discuss subjects like these with an adult: the emotions they feel when they receive money, their experience with an item they've purchased based on an advertisement, and even buyer's remorse.

Objectionable Material on the Internet

These days, of course, many parents would rather have their kids watch fast-food commercials on television than see violent and pornographic material on the Internet. Keeping their kids safe online is a huge concern for many parents.

A new requirement for the First Class rank in Boy Scouting can help. It requires Scouts to describe three things they should avoid doing on the Internet

and helps them understand how to deal with a "cyberbully." This requirement builds on Scouting's track record over more than two decades of teaching Scouts to protect themselves by recognizing, resisting, and reporting all forms of child abuse.

Even more importantly, Scouting teaches values and builds character in young people, thus helping them resist temptation, whether it be online or in the real world.

Disconnection from Nature

As kids have increased their screen time, they've decreased their time outdoors, leading to what Richard Louv, in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, dubbed "nature-deficit disorder." Kids who know all about rain forests and global warming, he argues, may never have been to the park down the street. (And many may not want to go. One fourth-grader told Louv he liked the indoors better because "that's where all the electrical outlets are.")

Louv says one reason for nature-deficit disorder is parents' wariness about strangers and other potential dangers. Many would consider unstructured, unsupervised outdoor play as just short of neglect.

Scouting, of course, offers structured, supervised outdoor play. Cub Scouts participate in den hikes and family campouts, while Boy Scouts and Venturers participate in weekend outings, summer camps, and rugged high-adventure programs—all under the watchful eyes of adult leaders who adhere to the "Guide to Safe Scouting," a publication that offers extensive advice for keeping Scouts safe.

The results can be life-changing. As Louv writes, "Nature—the sublime, the harsh, and the beautiful—offers something that the street or gated community or computer game cannot. Nature presents the young with something so much greater than they are; it offers an environment where they can easily contemplate infinity and eternity."

Is Scouting a panacea, a cure for all the problems facing kids and parents today? Of course not. At the same time, however, it offers more than casual observers might think. Throughout this book, you will meet dozens of parents whose kids and families have benefited from their time in Scouting. While their stories are unique, they point to the universal impact that Scouting can have, the impact it has had since its founding a hundred years ago.

What Scouting Does for Kids

How can you learn the essence of someone's character? Study his office—the pictures on the walls, the mementos on the shelves—and you learn his story. Diplomas speak of his education, certificates speak of his accomplishments, snapshots and finger-painted masterpieces speak of those he loves.

Steve Elwart's office in Vicksburg, Miss., is rich with tokens of a long career in engineering. But tucked in between his mementos and awards is a Polaroid photo of Elwart as a Cub Scout a half-century ago. Encased in a Popsicle-stick frame, the photo reminds Elwart of the impact his den leader had on his life. "She lived at 121 North Yale, and her phone number was Clearbrook 5-2523," Elwart said. "After almost 50 years, I still remember that woman."

A thousand miles away, an Eagle Scout badge hangs on Sam Graves' office in the Longworth House Office Building. Graves earned that badge in 1976 in Tarkio, Mo., part of the district he now serves in Congress. Each time Graves leaves his office, the badge reminds him of an oath he first took three decades ago: "On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country . . . "

For those who don't yet have office walls or awards with which to adorn them, the Internet offers a digital substitute. On social-networking Web sites like MySpace and Facebook, teens and 20-somethings share their stories with each other. In describing herself in her Facebook profile, Venturer Meg Gehlhausen of Evansville, Ind., focused on the outdoors. "Philmont Scout Ranch, backpacking, and camping are not hobbies; they are a way of life and a way to live," she wrote. "I believe that a person can be the best person they can be solely out in the wilderness. It is the only place I am truly happy and when I am not there, I crave to be. Amazing things happen between a person and the land, and you can only understand once you let these things happen."

An engineer in Mississippi, a Congressman from Missouri, an Indiana college student. At first glance, they have little in common. Yet Elwart, Graves, and Gehlhausen—like millions of Americans before them—credit Scouting with helping them become the adults they are today.

Proving Scouting's Worth

It's easy to draw a line between the Scouting program and a love for the outdoors. But how do you connect the dots between a Cub Scout den and a successful career? Or between a Boy Scout troop and the U.S. Congress?

Proving the impact Scouting has on young people can seem difficult. There are no double-blind experiments, none of those separated-at-birth studies that explore the lives of identical twins. (Some might say that Scouting, like crime prevention, is measured best by what *doesn't* happen, which of course is impossible to measure.)

To get a handle on Scouting's impact, the Boy Scouts of America recently commissioned a study through Harris Interactive of men who'd been Scouts. The results proved what many in Scouting suspected. Former Scouts, the study found, have higher levels of education than non-Scouts, earn more money, and are more likely to own their own homes. More than two-thirds attributed some of their self-confidence to having been Scouts, and a similar percentage could cite situations where Scouting had helped them be better leaders. Large majorities credited Scouting with teaching them integrity, patriotism, respect, and teamwork.

Selected Findings of "The Values of Scouts: A Study of Ethics and Character"

Former Scouts are more likely than non-Scouts to:

- Complete high school (91 percent vs. 87 percent)
- Graduate from college (35 percent vs. 19 percent)
- Own their own homes (74 percent vs. 65 percent)

Men who were Scouts for five years or more have average household incomes of $80,000, compared with $61,000 for men who were never Scouts.

Not surprisingly, those who had been Scouts for five or more years were more likely to exhibit the traits people expect of Scouts. To cite but one example, 61 percent of respondents said Scouting had increased their ability to help other people accomplish their goals. Among long-tenured Scouts, this rate rose to 75 percent.

Results like those are the reason that dozens of colleges, universities, and religious, civic, and military organizations offer college scholarships to Eagle Scouts. They're the reason that Eagle Scouts enter the military at a higher pay grade than other enlistees. And they're the reason that Scouting is the only youth activity described in NASA's Astronaut Fact Book. As astronaut and Eagle Scout Mike Fossum said, "The people who've been through the Scouting program possess some or all of those ideals of Scouting, the common set of values that we express in the Scout Oath and the Scout Law. Those aren't Scout values;

those are American values that are the kind of thing you'd want any upstanding employee in any organization to profess."

The values Fossum described are key to Scouting's mission. In fact, the BSA's mission statement directly incorporates them: "The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law."

Scout Oath and Scout Law

The words of the Scout Oath and Scout Law are very familiar—perhaps too familiar. Familiarity may not breed contempt, but it often breeds complacency.

Before you read the Scout Oath and Law, think about these questions: What would happen if everyone you know lived by such a code of conduct? What if our country's leaders made all their decisions based on the values found here? What kind of person would your child become if the values of Scouting became central to his character? How different would our world look tomorrow if the next generation stood as one and made that familiar promise: On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty . . . ?

Scout Oath

On my honor I will do my best

To do my duty to God and my country

and to obey the Scout Law;

To help other people at all times;

To keep myself physically strong,

mentally awake, and morally straight.

Scout Law

A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

But if values are Scouting's fundamental lesson, they're just the starting point. Through Scouting, young people also discover lifelong hobbies and friendships, learn essential skills, build self-esteem, and much, much more.

Throughout this chapter, we'll explore a few of the countless lessons Scouting teaches. As you read the stories of current and former Scouts, consider what Scouting could do for your child—and what your child in turn could do for others.

Scouting Teaches Values

One of the first things a new Boy Scout does is memorize the Scout Oath and Law. At first, they struggle with the words—often mixing them up or leaving a phrase out. But once they've mastered the words, they never forget them.

In his book *Legacy of Honor*, Alvin Townley tells the story of Eagle Scout George Coker, a POW during the Vietnam War. After two months of torture at the hands of the Viet Cong, Coker could barely remember his own name.

But he remembered the Scout Oath. "The very last thing I could consciously hold onto was the Scout Oath," Coker said. "By the end, I could only get out the first verse: 'On my honor I will do my best.' That forced my brain to function and say 'I *will* do this again. I will *not* do what they want me to do.' "

In between learning the words and living them, Scouts must figure out what the words mean. Some Scout leaders present scenarios that bring the values into sharp focus. "Imagine that you caught your best friend cheating on a test," a Scoutmaster might say. "If you're trustworthy—the first point of the Scout Law—you'll report him to the teacher. But if you're loyal—the second point of the Law—you'll keep quiet. How do you resolve that conflict?"

Other Scout leaders talk about "running the 12," comparing a possible action to the points of the Scout Law to make sure it's ethical. That's the approach Scoutmaster Wendy Stevens of Port Townsend, Wash., takes with her Scouts. She told the story of one Scout who was especially immature. "All I have to do is pull him aside and say, 'Okay, where are we falling down? Which word do we need to pull you up with? Is it trustworthy? Is it loyal? Is it courteous, kind, all of those things? Which word or words do you need help with?'" she said.

In today's climate, values have become something of a political football. But Americans of all political stripes celebrate the values found in the Scout Oath and Law.

Jim Keller, an assistant Scoutmaster in Ellisville, Mo., learned that lesson recently. Keller describes himself as "an upper middle-class, fairly conservative, churchgoing family guy." He said his ex-wife, Rain Ackley, is just the opposite: a sort of 21st-century hippie. As a result, she was never a huge proponent of their son Andrew's involvement in Scouting. That changed when Andrew became an Eagle Scout.

As Jim Keller tells the story, Ackley was entertaining a group of friends when the talk turned to their children. She announced that Andrew had just become

an Eagle Scout, and the room went silent. "It was like the old E.F. Hutton commercial," Keller said. Everyone in the room appreciated the significance of the Eagle Scout Award. One of her friends, a free spirit herself, said that she would only date Eagle Scouts. "They're the only guys I can trust," she explained.

Scouting Teaches Fitness

According to the Mayo Clinic, one-third of U.S. children are overweight or risk becoming overweight. The percentage of kids ages 6 to 11 who are overweight has doubled in the past two decades; among teenagers, it has tripled.

Obesity can lead to numerous problems in children, including diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, sleep disorders, liver disease, depression, and even behavior and learning problems. Yet 40,000 U.S. schools no longer offer recess, according to *Psychology Today*. A report from The Future of Children initiative reports that American kids now average 3.5 hours of "screen" time—sitting in front of televisions, computers, and videogames—every day.

Scouting, of course, offers an alternative to the sedentary lifestyles that are helping to fuel America's obesity epidemic. At every level of the program, age-appropriate outdoor activities are a central part of Scouting. One of the first achievements earned by Wolf Cub Scouts (boys in the second grade) is "Feats of Skill," which involves such activities as playing catch, swimming, and jogging. Later, in Boy Scouting, the Personal Fitness merit badge (which all Eagle Scout candidates must earn) requires Scouts to complete a 12-week physical fitness program to improve their aerobic fitness, strength, and flexibility. Along the way, Scouts can earn belt loops and merit badges in a host of sports, from bowling and baseball to snow sports and cycling.

Becoming Physically Strong

Physical fitness affects more than just the body. As athletes who've experienced a "runner's high" can attest, physical fitness enhances mental fitness. In fact, aerobic exercise is one of the best treatments for mild to moderate depression.

The Mayo Clinic suggests six ways to increase a child's activity level:

- Limit recreational screen time to fewer than two hours a day.
- Emphasize activity, not exercise.
- Find activities your child likes to do.
- If you want an active child, be active yourself.
- Make chores a family affair.
- Vary the activities.

Scouting directly or indirectly supports nearly all these techniques. The program draws kids away from television and videogames and lets them participate in a variety of fun, well-supervised outdoor activities. When parents participate as ScoutParents or registered leaders, they set a good example and receive the same health benefits as their kids.

But most Scouts become more fit not through earning badges but through participating in hikes, camping trips, and high adventure activities. That's certainly the case with the Scouts of Troop 167 in Arlington, Va., which specializes in outdoor adventure.

"We own our own canoes, and we have a canoe trip every month year round—even in January," said Assistant Scoutmaster Mark Wray. "Some parents look at us a little funny, but we go out anyway."

Troop 167 Scouts have taken numerous backpacking treks at the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. They've rafted the Ocoee and New rivers. They've climbed Longs Peak in Colorado and hiked the trails of Gettysburg National Military Park. They've been to the top of Mount Rainier and to the bottom of the Grand Canyon.

"It's an active troop; we do a lot of stuff," Wray said. "We want to be active. We want our guys to get out and enjoy nature and get the most out of their Scouting experience."

Along the way, those Scouts become more fit and develop habits that will persist into adulthood. In fact, many former Scouts from Troop 167 and countless other troops never hang up their hiking boots or put away their paddles.

When Peter Agre was growing up in Minnesota in the 1960s, he joined a Boy Scout troop that was affiliated with an Explorer post (the forerunner of today's Venturing program). That post often took canoe trips into the Boundary Waters along the U.S.-Canadian border; at age 14, Agre participated in one of those trips.

"I thought that was just an amazing experience," he said. "Was it a life-changing experience? It surely was."

The experience was so life-changing, in fact, that wilderness trips became a family tradition once Agre married and had children. When his son, Clarke, joined a Boy Scout troop in Baltimore, Agre introduced the troop to high adventure, leading annual trips to either Philmont Scout Ranch, the

Florida National High Adventure Sea Base, or the Northern Tier High Adventure Bases, where Agre had canoed as a Scout.

Agre's love for canoeing continues unabated. Now a Nobel Prize-winning professor at Duke University, Agre continues to spend his vacations paddling through the wilderness. "It's just a special joy," he said. "I want to do it as long as I can."

Scouting Teaches Service

Service to others is inherent in Scouting's DNA. The Cub Scout Promise, the Scout Oath, and the Venturing Oath all talk about service to others. The Scout slogan—"Do a Good Turn Daily"—makes service an everyday obligation. From common acts of courtesy (all too uncommon today) to massive Eagle Scout service projects and expansive national initiatives, Scouts answer the call to service in myriad ways.

One of the most familiar Scouting stereotypes is of a Scout helping an old woman across the street. It dates to the 1911 Boy Scout Handbook, which included an illustration of a uniformed Scout—campaign hat, jodhpurs, knee socks, and all—gently guiding the steps of a frail, wizened woman.

At first glance, the image seems as archaic as that old handbook itself, which devotes an entire chapter to chivalry. ("The boy-scout movement," it proclaims, "is a call to American boys today to become, in spirit, members of the order of chivalry.") But replace the uniform with blue jeans, trade the old woman for a classmate, and you have the story of Eagle Scout Trevor Robinson.

A few years ago, Trevor and classmate Krista Benson were walking toward the parking lot of their Gold River, Calif., school, when a car sped around a corner, heading straight for the teenagers. Acting on instinct, Trevor pushed his friend out of the car's path. With nowhere to go himself, he leapt onto the car's hood, shattering the windshield and breaking his collarbone. Seconds later, he lay on the ground, dazed, bleeding, and lucky to be alive.

"He saved my life," Krista said.

Trevor wasn't the only Boy Scout hero that day. "The first kid that was there to help him was a kid who ultimately became an Eagle Scout from our rival troop," said Trevor's dad, Rick, an assistant Scoutmaster with Trevor's troop.

For his heroism, Trevor received the Honor Medal with Crossed Palms from the Boy Scouts of America—along with the undying respect of Krista's relatives, who honored him at a family get-together. "I couldn't tell you how many aunts and uncles came up and gave me hugs and handshakes, thanking me for saving their little girl's life," he said.

Saving lives and serving America have been the focus on Scouting's many national good turns, projects that concentrate the efforts of millions of Scouts on urgent national priorities. During World War II, Scouts collected thousands of tons of rubber, scrap metal, and other materials for the war effort. In the 1950s and 1960s, they held massive get-out-the-vote campaigns. The 1970s began with Project SOAR (Save Our American Resources) and Operation Reach, a national program against drug abuse. Since the 1980s, Scouts across America have gone door to door in their neighborhoods each year, collecting canned goods for local food pantries and homeless shelters.

Most recently, in 2004 the Boy Scouts of America launched the Good Turn for America initiative to address the issues of hunger, homelessness, and poor health in our nation. The initiative matches Scout units with respected service organizations (including the Salvation Army, Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross, the American Cancer Society, America's Second Harvest, and the Department of Homeland Security), which provide service opportunities for Scouts. Four years later, Scout units had logged *6.5 million hours* of service—roughly 4,500 hours per day—at the Good Turn for America Web site.

Service projects meet urgent community needs, but they do something even more important. They develop in Scouts a habit of service that will guide them throughout their lives. When today's problems are solved and tomorrow's become apparent, Scouts will be there ready to help.

Scouting Creates Lifelong Friendships

As young people get older, connections to family often loosen, giving way to bonds of friendship. In fact, research has shown that small groups of friends, called *clusters*, often become as important as family to older adolescents. In his book *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, Chap Clark quotes a high-school junior named Kyle: "My parents don't know me, my teachers don't know me, even my coach doesn't know me. The only people who *really* know me are my friends."

In many cases, of course, friends lead friends astray, pressuring them into risky behavior. But Scouting offers a source of positive friendships, friendships that are strengthened by shared values and shared experiences.

Marcos Guerrero of McPherson, Kan., had plenty of friends growing up, but there was a "mass exodus" when he became a cop. "The only friends that remained with me after I became a police officer in '91 were my Scout friends," he said. "We shared the same values and stuff, so it was no big deal for them that I now had a gun and a badge."

Many of those Scout friends, in fact, went into law enforcement themselves. When Guerrero got married, all of his groomsmen were law-enforcement officers. All but one were Eagle Scouts.

One of those groomsmen eventually recruited him to be a Cub Scout leader. As a leader, Guerrero often told his Cub Scouts, "Don't be at all surprised if the boy sitting next to you is still sitting next to you in another 20 years."

That will probably be the case with Trevor Robinson and his friend Peter. Their friendship was forged by Scouting and tempered by tragedy. When Peter's father developed terminal cancer, Trevor reached out to his friend, providing whatever moral support he could.

One night near the end of the boys' sophomore year, Peter called Trevor, clearly upset. His father's condition had dramatically worsened, and Peter wanted his friend close by.

Four years later, Rick Robinson vividly remembered talking to Trevor that day. He pointed out that Peter's father was very ill and might not survive the night. "Are you prepared for that?" he asked. Trevor replied, "I have to be there. Peter needs me. If it happens, it happens."

To Rick Robinson, Trevor's decision was an outgrowth of the bonding that occurs on every Scout campout. "You're out there in the elements. Who do you lean on? You lean on whoever's there," he said. "If that happens to be your tentmate or your buddies, that's what you do."

Peter's father died the night he leaned on Trevor, and they both learned something about bravery that no Scout manual can teach. "What does brave mean?" Rick Robinson said later. "Not getting scared of the dark is one thing but facing someone's mortality is a really tough one."

Scouting Teaches Life Skills

Signaling, tracking, fire-building, and knot-tying may not seem like vital life skills in the 21st century. And some of these activities have indeed vanished from the Scouting program over the years. But former Scouts regularly find a use for the skills they learned in Scouting. Astronaut Mike Fossum certainly did.

As Fossum's crew was preparing for mission STS-121 in 2006, shuttle engineers became concerned about the Velcro® straps that would hold down a piece of equipment in the payload bay when Space Shuttle Discovery returned to earth. When someone suggested tying a knot, Fossum said the clove hitch is what the Boy Scouts would use. In typical NASA fashion, the engineers convened meetings, researched knots, conducted pull testing and materials testing, and finally settled on the appropriate knot—the clove hitch.

And so, on a spacewalk 220 miles above the earth, Fossum tied down the equipment using a knot he had learned as a Boy Scout. "I had fun with that," said Fossum, who is a Scoutmaster when he's not flying in space. "I actually made a note while I was outside doing it that I'd better get this right or my Boy Scouts will never let me forget it."

Other Scout skills also translate to the work environment, according to Trent Christian, a Scout leader from McDonough, Ga. For example, Boy Scouts must meet with a board of review—a group of adult Scouters—when they reach a new rank. "It's really like a mini-job interview," Christian said. "That's what you're practicing, that life skill of expressing yourself to someone you don't really have a peer relationship with."

Success in job interviews—and in life—requires more than just practice. It requires preparation, problem-solving ability, perseverance, and self-confidence. Meg Gehlhausen's younger sister, Suzanne, developed all those skills and more in Sea Scouting, a branch of Venturing that focuses on sailing. About a year after getting into the program, she decided to attend Sea Scout Advanced Leadership (SEAL) training, a weeklong, intensive leadership course for youth leaders.

According to her father, Keith, Suzanne worked hard to get ready for SEAL training. "She wrote a hundred-odd page outline of a part of the *Sea Scout Manual* to prepare herself for that course. She took it upon herself to go out and find people to teach her different skills that are involved in sailing," he said. "She made herself prepared."

When she entered Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology a few years later, Suzanne was ready for the pressure of college. "She pretty well rolls with that pressure because that's a habit that's she's formed," her dad said. "And if things are not going the way they ought to, then she figures out a way."

The same could be said for Brock and Tyra Wells' three sons from Basin City, Wash., all of whom are Eagle Scouts. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Dax, Kase, and Vard all served as missionaries for two years after high school. Their

parents drew a direct correlation between their success in the mission field and their success in Scouting. In calling merit badge counselors, breaking down goals into smaller steps, and planning service projects, the boys learned vital life skills. "By the time they were done, they knew how to do some things that other kids their age who weren't involved in Scouting just wouldn't even have a clue how to do," Brock Wells said.

Scouting Introduces Lifelong Hobbies

Suzanne Gehlhausen exemplifies something else Scouting accomplishes: introducing young people (and often their families) to hobbies and interests that will last a lifetime.

Suzanne's hometown of Evansville, Ind., lies along the Ohio River—not exactly a hotbed for sailing. In fact, the family had no sailing experience before Keith and Dot Gehlhausen decided to start Sea Scout Ship 312 to complement the Boy Scout troop they worked with. One of the group's first activities was a week-long sailing course at the Pamlico Sea Base, a BSA facility near Washington, N.C. Suzanne enjoyed the trip so much that she begged for permission to return at the end of the summer to help shut down the base for the season. So she flew back to North Carolina—her first airplane ride—and helped sail a 24-foot boat 180 miles to its home port. She was not yet a freshman in high school.

That first summer of sailing was just the start of Suzanne's sailing adventures. She competed in the William I. Koch International Sea Scout Cup, became boatswain (top youth leader) for the BSA's Central Region, served on the staff of the 2005 National Scout Jamboree, attended SEAL training, and received a free trip to Japan to participate in an international Scouting forum. Not bad for someone who'd never been sailing just a few years before.

Climbing was the activity that excited Scott Becker, an American who went through Scouting in England, where his family lived. After graduating from high school, he enrolled at the University of Edinburgh—which just happens to be in the middle of prime climbing country.

Scott's mother, Nancy, remembers the time he announced that he and a friend were heading to Norway for a spring break climbing trip. When she asked him where they would sleep, he said, "Oh, we're going to build an igloo." Her reaction was understandably conflicted: "Part of me was having a heart attack," she recalled, "and part of me knew that he knew how to do that because of Scouting."

Not all the hobbies Scouts develop are quite so adventurous. Both Trevor Robinson and his older brother, Brent, became good cooks in Scouting. Brent has even taken some culinary classes to further develop his skills.

Brent's interest in cooking paid off in a surprising way when a female friend called him in tears one day. She'd invited her boyfriend over for dinner, but there was just one problem: she didn't know how to cook. Enter Brent. According to his dad Rick, "he helped her plan out her meal, they bought the ingredients, and then he cooked the dinner and left so she could take credit for it."

Scouting Builds Self-Esteem

Children today are buffeted by two countervailing forces. On the one hand, we live in a world that keeps score. As children feel increasing pressure to excel in the classroom and on the athletic field, they (and their parents) often equate self-worth with straight As and state championships. In *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, Chap Clark describes attending a youth football game with a friend. Most of the parents on the sidelines were yelling, Clark wrote, including a father who screamed to his son, "If you don't strip the ball, you're walking home!" Clark was shocked, not just because of the father's venom but because the target of his anger was no more than 9 years old.

On the other hand, many adults have swung to the opposite extreme—primarily in reaction to the win-at-all-costs mentality Clark described. In a 2007 article on the demise of recess, *The New York Times* reported on a Connecticut school that had banned tag, dodgeball, soccer, and other competitive games. After parents complained, the school decided to allow older children to play a version of kickball—"as long as the score is not kept."

In other cases, schools still allow competitions—and even scorekeeping—but give all the children "the same little trophy for showing up," said Ginger McClure, a school psychologist in Fairfax County, Va., and the mother of two Eagle Scouts.

It's no wonder many kids suffer from low self-esteem.

According to Cubmaster and child psychologist Fred List of Sylva, N.C., Scouting offers a better path toward a positive self-image. The program's secret, List believes, lies in the Cub Scout motto: "Do Your Best."

"Do your best," List emphasized, "not be the best."

In Scouting, boys aren't rewarded just for being the best, and they're not rewarded just for showing up.

Instead, they're rewarded for striving to reach their full potential.

The program in List's pack does include competitions that result in winners and losers, most notably the annual pinewood derby, in which boys race small wooden cars they've built with their fathers or other adults. "Competition is a part of life," List said. "I don't know that we should shield kids from it entirely."

At the same time, however, List encourages his Cub Scouts to stretch themselves, to try new things, and to learn from their failures. In doing so, they begin to discover what their talents are and what they truly love to do.

A key feature of Scouting is variety. In contrast to most other youth programs, Scouting activities run the gamut from academics to athletics, from art to science, from service to self-actualization. Somewhere along the way, many Scouts discover their unique gifts, the things that make them special and make them happy. And that discovery boosts their self-esteem.

They also learn something that society rarely teaches. "Your best may not look like other people's," List said, "but that's okay, too."

Perhaps nowhere is this principle more apparent than in the leadership service project each Eagle Scout candidate must complete. While a Scout must meet certain requirements and maintain certain records, there are no rules about how extensive his project must be, how many people must be involved, or how much money must be spent. Perhaps because there are no arbitrary benchmarks, many Scouts undertake projects far beyond what they might appear capable of.

In 2007, 13-year-old Life Scout Matthew Hamilton of Columbia, Tenn., set out to build a prayer garden at his church. He raised $20,000 in cash donations. He secured $30,000 in supplies and services from 15 different businesses. He recruited hundreds of volunteers and spent his entire summer supervising their work. Along the way, he developed more self-esteem than a trophy case of awards could provide. Not bad for a boy who, just a few years earlier, had cried through his first Cub Scout camping trip.

"He's a testament to what Scouting can do for a young boy," Matthew's father, Rick, said.

Matthew is lucky to have supportive parents. Other kids aren't so lucky. Sometimes Scout leaders have to work hard to overcome the negative influence of unsupportive parents.

Keith and Dot Gehlhausen remember one Scout in particular who wanted to become an Eagle Scout but was running out of time and needed help. "He's a beautiful boy, and he's got all the personality in the world," Dot said. "But he's not all that intelligent."

The Scout was supposed to meet with the Gehlhausens to develop a plan for completing his final requirements. Surprisingly, his father tagged along and immediately began criticizing his son, saying he would never become an Eagle Scout.

"Right in front of him!" Dot said. "And we're just like, 'Oh, yes he will. We're going to help him, and he will do it.' "

The Scout did finish his requirements and became an Eagle Scout. In doing so, he perhaps showed his father what he was capable of in other areas of his life.

"In our environment, we have no tolerance for behavior that would diminish a child's spirit," Dot said. "I can't go home with them, but when they're here, we are not going to operate that way. We're not going to pull any punches about it."

Scouting Helps Kids Deal with Disabilities

Self-esteem can be a major issue for young people who have disabilities. Although they can often reach the same goals as their nondisabled peers, they may need more time or special accommodations.

Ginger McClure, the Virginia school psychologist we met earlier, said Scouting is perfect for kids with disabilities because "it's individualized, it's self-paced, there's a mentor, there's an opportunity to develop resiliency."

"Another reason I think it's so good," she said, "is that there are opportunities for recognition and for reinforcement all along the way, so there are a lot of positive messages and chances to build self-esteem for kids, especially kids with disabilities who don't get a lot of that in other arenas."

McClure said Scouting works so well that it's one of the top activities counselors recommend to the parents of kids with disabilities. "It isn't a program that's just thrown together," she said. "It's very well-founded in developmental psychological principles."

Byron and Carol Gilbert didn't need a counselor's recommendation to get their son, Stephen, into Scouting. Byron had been a Cub Scout, and Carol was working with their daughter's Girl Scout troop, so they already understand the program's value.

They also knew their options were limited. Stephen is legally blind, the result of congenital cone dystrophy, so many youth activities were out of the question.

"He could never have done any of those contact sports," Byron said. "We did karate to the point where there was going to be full contact, but he couldn't see the hits coming in."

Scouting, however, offered an environment where Stephen could thrive. He started off in Cub Scouting, where Carol served as his den leader, then crossed over into Boy Scouting, where Byron became an assistant Scoutmaster.

Together, father and son participated in countless adventures, from summer camps to high adventure trips to excursions to the Cumberland Island National Seashore. But Byron didn't always participate with Stephen. Among Stephen's first solo trips was a troop hiking weekend in the Okefenokee Swamp—scheduled for wintertime, when the alligators would be docile. Stephen was 12 years old at the time. ("It was okay for me," Byron said. "It wasn't okay for his mom.")

Stephen was successful that weekend—and throughout his Scouting career. As a teenager, he served three seasons on summer camp staff, first working in the trading post and then teaching handicrafts. He earned 31 merit badges, became an Eagle Scout, and received awards in conservation and boardsailing. Perhaps most importantly, his father said, "Stephen has the confidence that he knows he can go into pretty much any environment and survive."

Thrive might be a better word. Stephen is now a student at Southern Polytechnic State University, where he's pursuing a degree in engineering.

Vance Taylor also learned to survive and thrive in Scouting. Diagnosed with muscular dystrophy at age 7, he was no longer able to walk by the eighth grade. As a freshman in high school, he underwent back surgery, which further limited his mobility. But Taylor became an Eagle Scout. Through his own hard work—and with the support of his mother, Scout leaders, and fellow Scouts—he achieved things few would have imagined possible.

One of Taylor's enduring memories is of completing the Swimming merit badge, which required him to swim continuously for 150 yards. Although he could float, swimming was a major challenge. The day of his swimming test, his leaders climbed in the pool with him, taking turns swimming alongside. "Every time I stopped kicking my leg or my arm, they'd stop moving," he said. "And they'd say, 'Come on, you've got to do it. If we have to stay here all night, then we'll stay all night.' "

It didn't take all night, but Taylor did complete the merit badge. "I was tired as all get out, but I don't really recall a time I ever felt better," he said.

Scouts with Disabilities and Special Needs

Today, some 100,000 Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Venturers with disabilities are registered with the Boy Scouts of America. Many are members of mainstream Scouting units, while others participate in units comprised of young people with similar disabilities; these units are often chartered to special schools or centers that make Scouting part of their curriculum.

Scouts with disabilities participate in the same program as their peers, although accommodations in advancement requirements are made when necessary. For example, a Scout who uses a wheelchair may select an alternate merit badge for a required badge like Swimming. Since 1965, the registration of over-age Scouts with mental disabilities has been possible, allowing them extra time to work toward the Eagle Scout Award.

Scouting Builds Awareness of the Larger Community

Disabled Scouts like Vance Taylor and Stephen Gilbert undoubtedly benefit from their participation in Scouting, but so do their fellow Scouts. Their eyes are opened—no pun intended—to what people with disabilities must endure and to what they're capable of.

When Taylor was in Boy Scouting, his fellow Scouts took turns pushing him around camp in a wheelchair. (They did okay until the time they pushed him too close to a campfire and melted the soles of his shoes.) The member of Taylor's troop also earned the Disabilities Awareness merit badge, which taught them more than most people ever learn about disabilities. "Everybody in my troop got it," he said. "And it really bonded us as a troop to all work together."

But the impact went far beyond Taylor's troop. "The interactions that they had with me will affect them for the rest of their lives," he said. "Folks that warm up to you right away and feel very comfortable usually are the people that have known somebody with a physical disability. I think about it now and realize that it wasn't just forming friendships and having fun, it was helping other folks with disabilities, meeting people that were gonna be nice and open up and offer a helping hand later on."

A vision specialist who worked with Stephen Gilbert at school once visited his troop meeting. She brought along goggles that simulated various vision problems,

including Stephen's condition, and invited the Scouts to try them on. "All the boys could see, at least somewhat closely, what he sees," Stephen's father said.

(Activities like that have been part of National Scout Jamborees since 1977. At each Jamboree, thousands of Scouts get to experience wheelchair basketball, beep baseball, and other adaptive sports, learning firsthand what it means to have a disability. Some of those Scouts go on to earn the Disabilities Awareness merit badge.)

Cub Scout leader Trent Christian discovered how readily Scouts embrace friends with disabilities when a boy with Down syndrome joined his den. Christian worried about whether the boy would be accepted—but not for long. "I think he does more for the other boys than they do for him because, being around him, they all have a sense now of loyalty to him and of taking care of him," Christian said. "I just think it's a real healthy thing for them."

To Fred List, stories like Christian's point to one of Scouting's key benefits: making Scouts aware of the larger community and teaching them that "there is something bigger than ourselves that we can be a part of."

That may be a novel concept these days, according to List. "People just aren't connecting with their communities," he said. "They don't go out and vote. They don't go out and volunteer. And that really destroys a whole community."

In contrast, he said, Scouts follow through on their promises to do their duty to God and country and to help other people. "We do service projects. We pick up trash. We collect food. We go visit community agencies like the police or the fire department to help Scouts learn what other people are doing to serve the community," he said.

For many Scouts, community takes on a much larger meaning, especially when they participate in activities like the World Scout Jamboree. In 1999, for example, Jeff Wagener's two sons participated in the World Scout Jamboree in Chile, along with some 30,500 other participants from 158 countries. "Scouting is a worldwide fellowship that opens doors to interaction," Wagener said.

In the Wageners' case, those doors had already been open. When the Colorado family lived in New Zealand, one of their sons actually sought out and joined a troop from Scouting New Zealand, building bonds with fellow Scouts from half a world away from home.

Scouts don't have to travel overseas to become part of the world community. Robert and Christian Cousin of Cape Coral, Fla., haven't left the United States, but they've left their mark on the Kigali Christian School in Rwanda. As his Eagle Scout service project in 2007, Robert collected 6,500 discarded textbooks to send to the Rwandan school. Not to be outdone, Christian ran a drive that collected "tons and tons of school supplies," along with much-needed sports equipment.

"We're hoping that we can make a difference for the whole country," Christian said. "These children had no outlet but maybe labor in fields for the rest of their years. And they're only children. With education, we're really hoping they can live a better lifestyle, possibly move out, get into a better area, and have families of their own that can be successful."

Scouting Gives Kids Role Models

While many bemoan the decline of the traditional, two-parent family, the truth is that even two parents may not be enough these days. As Chap Clark argues in *Hurt: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers*, "In a segmented, fragmented culture in which neighbors do not know one another's names and families are so busy that they don't have time for an evening meal together, even the best of parents cannot possibly hope to meet all the nurturing requirements of raising a postmodern adolescent."

Yet one of those nurturing requirements, Clark says, is authentic, ongoing relationships with adults. Scouting can provide those relationships. It certainly did for Vance Taylor, who grew up with muscular dystrophy—and without a father. Although his mother was very supportive, Taylor didn't have a good male role model in his life until he joined Scouting. "It was for me the one time during the week when I actually had the opportunity to see what it was a man did," he said. "I knew that my leaders were married, they had families, they held down jobs. They talked a lot about the hard work they had to put forward with regards to their education and the training they needed to do the jobs that they had. And it was an example for me of something I knew I would have to do for myself one day if I wanted to be a family man."

Scott Malone learned similar lessons. When he was growing up in Johnson City, Tenn., in the 1970s, Malone faced several challenges. He was an African American in a predominantly white community, his father was not involved in his life, and his mother didn't have much money. Those circumstances might have determined Malone's destiny had he not joined Boy Scout Troop 163.

The leaders of that troop, especially Scoutmaster Bart Lewis, took a deep and abiding interest in Malone. When

he needed camping equipment, they made sure he got it. When he wanted to go to Philmont Scout Ranch, they quietly provided the money. Even father-son outings were a pleasure because the troop offered Malone so many positive male role models. "I didn't miss a father that much because I had Scouting," he said.

The support Malone enjoyed carried over beyond the boundaries of Scouting. Many of his Scout leaders were local business owners, and they made sure he and other Scouts could find good summer jobs and help in preparing for college.

"I never found the doors closed. They may not have been wide open, but they didn't close doors. They opened doors for me," Malone said.

Years later, when he graduated from medical school at East Tennessee State University, his Scoutmaster attended his graduation party. "He wore his Scouting uniform," Malone said. "I still have pictures of that. It is just amazing."

Today, Malone is a physician in Warner Robins, Ga. In 2005, he founded the Central Georgia Sports and Orthopedic Foundation, which provides numerous free services to middle school and high school athletes, including physical exams, injury clinics, and mentoring as they strive to compete at the collegiate and professional levels. "They just need somebody to put their arms around them and walk them through the process," Malone said.

Occasionally, young athletes ask Malone how they can repay him for what he's done. He tells them, "All I want you to do is extend the hand to somebody else, because that's how I got where I am. That's why I helped you, and I expect you to help others."

Even a child who doesn't face special challenges can benefit from mentors who, in the words of Chap Clark, "will do whatever it takes to bring him or her into the community of healthy adulthood." In working on his Eagle Scout project, Matthew Hamilton encountered many such mentors.

Not long after completing his project, Matthew was asked to speak at a BSA fund-raising luncheon. The remarks he gave focused not on his project, but on the men he'd met in the process. He talked about Roy Pritchard, who earned his Eagle Scout badge in 1935 and still carries a Good Turn coin in his pocket. He talked about Air Force veteran Glenn Myers, a POW from the Vietnam War, who donated materials for his project. He talked about Col. Bill Hickman, a local Eagle Scout who was then in charge of a strike brigade in Iraq. Each of these men supported Matthew's project, and each supported his growth as a person.

In what other arena would he have encountered these men, much less learned so much from them?

As a leader in Matthew's troop, Rick Hamilton is especially sensitive to the need for positive role models. "Many of the boys in our troop either don't have a father or their father is not involved. I've got grandparents bringing their grandsons every week just so they get exposure to male role models," he said. "It's really sad. It makes both my son and me realize how fortunate we are."

Scouting Can Reframe Kids' Impressions of Adults

Kids like Matthew Hamilton are fortunate because the adults in their lives—whether family members or not—are positive role models. Some kids are not so lucky.

A few years ago, a single mother brought her young sons to join Marcos Guerrero's Cub Scout pack. When she learned that he was a law enforcement officer, she told him a harrowing story. The previous summer, her then-husband had raped her 16-year-old daughter from a previous marriage. When the police arrived to arrest him, he barricaded himself—and the couple's sons—inside their house. The SWAT team eventually broke down the door, arresting the man and rescuing the boys.

As a result, Guerrero said, "Any time a police car drove past them or they saw somebody in uniform, the boys were really skittish and upset, saying, 'There's the guy that took my dad away.'"

Slowly, Guerrero and another leader, who was also a law enforcement officer, helped reframe the boys' image of cops. They provided the boys with equipment and uniforms and made sure they were included in family campouts. Within a couple of years, the mom reported that the boys no longer had phobias about squad cars and police officers.

Scouting can even help Scouts reframe their impressions of specific adults, according to Lt. Col. Kim Mondonedo, whose son, Max, is a Scout at Camp Zama, Japan, where Mondonedo is stationed. Mondonedo calls herself a "geographically single" parent because her husband works in the Philippines and is seldom home. Because of that—and because she grew up in a Scouting family—Mondonedo looks to Scouting to provide male role models for her son.

Due to the transient nature of life in the military, Max has seen more than his share of Scout leaders. Mondonedo appreciates the opportunity Scouting gives him to learn from people with very different leadership styles.

Max didn't like one of his leaders at first, a man his mom described as "a tough old guy." Gradually, however, Max warmed to the man and his leadership style. He even told his mom, "I had a talk with him. You know, he actually is a cool guy."

Back in the States, Keith and Dot Gehlhausen are very conscious of the example they set—not just as leaders but as spouses. "I was involved in a very bad marriage before, and it's given [my children] the opportunity to be a part of a harmonious home where we're all on the same page doing things together," Dot said. "It's been real important to me for them to have a happy family and see a happy marriage."

The example they set extends beyond their own family to the young people they serve through Scouting, according to Keith Gehlhausen. "We've had a lot of kids in our units over the years that have come from broken homes, from very difficult situations," he said. "In our particular situation and others, part of the adult role model is seeing a happy marriage, seeing two people interact together."

Creating Authoritative Communities

Keith and Dot Gehlhausen—and thousands of Scout leaders like them—are creating environments where children and adolescents can not only survive but thrive, where adults walk with those young people along the road to adulthood.

In its 2003 report "Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities," the Commission on Children at Risk defines *authoritative communities* as "groups of people who are committed to one another over time and who model and pass on at least part of what it means to be a good person and live a good life." According to the report, "the weakening of authoritative communities in the U.S. is a principal reason—arguably the principal reason—why large and growing numbers of U.S. children are failing to flourish."

The report lists 10 main characteristics of an authoritative community. Each is also a characteristic of Scouting.

Ten Characteristics of an Authoritative Community

1. It is a social institution that includes children and youth.
2. It treats children as ends in themselves.
3. It is warm and nurturing.
4. It establishes clear limits and expectations.
5. The core of its work is performed largely by non-specialists.
6. It is multigenerational.
7. It has a long-term focus.
8. It reflects and transmits a shared understanding of what it means to be a good person.
9. It encourages spiritual and religious development.
10. It is philosophically oriented to the equal dignity of all persons and to the principle of love of neighbor.

(Source: "Hardwired to Connect: The New Scientific Case for Authoritative Communities," The Commission on Children at Risk, 2003)

The Scouting program works. All it needs is people—people like you, perhaps—who are committed to doing whatever it takes to nurture the young people in your home, your neighborhood, your church, and your community.

What Scouting Does for Families

Dennis Chookaszian's students in the University of Chicago's MBA program get a surprising life lesson. In his course on corporate governance, the retired CEO tells the students that their lives have three facets—career, family, and personal—but that they must pick just two to focus on.

"You can't do all three well," Chookaszian explains. "There are not enough hours in the day to have a really high-level job and have a robust personal life and a robust family life. If you really think you can do all three and do them in a wholesome way, you're going to be disappointed."

In his own life, Chookaszian chose early on to focus on career and family. He spent 60 to 70 hours a week working and devoted the rest of his time to his wife and kids. As an Eagle Scout with two sons, he was naturally drawn to Scouting. He served as a Scoutmaster for many years, then participated at the district and council levels in the Chicago Area Council. Today, he is a member of the BSA's National Executive Board—and a volunteer with his oldest grandson's Cub Scout pack.

Making Choices

Most women are familiar with the tough decision Chookaszian's MBA students must face. Today, 60 percent of mothers of school-age children work outside the home (compared with just 26 percent in 1948), yet parenting requires as much time as it ever did.

But mothers aren't the only ones who face choices. Every parent—married or single, rich or poor—must make the kind of decision Chookaszian describes. We simply don't have enough hours in the day or dollars in the bank to achieve all our goals. While popular culture tells us we can have it all (whatever "it" is), in reality we must sacrifice some objectives in the pursuit of others.

Like Chookaszian, astronaut and Scoutmaster Mike Fossum chose to sacrifice personal time. "As I've explained to my loving and patient wife, Scouting is my hobby," he said. "I don't play golf; I rarely go fishing; I just don't participate in other kinds of hobbies. I do work on old cars, but that's more out of necessity so I can drive to work."

While Fossum and Chookaszian sacrificed personal time, Rick Hamilton, a Scout leader from Columbia, Tenn., sacrificed career advancement. "Over nine years ago, I woke up sitting in a hotel room in Europe traveling on business and realized I was missing out on my son growing up while I was climbing the corporate ladder," he said. "Ever since, I've done my best to be a dad and turned down business opportunities that would have taken me away from my kids."

An engineer with a chemical manufacturing company, Hamilton made the conscious decision to put his kids first. That included turning down promotions—and signing up as a Scout leader. He served as his son Matthew's Cub Scout den leader and is now an assistant Scoutmaster with Matthew's Boy Scout troop. He is also the advancement chairman for his district.

Hamilton's troop serves Scouts from a wide variety of economic and family backgrounds. At one end of the spectrum is the single mom who drops her son off at troop meetings on the way to her 12-hour shift as a deputy sheriff. (The boy's grandmother picks him up and cares for him overnight.)

At the other end of the spectrum is the father with a million-dollar car collection, who often picks his son up from camping trips in his latest find. "His son can tell you everything in the world about the cars his dad owns, but he's never camped with him," Hamilton said. "His son just yearns for him to be there, but he's just not there."

Fortunately, the choices we make aren't irreversible, as Scouter Gordon Stiefel proved. When Stiefel was a Cubmaster in the late 1990s, his Chicago-area pack required a parent from each family to attend the monthly pack meetings. One couple at a signup night said they couldn't do that because they were too busy with their medical careers. They offered to donate $1,500 to the pack if they could be exempted from the rule.

Stiefel declined the offer, and the family left. The father called a week later to make another plea, but again Stiefel declined.

Finally, the parents gave in and enrolled their son in Scouting, making sure one of them attended each pack meeting. Month after month, Stiefel watched as the parents becoming more engaged and involved in Scouting—and in their son's life. At the end of the year, he said, "they thanked me for making them come for an hour a month as they finally connected with their son."

Scouting Creates True Quality Time

One of the myths of parenting is that you can schedule quality time with your children the way you might

schedule a dentist's appointment or a round of golf. Another myth is that being in the same place at the same time—such as in the van on the way to a soccer game—counts as parenting. "Some people think that if they're in the same house with the kids, that's quality time," said Scout leader Steve Elwart of Vicksburg, Miss.

In truth, parents need to spend "quantity time," not just quality time, with their kids. A 2002 study in the journal *Adolescence* demonstrated this point. The authors interviewed parents and teens about their relationships with each other and measured parent success on six scales (communication, use of time, teaching, frustration, satisfaction, and information needs). Time spent together made more of a difference than any other factor. In fact, the authors reported, "Fathers who devoted more than 10 hours per week interacting with their adolescents received significantly better ratings on five of six scales than did fathers who devoted less time."

The conclusion? "It appears that an effective way to become better informed about what is happening in the life of daughters and sons is to spend a considerable amount of interactive time with them," the authors wrote.

Yet many parents spend little time with their children. In *Being Adolescent,* Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Reed Larson reported that teens spend less than 5 percent of their time with their parents—and only 2 percent of their time with other adults.

It's not for lack of trying, as two 1999 studies showed. In one study, 70 percent of adults said they wanted to spend more time with their kids. In the other, half of the kids surveyed felt that the time they had with their parents was often hurried.

Scouting can give both parents and kids just what they're looking for, according to Mark Belli of Gastonia, N.C., who has been an active Scout leader for more than a decade. Belli moved through Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting with his sons, Nicholas and Chris. Later, he and his wife, Becki, helped start a Venturing crew that also included their daughter, Maggie. (Venturing is the BSA's program for young men and women who are 14 through 20 years of age.) Built around four families who were already close friends, Crew 6 specializes in shooting sports, scuba diving, and other high-adventure activities.

But Venturing has done far more than teach Belli's children fun hobbies. "It has brought the family much closer together over the years," he said. "We also understand that each of us has a passion for this program or we wouldn't be putting the time and energy and effort into it."

Belli and his daughter have become especially close in recent years as they've crisscrossed the country teaching Venturing training courses. The hours they've shared in airports and on the road have offered them both quantity and quality time. Belli recalled what he told Maggie before one such excursion: "Sorry, Mag. We're going to central Indiana. That's eight hours' worth of time. I know you're going to sleep through most of it, but guess what, we are going to have some talks."

Scouting doesn't just create family time. It often forces it. The routine of weekly meetings and regular outings, the need to work together on badges and projects, can move family time to the top of a busy parent's priority list.

Melissa Mossbarger of Franklin, N.C., runs a day-care center out of her home and understands how hard it can be to make it to her son's Cub Scout meetings. "It may seem when you're walking out that door that there are ten other things that need to be done. Leave them there. They're not going anywhere," she said. "Go do this one thing because it's going to make a difference. It's going to make a difference in how your child grows up. It's going to make a difference in your family. And you're going to come home and realize that those things are still there, and they really weren't as important as you thought they were—not as important as your child and your family as a whole."

Scouting Creates Shared Experiences

A popular parenting book has a tongue-in-cheek title: *Get Out of My Life, but First Could You Drive Me and Cheryl to the Mall?* Unfortunately, kids aren't the only people who sometimes confuse chauffeuring with parenting. Many well-intentioned parents drive their kids to school and piano lessons and soccer practice and baseball games but fail to *participate* in those activities in meaningful ways. Some even hold conference calls during Little League games or read the newspaper in the parking lot while their kids are at church.

The U.S. Department of Education reported a few years ago that 28 percent of parents never attend parent-teacher conferences and that 61 percent never volunteer at school. According to the Brookings Institution, PTA participation dropped from 12 million in 1966 to 6.6 million in 2001—despite a 68 percent *increase* in total student enrollment.

Of course, many youth activities don't allow for real parental involvement. Unless you're a coach, for example, your child's sports league may consign you to the bleachers or the concession stand.

Scouting is different. At the Cub Scout level, activities like working on badges and going on camping trips require parental involvement. In Boy Scouting and Venturing, parents who sign up as leaders or serve as drivers participate in many of the same activities as their children. They may not earn the same badges, but they definitely earn the same sunburns, sore muscles, and enduring memories.

Parents who participate with their children in Scouting also demonstrate their own priorities, which has a bigger impact than one might expect, as a recent research project demonstrated. That project, the National Study of Youth and Religion, sought to define young people's spiritual beliefs and where those beliefs come from. According to study author Christian Smith, "the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents." Moreover, he said, "Parents and other adults . . . most likely 'will get what they are.'" In other words, if you want your child to be a regular churchgoer, you'd better be one yourself. While the NSYR study dealt with religion and spirituality, there's little doubt that parents "get what they are" in other arenas as well.

As Boy Scouting and Venturing leaders, Keith and Dot Gehlhausen of Evansville, Ind., have shared many life-altering experiences with their children—from learning to sail in the Atlantic Ocean to backpacking at the Philmont Scout Ranch in northern New Mexico. "It's not your trip to Disney," Dot said. "Going to Philmont, learning new skills, and doing things together has been life altering. What a privilege it's been for us to be with them when they've had those transforming moments."

Mark Wray of Chantilly, Va., has enjoyed more than his share of transforming moments on his many visits to Philmont. As a Scout in the 1970s, he completed treks with both his brothers. As an assistant Scoutmaster more than 20 years later, he took his sons to Philmont. In 2005, when his daughter wanted to go to Philmont, Wray's sister signed on as an advisor. (Co-ed Scouting trips require both male and female leaders.) Most recently, his wife came along as an advisor on their daughter's second trek. In all, members of the Wray family have completed 24 Philmont treks—and counting.

"It's something that I've shared with everybody in my family now," Wray said. "We can sit down—my brothers and my sister and my wife and my kids—and we all have that collective memory. We all know about squeeze cheese, and we know about climbing Baldy. We know about the Tooth of Time. So we can all participate in that conversation. It's not like somebody sits in the back and goes, 'I have no idea what you're talking about.' As a complete family, we have that collective memory of what it's like, where we went, what we did."

Scouting Involves the Whole Family

You don't have to travel to Philmont to enjoy Scouting as a family. At every level, parents and siblings can participate in some way, even if they aren't Scouts or leaders themselves.

In fact, many parents choose Scouting in part because the whole family can participate. "With good parents and good families, most of their kids are involved in sports and after-school clubs and things like that," said Keith Gehlhausen. "They're all great things, but they're not typically things that the entire family can share."

How family members can participate depends on the Scout's age. In Cub Scouting, family involvement is a given. Most major activities—pack meetings, the pinewood derby, and family campouts—involve the whole family in some way. In Boy Scouting and Venturing, family involvement tapers off, although it never ends completely. Awards ceremonies (called courts of honor) and other events are typically family affairs.

At times, family involvement extends even farther. Steve Elwart and his wife have four sons and a daughter, Brandy. Although Brandy was a Girl Scout, she also participated in many Boy Scout activities with her brothers. "Since our kids were little, we tried in as many ways as possible to make Scouting a family thing," Elwart said.

Brandy often tagged along on troop events, learning canoeing and knot-tying alongside the Boy Scouts. One of Elwart's favorite memories is of the time his Scouts—and Brandy—were learning what to do in a canoe emergency. Brandy and her partner had just intentionally tipped over their canoe when a lifeguard came paddling up as quickly as he could. When Elwart assured him that Brandy was alright, he seemed disappointed. "He thought he was going to save her life," he said.

Today, Brandy is the mother of two Cub Scouts, and her father says she can still tie a mean knot. "The program is flexible enough that in many of the things we did, we were able to include her," Elwart said. "That was a great benefit."

For some parents, flexibility is not just a benefit; it's a requirement. Mark Liechty told the story of a Scout in his northern California troop. Because the Scout had behavior issues, his dad needed to attend every campout. But that caused problems with his ex-wife

on weekends who had custody of their children. If a troop campout fell on one of those weekends, he had to either keep his son home or bring his daughter along.

After much discussion, Liechty's troop came up with a simple solution. "Every campout is a family campout," Liechty said. "We have a boys' area, an adults' area, and a family area. Truth be told, most of the time the family area has a single tent—for the man and his daughter. But the solution works."

When parents are also Scout leaders, family involvement deepens. That's certainly the case with Jeff Clark's family in Apache Junction, Ariz. For more than a decade, Clark and his wife, Mindy, led Cub Scouting training courses, involving their two sons in meaningful ways most of the time. "At all of our trainings, they were hauling boxes in and out from the buildings to the vehicles," Jeff Clark said. "They were used as guinea pigs. They were used as props."

The family has received far more than they've given. "It's definitely brought us together," Clark said. "We get to spend a lot more time together. We get to go on outings. We can talk more openly about things."

The BSA Family Award

The BSA Family Award program offers activities to help strengthen all families—whether two-parent, single-parent, or nontraditional. The program helps families accomplish worthy goals while building and strengthening relationships among family members. All family members are encouraged to participate.

To earn the award, a family must complete 10 activities within a 12-month period. Specifically, the family must choose two activities in each of the following categories:

- Learning Through Fun and Adventure
- Strengthening Family Relationships
- Developing Personal Strengths
- Teaching Responsibility
- Handling Difficult Situations

When the family has completed the requirements, all family members are eligible to receive an award certificate, a patch they can wear on their Scout uniform, and a pin they can wear on civilian clothing.

Scouting Bridges Generations and Miles

Mark Wray family's Philmont memories span two generations, and they will undoubtedly span more as Wray's children have children of their own and involve them in Scouting. While Wray may never hike at Philmont with his grandchildren, he'll share an indelible bond with them nonetheless.

In many families, Scouting becomes a tradition passed down from parent to child. An Eagle Scout father will enroll his son in Cub Scouting as soon as he's eligible. A mother who grew up with brothers who were Scouts (or was herself a Girl Scout) will make sure her son continues the tradition.

Scouting's power to bridge generations is powerfully demonstrated in every issue of *The Eagletter*, the journal of the National Eagle Scout Association. A section called "Eagle Scouting Is a Family Affair" shows photo after photo of families of Eagle Scouts, along with the dates each received Scouting's highest rank. Whether they show a father and his son, a grandfather and his grandsons, three generations of men, or a dozen family members, these photos speak powerfully of Scouting's ability to bridge the generations.

Steve Elwart is part of four generations of Scouts. Three of those generations—Elwart, his two adult sons, and one of his grandsons—are all involved with Cub Scout Pack 104 in Vicksburg, Miss. Elwart serves as an assistant Webelos den leader and says he can do "a mean 'Bunny Foo Foo' "—a reference to one of Scouting's immortal, and silly, campfire songs.

"Having the grandson and the son and the grandfather all together in one unit like that gives us a chance to play together," Elwart said. "We get to play and have a good time and really get to know each other as real people."

Many parents and grandparents don't have (or don't take) that opportunity. As a result, a lot of grandchildren have "a foggy memory of a kind man whose lap they climbed up in from time to time," Elwart said. "My grandkids have gotten to know me as the person I really am, which I'm thankful for."

That knowledge extends to his daughter's two sons, who live 400 miles away in Texas. Once, when Elwart was in Dallas for a regional Scout meeting, he stopped by their home in his "Mexican general" uniform, complete with the many awards he's earned in three decades in Scouting. "They really liked it, and they wanted to know what all the stuff was," Elwart said. "That gave us something to talk about, and then I could ask them things about how the pinewood derby

went and how the space derby went and how many arrow points they'd earned. There was a commonality there that gave us something to talk about and a common interest."

Kim Mondonedo tells a similar story—but in reverse. An Army officer stationed in Japan, Mondonedo is the daughter of a longtime Scouting volunteer who lives in Maine. Scouting is an important thread connecting her son, Max, with her father. "He has a rapport with his grandfather," Mondonedo said. "Every time we go back to Maine, I send Boy Scout books ahead and ask his grandfather to help teach him."

For example, Mondonedo said, gun control laws in Japan are very strict, even for people on U.S. military bases. So Max's grandfather helps him learn about skills like marksmanship during his visits to Maine. And those badges help grandfather and grandson learn about each other.

Scouting Brings Generations Closer Together

Scouting doesn't just bridge the generation gap. It closes it. When parents sing silly songs and sleep in tents, their children begin to see them as more approachable people. When Scouts take on leadership roles in Scouting, they become less like children and more like adults.

Mark Belli has seen that phenomenon clearly. As he and his daughter have worked together on Venturing training courses, their relationship has changed significantly. "It's gone from being the typical youth/parent relationship to being a peer relationship," he said.

Belli remembers clearly the time that Maggie stopped being "Mark's daughter" and he started being "Maggie's dad." They were teaching together at the Philmont Training Center one summer, and Belli and a group of other faculty members were sharing stories at a local restaurant. "Maggie walked up, and they pulled up a chair and let her sit down," Belli said. "And everybody went on with the conversation. That was a whole different look versus the 'Oh, you're Mark's daughter' kind of thing."

(Belli became even more "Maggie's dad" when she—as the national Venturing president—participated in meetings of the BSA's National Executive Board. "She goes to this national meeting, and there's a bunch of 60-year-old guys and Maggie," he said. "It's kind of like, 'Wow, is this a little overwhelming or what?'")

Not surprisingly, the close relationships fostered in Scouting carry over into other aspects of life. Dennis Chookaszian, the corporate executive who sacrificed hobbies for work and family, continues to enjoy a close relationship with his sons. "We're like friends more than like father and sons, and it's really been fun," he said. In fact, after forgoing hobbies for much of his life, Chookaszian now plays golf regularly with his sons—men who grew up, and grew closer to their dad, in Scouting.

It's not just the gap between children and parents that Scouting closes. Those who work in Scouting with their adult children discover that Scouting continues to strengthen their relationships. As Steve Elwart works side by side with his sons in Scouting, he grows closer to them and sets a positive example for his grandsons. "They've had a chance to see the interaction between their fathers and me. "Especially when the boys get older, and they get into that stage of being cool, they will still have that memory," he said. And they'll be able to say, "Eventually I will grow up, and I'll have a relationship with my dad like my dad has with my grandpa."

Elwart's grandchildren will probably be Scout leaders, too. In fact, they may even be looking forward to that time as much as Andrew Keller from Ellisville, Mo. Andrew has a much-younger half-brother, and he has already done the math to figure out when Shane will be old enough for Cub Scouting, according to his father, Jim. "He said, 'By the time Shane's old enough to be a Cub Scout, I'll be old enough to drive, and I can go down and take him to his den meetings, and I can be a den chief," Jim Keller recalled. "I looked at him and I said, 'Andrew, you could probably be a den leader.' But we'll stick with den chief."

Scouting Brings Blended Families Together

There was a time in America when the nuclear family was the norm (or at least appeared to be). Today, however, families come in many varieties. The Boy Scout Handbook defines *family* this way:

Family is a word that means belonging, support, and love. For many Scouts, a family is made up of parents, brothers, and sisters all under the same roof. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins might live nearby.

There are other kinds of families, too. Perhaps you live in a family with one parent, or you share time with your father and mother who live in different places. Your grandparents and other relatives might live far away, even in other countries. Maybe your family has no parents at all, but instead is made up of relatives or guardians who want the best for you. The most important thing is that they care for each other and want to share their lives with you.

One way many adoptive parents, stepparents, and guardians share their lives with young people is through Scouting. In doing so, they often cement the bonds created by second marriages, legal procedures, and court orders.

When Steve Elwart's stepson, Joey Barrett, came into his life, Joey was already 12 years old. "Having a blended family is challenging. Where Scouting really helped, not only with the blended family but the family in general, was in giving us a specific time that we would be spending with our kids, that quality time that we talk about," he said.

Due to his stepson's age, Elwart missed out on father-son activities like the pinewood derby—until the last few years. "One of the things that just happened recently that I'll carry around for a long time is when my stepson and I were working together making pinewood derby cars for the kids in his den," Elwart said. "He was 12 years old when we got together, so we didn't really interact too much. He was in the cool stage, but then when we came back together and worked in Scouting together, it's been very rewarding."

Nathan Wolfstein, on the other hand, missed very few Scouting moments with his stepson, Sean Adair. The Los Angeles resident enrolled Sean in Scouting within six months of marrying the boy's mother. "We needed something to bond us together," he said.

Wolfstein had been a Cub Scout himself, so Scouting was the first program he tried with Sean. "My whole goal at the time was not so much to get him involved in Scouting but to get him involved in *something*," Wolfstein said. "If he didn't like Scouting, we would do band, we would do something else, because he needed the extracurricular activity."

Fortunately, Sean liked Scouting and remained in the program through high school, becoming an Eagle Scout. Along the way, he and his stepdad, who served as an assistant Scoutmaster, shared many experiences that strengthened and deepened their relationship.

That's not to say that the two were always together. On many outings, Wolfstein would work with one group of Scouts while Sean took a hike with a different group. "When I was there, I may have been over here and not directly with him, but he knew I was there," Wolfstein said. "He knew I was an involved parent. He never said to me, 'I don't want you to go.' He did notice the other kids whose parents never came."

After college in Florida, Sean moved back home while he looked for a job, and he would often come into the family room just to hang out with his parents. "I have friends whose kids don't even want to talk to them," Wolfstein said. "I can't understand that."

Scouting Creates a Safe Environment for Families

Amber alerts. Photos on milk cartons. News reports about child abuse. The reminders of "stranger danger," pedophile teachers and priests, and child predators are all around us. And the dangers are real—if perhaps overblown by the media. Each year, authorities receive more than three million reports of child abuse, including half a million reports of child sexual abuse.

For more than two decades, the Boy Scouts of America has had in place extensive youth protection policies that are designed to protect Scouts from abuse (and adult leaders from false accusations). All registered adult leaders undergo criminal background checks, abuse-prevention training is provided to both leaders and Scouts, and every BSA youth handbook includes a parent's guide on how to protect children from abuse.

Moreover, Scouting has extensive safeguards in place to prevent abuse. At least two adults, including one registered leader, must participate in all outings, and separate sleeping accommodations and shower facilities are required. Hazing and corporal punishment are prohibited, as is one-on-one contact, such as conferences behind closed doors.

Because of these safeguards—and because Scouting naturally attracts adults who have children's best interests at heart—parents like Marcos Guerrero of McPherson, Kan., feel confident that Scouting provides a safe environment for their kids. With his law-enforcement background, Guerrero has never needed Amber alerts or milk-carton photos to remind him of potential threats to his two sons. At amusement parks and other public places, he said, he often goes into "cop mode," continually surveying his surroundings for potential threats to Matthew and Zane.

But not at Scout functions. "I can transition out of cop mode, and I don't have to be hyper-vigilant about when and where and what they're doing or who they're with, which is really nice," Guerrero said. "It allows me an opportunity to relax and actually enjoy whatever I'm doing at the Scouting function."

The Scout program also provides a safe haven from family strife, according to Mark Belli. When one of his sons went through a minor rebellious phase at age 16 or 17, the battle lines ended at the door to the troop meeting room. Belli's attitude was "Yes, you're my kid, but we have a job to accomplish here."

To ensure that family squabbles didn't bleed over into Scouting, Belli's troop had a simple but firm policy: no leader would discipline his own son. "I would let another leader discipline him, and that way it

wasn't coming from me as the parent," Belli said. "It was coming from a leader to a Scout." That way, he explained, his son never had to wonder, "Are you my parent, who I may or may not like right at this moment, or are you my Scout leader, who I need to listen to?"

Many Scouts no longer need to ask questions like that. As a Scout interacts with his dad in Scouting, the parent image and the Scout leader image begin to merge. As a Scout gets to know—really know—his mom, he begins to understand her, respect her, and love her more than before.

It's like watching a 3D movie. Without special glasses, the images are fuzzy, disjointed, confusing. With them, the images pop from the screen with incredible depth and clarity.

Time spent together in Scouting brings similar depth and clarity to parent-child relationships. But it does something else. As we'll see in the next chapter, Scouting helps leaders become better parents just as surely as it helps Scouts become better citizens.

What Scouting Does for Parents

One Sunday in September 2007, Marcos and Tina Guerrero arrived at the Boy Scouts of America's Philmont Training Center with their young sons, Matthew and Zane, in tow. The family had been to the Cimarron, N.M., facility before, so they knew just what to expect: Marcos would participate in a Scoutmaster training conference, Tina would enjoy a relaxing week with other conference spouses, and the boys would participate in the training center's extensive children's program, which caters to children of every age from infants to teens.

There was just one problem. Matthew and Zane were the only children at registration that afternoon. While the training center overflows with children each week during the summer, few participants are able to bring their kids in the fall, when school is back in session. (Matthew and Zane were there only because the family was in the process of moving from one state to another.)

Marcos worried about how the week would go, but he didn't need to. Within minutes, Philmont staff members had whisked the boys away to points unknown, intent on giving them the full Philmont experience and more. "The next time they showed up," Marcos recalled, "they had their own little entourage, and they had a handful of cookies and little Philmont memorabilia."

But the fun was just beginning. By the next evening, when training center participants assembled to enjoy Dutch oven cobbler and an old-fashioned sing-along, Matthew and Zane had become the center of attention. "It was like the boys had a whole session full of adopted parents and grandparents," their dad said. "Other adults were saying 'Hi' and playing with them and talking to them like they were little celebrities."

In addition to dozens of temporary relatives, Matthew and Zane acquired a semi-permanent adopted uncle, Brian Miller, whom Marcos met in his conference. "I'm not sure who adopted who, but Brian was fantastic," Marcos said. "He even came and spent the week before Thanksgiving with us."

Matthew and Zane undoubtedly benefited from their experience at the Philmont Training Center, but so did their parents. Marcos was able to concentrate on learning how to be a better Scout leader. Tina was able to enjoy some adult companionship for a change. And they were still able to spend time with their sons in a safe, fun environment, far removed from the hassles and hustle of everyday life.

The Guerreros' story points up one of Scouting's hidden benefits. While the program is solely designed to benefit young people—it's the *Boy* Scouts of America, after all—adults who participate benefit as well. They meet like-minded adults who can help them raise their kids, they learn to be better parents themselves, and they acquire life skills that benefit them far beyond Scouting. We'll explore some of those aspects of Scouting in this chapter.

The Philmont Training Center

Since 1950, the Philmont Training Center has served as the BSA's national volunteer training center. Each year, more than 6,000 Scout leaders and family members spend a week at the center, part of the sprawling Philmont Scout Ranch near Cimarron, N.M.

While Mom or Dad attends a training conference, other family members participate in programs for every age from infant through adult. Depending on their age, spouses and children can hike, ride horses, shoot bows and BB guns, visit the ranch's three museums, and even venture into the backcountry on five-day mountain treks. For those family members who remain on site, schedules are carefully coordinated to maximize family time during meals and evening activities. On western night, for example, families can enjoy a buffalo barbecue on the lawn of the Villa Philmonte and try their hands at roping and line dancing. On Wednesday afternoon, regular activities shut down, allowing families to hike around the training center or explore the historic village of Cimarron.

Some Scouters' spouses come to the Philmont Training Center with real reluctance, not at all sure they want to spend precious vacation time at a Boy Scout camp—even if it's the finest one in the world. By week's end, however, they'll often say something like this to their spouse: "The kids and I are coming back next year, so you'd better figure out which conference you're going to sign up for!"

Extending the Family

"The Andy Griffith Show" was one of the most popular television shows of the 1960s, ranking in the top 10 each year during its eight-year run. It remains popular in syndication four decades later, with millions around the world watching it every day.

First aired during America's most tumultuous decade, "The Andy Griffith Show" didn't really reflect society then, nor does it reflect society today. But one aspect of the show rings true with 21st-century viewers: It's

built around a single parent, Sheriff Andy Taylor, who's struggling to raise his son, Opie, while maintaining a career. Except Taylor rarely struggles. Instead, he's supported by his live-in aunt and a virtual extended family of friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

Marcos and Tina Guerrero found just such an extended family at the Philmont Training Center. For a week, they enjoyed the deep connections that few people think exists outside of Mayberry and memory. For a week, they rubbed shoulders with other adults who cared for their kids nearly as much as they did, adults who were willing, even eager, to share in the joys, the challenges, and the responsibilities of parenting.

Families like that are tied together not by DNA but by the BSA. And they can be found wherever Scouting flourishes, wherever a Scout leader becomes a matriarch or patriarch in khaki.

Deepening Connections

In some cases, as with Venturing Crew 6 in Gastonia, N.C., Scouting grows out of family connections instead of the other way around. "We formed that crew specifically because there were three or four families that were very close," said leader Mark Belli. "We spent so much time in Scouting together that we said, 'Well, let's just put this crew together.'"

Even in the early days, Crew 6 outings felt more like family reunions. "The Scouters looked forward to seeing each other, and the kids looked forward to seeing each other because they were all kind of meshed together in a bond with a common goal, no matter where they came from," Belli said.

That's not to say that problems never cropped up. But when they did, other parents stood ready to help. If one of Belli's children got out of line, for example, he could say to the other adults, "Do you guys think that this is appropriate? If not, then go discipline him; you have my total blessing to deal with it." Sounds like just the sort of thing Sheriff Taylor might have said to one of his friends in Mayberry.

Finding Support Structures

Mark Belli's Venturing crew was built around a group of two-parent families. But we only have to look around our own communities to realize how many kids are growing up today in single-parent households.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, single-parent households comprised 32.2 percent of all U.S. households in 2007, up from 12.9 percent in 1970. Nearly a quarter of U.S. households are now headed up by a single mom, while three percent are led by a single dad. (Among African Americans, single-parent households are far more common, accounting for 54 percent of all households.)

Most single parents work very hard to raise their kids well, but they can only do so much. To compensate, they must rely on neighbors and other family members to care for their kids. Many also turn to their church. When the church offers the Scouting program, single parents often find all they need and more.

That's certainly the case at Union Hill Missionary Baptist Church in Texarkana, Texas. There, Scout leaders like Phil Phillips serve as the father figures so many inner-city kids so desperately need.

"The part of Texarkana that we live in, you see young men growing up without fathers, without any males in their lives," Phillips said. "The only other males they see are guys on the street. You really want to be a positive influence in their lives before it gets too late—before they start making bad choices, before they start selling dope, before they start stealing, before they end up in jail."

Phillips knows what it's like to grow up without an intact family to support him. His father was never in his life, his mother lost custody of him when he was 10 years old, and he bounced around between relatives until high school. Only a stint in the U.S. Army straightened him out, he said.

Although he had no Scouting background, Phillips was hooked on Scouting when he visited his first Cub Scout meeting at Mount Union. He served as assistant Cubmaster for two years and then graduated with his son into the church's new Boy Scout troop, where he serves as Scoutmaster.

Phillips teaches his Scouts all the typical Scouting skills—cooking, knot-tying, first aid, and the like—but he also teaches them something more fundamental: respect.

"I've told my kids many a time that the stuff they see out on the street is not acceptable in my room," Phillips said. "We are going to treat each other decently. We are going to listen to each other. We are going to care about each other. We are going to be friends, and we're going to have fun here. All that other stuff? That's out there. That doesn't belong in here."

One young Scout was so loaded down with anger that Phillips had to ask him to leave several meetings when he couldn't control himself. Gradually, however, the boy's behavior and attitude improved.

"Over the last year or so, you can just see how calm he's become," Phillips said. " I'm not saying he's perfect. He still has his issues. They still live where they live. But he's a better kid. He speaks to people differently. He talks to adults differently. I told his mother he's a much better kid than he was a year ago."

That single mother was no doubt thrilled to realize that she was single no longer, that Phillips and the other Scout leaders at Union Hill had joined forces with her in parenting her son.

Finding support structures can be especially hard on military bases due to the transient nature of military service. Lt. Col. Kim Mondonedo, a Scout leader at Camp Zama in Japan, has seen that firsthand. "We do have a lot of single parents, either geographically or otherwise, affiliated with the military," she said. And those families are typically separated from other family members by thousands of miles, making ongoing support impossible.

Mondonedo herself is geographically single because her husband, Jude, works in the Philippines, nearly two thousand miles away. As a result, she is usually the caregiver—and Scout leader—for the couple's son, Max. Their roles were briefly reversed, however, when Max was a Cub Scout. "During one of those years I was deployed to the Balkans," Mondonedo said. "Jude kept him involved in Scouts at that time although my husband isn't as into it as I am."

Whether they're alone due to death, divorce, or geography, many single parents turn to Scouting for the kind of adult role models they recognize are missing in their own families. A single mom might look to Scouting for positive male role models, while an older couple raising their grandchildren might see Scouting as a way to introduce those kids to adults who still have the energy for camping, hiking, and other childhood pursuits.

Grandparents and Scouting

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, more than six million children in the United States live in households led by someone other than their parents. Three-fourths of these households are headed by grandparents. In many cases, such "kinship caregiving" (as the Annie E. Casey Foundation terms it) is temporary. However, forty percent of such relationships last more than five years.

Many custodial grandparents turn to Scouting for support, recognizing that Scouting can provide their grandchildren with younger role models. It also provides them with the stability many desperately need. For example, when Wendy Stevens of Port Townsend, Wash., gained custody of her grandson a few years ago, he had moved eight times in a single year. "I needed a consistent schedule and structure for him," she said, a schedule and a structure that Scouting provided.

And then there are people like Greg Quandt. In 2004, Quandt was single and living in St. Paul, Minn., while his sister and brother-in-law were raising their two boys, Eric and Ryan, in Georgetown, Texas.

Then, tragedy struck. The boys' parents were killed in a car accident, and Quandt became their guardian, moving from Minnesota to Texas to care for them. The change for Quandt was huge. "I went from being single and free to being single with kids," he said. "I had to take on the role of disciplinarian instead of fun uncle."

He also took on the role of Scout parent. Eric and Ryan were already in Scouting, and Quandt wanted to be sure they remained in the program. "They had to give up one activity, but they weren't given the choice of whether or not they wanted to drop out of Cub Scouts," he said.

Quandt saw in Scouting something he didn't see in other youth programs. "Scouting is going to help develop who they are," he said, not just teach them specific skills as in sports. Moreover, he said, "it's people that share common values through Scouting, so that's always good."

Mondonedo tells the story of one Scout in her troop who was being raised by his single mom. Perhaps out of guilt over her divorce, the mom overindulged her son, giving him everything he wanted and expecting little in return. Then he signed up for a 10-day trip to Korea with Mondonedo's troop.

"It was really rough for him to have to carry a big backpack all over the place and to be alone and to have to figure out if he was going to shower," she said. "Being away for ten days in another country was really, really significant. I think that his being a Scout will have a huge impact on him long term."

Brian Miller, the Arkansas Scoutmaster who befriended the Guerrero family at Philmont, recently intervened with a single mom whose son was getting in trouble at school. The mom's first reaction was to ground the boy from everything fun, including Scouting, but Miller respectfully disagreed. "I explained how Scouting shouldn't be looked at as something that's taken away like a sporting event or a Gameboy, that the values Scouting is trying to teach actually work for the positive," he said.

The mom relented, allowing her son to continue in Scouting. That gave Miller a chance to counsel with the boy about his behavior—and to show the mom a different approach to parenting.

A month later, Miller could report success. "In the last month, he hasn't gotten in trouble at school. He's doing better at home as far as minding and not getting in trouble," Miller said. "He has made a drastic turnaround in his attitude and his behavior."

Learning Parenting Skills

Brian Miller's success in helping a struggling single mom deal with her son becomes even more impressive when you realize that Miller is not a parent himself. A former Scout, he first became a Scout leader when he was stationed on an Army base in Korea. "I'd been there a month and was trying to figure out what to do in my free time, and I actually heard a radio announcement," he said. "I hadn't found anything else to do, and I had experience in Scouting, so I figured I'd get started."

Miller continued his involvement when he transferred to Fort Riley, Kansas, and then when he left the Army and moved to Arkansas. Today, he's a firefighter and a substitute teacher—and a student in a school of parenting called Scouting.

"It's letting me experience different scenarios that might play out," he said. "It's giving me a view of what kinds of things to expect and what kinds of things a kid of my own might try to get away with."

As Miller learns parenting skills on the job, he often recalls lessons his Scoutmaster, Mark Krigbaum, taught.

"He wasn't the type of person that was going to let you cut corners," he said. As a result, Miller insists that his Scouts show proficiency before he'll sign them off on advancement requirements.

If that sounds like the sort of parenting skill that gets passed down from father to son, it is. Krigbaum, Miller said, "was more like a father figure since I didn't really have one growing up. He was somebody I could look to and think, 'Someday I want to be that kind of person.'"

Today, Miller is that kind of person. And he's teaching a new generation of Scouts to be that kind of person, too.

Like Miller, Keith Gehlhausen became a Scout leader before he became a parent. An Eagle Scout from Troop 312 in Evansville, Ind., Gehlhausen served his old troop as an assistant Scoutmaster whenever he was home from college. In 1995, less than a year after graduation, he was asked to take over as Scoutmaster. By working with other people's children in Scouting, Gehlhausen learned skills that no parenting manual could teach. "The experiences that I had to draw on as a parent were those that I had working with Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts," he said.

Gehlhausen became a parent four years after becoming Scoutmaster. That year, he married his troop's advancement chair, a single mother with three children. Since then, the family has been extensively involved in Scouting, participating in high-adventure trips and working together on Scout training courses.

As Gehlhausen looks at his kids, all of whom are now in college or beyond, he sees the cycle repeating. "Now that they've moved beyond just being the receiver of information or the learner, they're the ones that are having to deal with kids—and finding out ways to understand them, be their friend or the authority figure, teach them, influence them, whatever," he said. "When it's their turn to be a parent down the road, they're going to have some experience to draw on as well."

Some of those experiences will undoubtedly involve working with overprotective parents and teaching them by example that it's okay to let their kids try new things even if it means they'll occasionally fail.

Veteran Boy Scout leader Gordon Stiefel of Chicago often tells the story of the couple who didn't want to let their son attend summer camp because he didn't know how to swim. When the boy insisted, they gave in—but signed him up for $600 swimming lessons ahead of time. The swimming lessons didn't work, however, so the parents remained worried.

Stiefel—always thinking of ways to get parents involved in Scouting—had an idea. "If you're that concerned," he told the father, "why don't you come up with me? Come with me, and you'll both get captured by the magic of Scout camp."

The father wasn't convinced, but he tagged along anyway. The son signed up for the camp's swimming classes and again began learning how to swim. Then came Thursday.

Stiefel recalled what happened that day. "The dad and I were sitting in the site doing important work called playing pinochle, and the Scout comes running up the hill and says, 'Mr. Stiefel, Mr. Stiefel, quick, quick! I made beginner! They're gonna let me try to make swimmer!'" Stiefel said.

Deciding to have a little fun—and to prove a point—Stiefel marched down to the waterfront with the Scout and his dad in tow. Approaching the waterfront director, whom he'd known for twenty years, Stiefel

asked why the camp was bestowing beginner status on Scouts who hadn't passed the test.

Almost before the waterfront director could reply, the Scout jumped in the water and repeated the beginner test for Stiefel and his dad. When the test was over, the dad looked over at Stiefel and said, "I don't believe it. This is magic."

Magic did happen that day—but not just in the water. Through the Scouting program, a father discovered his son's true capabilities and become a better parent as a result.

Byron Gilbert also became a better parent through his participation in Scouting. Gilbert's son, Stephen, is legally blind yet participated fully in Cub Scouting and Boy Scouting, eventually becoming an Eagle Scout. Given Stephen's disability, it was only natural that Gilbert would tag along on Scout trips.

On one of those outings, when Stephen was a Cub Scout, a couple of boys were swinging on a log that had been tied between two trees. As Gilbert watched, one boy lost his grip and fell several feet to the ground, where he lay motionless. Not surprisingly, Gilbert panicked and rushed off to find the injured boy's father.

The father wasn't very worried, however. He calmly checked on his son and then said to Gilbert, "Don't worry about it. He's fine. He does that all the time."

The incident made Gilbert realize that, as the father of a disabled Scout, he had become hypersensitive to the dangers kids face, forgetting that bumps, bruises, and bug bites are a natural part of growing up. "I think Scouting helped me to lower my sensitivity levels," he said. "Kids don't break as easily as I thought."

Addressing potential ScoutParents, Gilbert offered a simple message: "Let the program change you, because it changes the adults, too. There are a lot of rudder changes that happen because of Boy Scouts. I have always called Scouting my rudder change."

School psychologist—and long-time Scouter—Ginger McClure offered a similar message. "Parents get feedback from teachers at school about how their kid is doing, and it's often very negative," she said. "Sometimes they get negative feedback in Scouting, too. But when they become involved and participate in a Scout unit—and especially if they can see another Scout working with their kid—they get a different perspective on things."

Scouting Behind Bars

Few parents need a new perspective and a rudder change more than the women at the Washington Corrections Center for Women in Gig Harbor, Wash. The 75-acre facility houses more than 700 female inmates, and it sponsors a variety of programs designed to ensure that those women don't come back.

One of those programs, the Children of Incarcerated Parents program, brings Scouting right into the prison. Inmates who are mothers and have committed no major infractions are invited to participate. Once a month, they gather to plan a Scout meeting, much like moms on the outside would do. On the next visiting day, they put on that meeting for their sons.

At a recent October meeting, for example, the theme was Halloween safety. The moms taught their sons how to stay safe while trick-or-treating and what to do if an older child tries to steal their Halloween candy. "We talked to them about bullying, and we did little skits," said a mom named Andrea, who led the meeting that month.

Andrea explained that the moms rotate leadership. "One mom usually goes through the books and comes up with the basic idea of what we want the Scout meeting to be about, and then everyone else adds their input on it," she said. "It works. It really works."

Of course, the focus of the program—as in the rest of Scouting—is the kids. As prison worker Dee Craig explained, many of the inmates are single mothers, so their kids end up without adequate support. "Usually they go and stay with grandparents who often are marginalized financially, don't have the energy for children, and are in a less-than-desirable environment themselves," she said.

But the mothers are real beneficiaries, too, according to the Rev. Jimmy James, the Boy Scout executive who helped start the program. "They have the opportunity to not only be leaders with their boys, but they have an opportunity to interact and develop a mother/son bonding relationship that they normally would not have," he said.

Prison worker Willie James Craig has seen short-term changes in the women who participate. "They stop getting infractions; their behavior changes," she said. "Sometimes they will tell me, 'If I didn't get to see my son, I'd be fighting and doing everything else like anybody else.'"

But she also hopes for longer-term results. "What we hope will happen is that the mothers can take what

they learn here in this Boy Scout program and transfer that to the community. Hopefully with the training and the process they've been involved in, they won't reoffend and come back here and see me again."

Perhaps an inmate named Tina best described the program's impact: "This program has been an absolute blessing because it allows me the time to spend with my child in a positive way, not just in the visiting room with other visitors, but with other moms who care. I think it's very important because it keeps my relationship with my son strong. It shows my son that he's more important than hanging out with my friends or stuff like that. Being in this program, has been a blessing, just an absolute blessing."

Finding Like-minded Adults

Parenting—especially for single parents or those who live far from traditional support structures—can be a lonely pursuit. When you're busy with your kids all the time, it can be hard to make connections with other adults. Coworkers are there, of course, but they don't always share the same interests and values.

Scouting is different. Adults who are involved in Scouting, whether as parents or volunteers, naturally have much in common. They may come from different faith traditions and ethnic backgrounds and they may pull different levers on election day, but they are united by their commitment to young people. As a result, parents who get involved in Scouting often develop friendships that are at least as strong as those their kids form.

When Greg Quandt moved from Minnesota to Texas to care for his orphaned nephews a few years ago, he found himself without a network of adult friends. Once he'd settled into a parenting routine, his parents encouraged him to reach out to other adults in two places. One was the church; the other was Scouting. "As far as my being able to interact with other adults, Scouting has been good for me because at least I'm going to troop meetings and den meetings and interacting with other adults," he said.

Finding like-minded adults was especially important for Nancy Becker and her husband, John, when they relocated from Illinois to England. Their first priority, however, was to find a Boy Scout troop for their sons, T.J. and Scott, who'd been in Scouting back in the U.S. They quickly found Troop 301 in Surrey, which served expatriate families like theirs. "Luckily for us it was an absolutely fabulous troop," Nancy said. "It was really great for a couple of reasons. Number one, the kids could continue with the program. Number two, it was a way for me to meet lifelines of people, people who had the same values and wanted the right things for their kids and were willing to work for them."

The Beckers had been Scout leaders back in Illinois, and they continued their involvement in England, John as an assistant Scoutmaster and Nancy as a troop committee member (and eventually troop committee chair). "it was a huge, huge part of our life there," Nancy said.

As Scout leaders, the Beckers naturally attended meetings of Troop 301, but they weren't the only parents on hand at meetings. "We all went on Monday night. All the adults went," Nancy said. "Now a lot of us had jobs— teaching a merit badge or making an announcement or whatever—but honestly a bunch of us just went to be there and be with each other because we were a family."

Like a family, the adults of Troop 301 supported each other. For example, when John's work with Kraft Foods sent him back to the U.S. for a couple of years, Troop 301 became Nancy's support network. And she often returned the favor. "I could just look in one or another of my friends' eyes, and we would just walk up and give each other a hug," Nancy said. "Either I was really going through it or somebody else was."

After their sons graduated from high school, the Beckers moved again, briefly back to the United States and then to Brisbane, Australia, where they still live. Although they're 10,000 miles removed from England, they remain in touch with their friends in Troop 301. "I'll bet I've gotten 12 Christmas cards from people that I knew in the UK, and I'll bet ten of them were people in the Boy Scout troop," Nancy said. "God bless these people that went out and bought extra postage and sent them all the way to Australia."

She was grateful for the cards but not at all surprised. After all, that's just what families do.

Impacting Life Beyond Scouting

Involvement in Scouting affects more than just the number of Christmas cards a volunteer receives. In fact, it can impact his or her whole life. That's been the case with Patty Chappel, a Cub Scout leader with Pack 2 in Columbus, Ga.

Chappel has been involved in Cub Scouting since her 15-year-old son was in the third grade. "It just seemed like I had a knack for it," she said. "I can relate to children. I'm very good at crafts."

She's good at more than just crafts, however. Over the years, she has become a very effective recruiter and organizer, and her well-planned den meetings set the example for other leaders in her Cub Scout pack.

Along the way, Chappel has developed the skills and confidence she needs to take on projects beyond Cub Scouting. A few years ago, for example, she started a children's worship program at her church, St. Matthew Lutheran Church, where Pack 2 meets. "Scouting actually helped me to start my children's church program," she said.

But Chappel's biggest challenge may lie in the future. So many people have told her she should be a teacher that she's now considering pursuing an education degree at Columbus State University.

Although she would earn a diploma for the effort, Chappel would approach college with the same attitude she approaches Scouting: "I don't do it for me," she said. "I do it for the kids."

How many people's lives have taken such drastic turns because of Scouting? While there's no way to know for sure, the Boy Scouts of America commissioned a survey a few years ago to measure the impact of Scouting on volunteers.

Partnering with Harris Interactive, the BSA surveyed more than 16,000 Scouting volunteers from across the country. The results were impressive. The study revealed that, while volunteers don't become involved in Scouting to improve themselves, that's exactly what ends up happening to many of them. A significant number of survey respondents said Scouting had had a positive impact on their personal values and traits, communications skills, relationship skills, survival and outdoor skills, and management and leadership skills.

Oftentimes, those skills translate into other areas of volunteers' lives. Consider these comments made by survey respondents:

"You learn how to work with people in Scouting—how to work as a team with other volunteers."

"I've joined other organizations because I have learned so much about leadership from Scouting."

"Volunteering helped me to be open and more willing to listen to what other people have to say."

"I enjoy immensely the bonding that I've had with other adult leaders."

"I learned some great leadership skills that I have been able to take from Scouting to work."

Scouting doesn't just benefit boys. It benefits everyone who wears the uniform. That's why many employers let their workers attend summer camp and Wood Badge training without taking vacation days. That's why many Scouters remain in the program long after their children graduate. And that's why you may find that you gain as much from Scouting as your kids do. All you have to do is say yes to Scouting, yes to your kids, and yes to yourself.

Selected Findings of the Volunteer Outcomes Study

Scout leaders who participated in the Volunteer Outcomes Study reported these changes in their lives:

- Becoming a better citizen: 90% of respondents
- Developing patience with other people: 69%
- Adding more fun to their lives: 85%
- Building self-esteem: 63%
- Becoming better at listening to others: 54%
- Developing the ability to teach children: 68%
- Building friendship with adults: 73%
- Becoming a better manager or supervisor: 74%
- Becoming a better employee: 66%
- Learning to organize groups of people: 57%
- Learning to plan and manage projects: 54%
- Learning to plan for unexpected events: 53%

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 88 percent of respondents said being a Scout leader had made them better parents, 71 percent said they'd become better examples to their own children, and 67 percent said they'd built closer bonds with their own children through Scouting.

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What Parents Can Do for Scouting

Having read this far, you know quite a bit about Scouting and should have a pretty good idea of what Scouting can do for your son, for your family, and for you. But you may still be wondering what you can do for Scouting. You may even be wondering how you can get involved if you're not an Eagle Scout and a natural-born leader who has limitless energy, plenty of spare time, and a pickup truck in which to haul Scout gear.

Scouting is blessed with plenty of people who fit that description, of course, but it's blessed with many, many more who don't. For every Eagle Scout, there's a mom who was never involved in Scouting before. For every natural-born leader, there's a dad who would rather work quietly behind the scenes. For every leader with lots of time and energy, there's a single parent who has little of either. And for every volunteer with a pickup truck, there's someone who arrives at Scout meetings on a bike or a bus.

All these different people serve Scouting because there are so many different ways to serve. In this chapter, we'll tell you what some of those ways are and what they require. First, however, we'll explain how Scouting is organized at the local level and introduce some terms (indicated in *italics)* that are helpful to know.

Of Packs and Troops and Crews (and Teams and Ships)

Across America today, nearly three million young people participate in Scouting through more than 120,000 local Cub Scout packs, Boy Scout troops, Varsity Scout teams, and Venturing crews. (These groups are known collectively as *Scouting units*.) The various levels of Scouting share the same aims—teaching citizenship, developing character, and fostering physical and mental fitness—but they use different methods to achieve those aims.

Cub Scouting is a year-round program for boys who are in the first through fifth grades. The program emphasizes family involvement, and it emphasizes activity. Everything in Cub Scouting is designed to have the boys doing things, whether it's hiking around the neighborhood, building a pinewood derby car, or playing an energetic game. All these activities relate to the ten purposes of Cub Scouting: character development, spiritual growth, good citizenship, sportsmanship and fitness, family understanding, respectful relationships, personal achievement, friendly service, fun and adventure, and preparation for Boy Scouting.

A Cub Scout *pack* includes boys in each grade and is divided into *dens*: Tiger Cubs (first grade), Wolves (second grade), Bears (third grade), and Webelos Scouts (fourth and fifth grades). (The word "Webelos" is short for "**We**'ll **Be Lo**yal **S**couts.") Dens typically meet separately each week, while the pack meets as a group once a month. Fun activities occur throughout the year, including the pinewood derby, family campouts, Cub Scout day camp, and Webelos Scout resident camp.

Boy Scouting, the oldest part of the BSA, is an outdoor-focused program for boys ages 11 through 17. (Boys who are 10 may join if they have received Cub Scouting's Arrow of Light Award or have finished the fifth grade.) Boy Scout *troops* meet weekly throughout the year and participate in monthly outings that range from day hikes to multi-troop *camporees* to high-adventure experiences at one of the BSA's three national high-adventure bases. (The bases are the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, the Northern Tier High Adventure Bases along the U.S-Canada border in Minnesota, and the Florida Sea Base in the Florida Keys.)

Each Boy Scout troop consists of one or more *patrols* of roughly eight Scouts each. An elected *patrol leader* leads each patrol, while an elected *senior patrol leader* leads the whole troop. These and the many other youth leadership positions in Boy Scouting—quartermaster, scribe, instructor, librarian, and the like—illustrate the program's emphasis on developing youth leaders.

In fact, leadership development is one of the eight methods of Boy Scouting. The others are ideals, patrols, outdoor programs, advancement, association with other adults, personal growth, and the uniform.

Varsity Scouting is a variation on Boy Scouting that serves boys ages 14 through 17. The program has five fields of emphasis: advancement, high adventure/sports, personal development, service, and special programs and events.

As the name implies, Varsity Scouting uses sports terminology and activities to achieve its aims. A Varsity Scout unit is called a *team*, the primary adult leader is the *coach*, and the primary youth leader is the *captain*. Just like Boy Scout troops are divided into patrols, larger Varsity Scout teams are divided into *squads*.

Venturing, which serves young men and women ages 14 through 20, is the newest member of the Scouting family and the only coeducational branch. Though relatively new, it builds on a tradition of

special programming for senior Scouts that dates to 1912. Venturing provides positive experiences to help young people mature and to prepare them to become responsible and caring adults, and it uses seven methods to achieve that goal: leadership, group activities, adult association, recognition, ideals, high adventure, and teaching others.

Unlike the other phases of Scouting, Venturing offers a highly flexible program, and each Venturing *crew* has a unique personality. Some crews focus on high adventure activities like backpacking, while others emphasize sports, arts, or hobbies. A crew that's affiliated with a church youth group might focus on social activities and faith development, serving as the youth group's outreach arm. *Sea Scouting*, which focuses on boating, falls under the Venturing umbrella. Sea Scout units are called *ships* instead of crews.

The BSA and Its Chartered Organizations

There are more than 120,000 Scouting units in the United States, but few of them belong to the Boy Scouts of America. Instead, they belong to local organizations that use the Scouting program under their own leadership to serve the children, youth, and families in their organizations and in their communities.

Some of these *chartered organizations*, groups like the United Methodist Church and Rotary International, have been involved with Scouting for nearly a hundred years. Others, such as the Islamic Society of North America and Parents without Partners, reflect how America has evolved in recent decades. All share the BSA's commitment to young people.

Working through these chartered organizations is one of the secrets of Scouting's success. Because local organizations own and operate Scouting units, Scouting remains a local solution to local problems—despite its global reach. Because Scouting units can count on the BSA's programs and their chartered organizations' resources, they have twice the institutional strength backing them up.

The chartered organization structure offers a true win-win-win scenario. Chartered organizations win because Scout units raise their profile in the community and brings new families through their doors. The BSA wins because chartered organizations help it achieve its mission. And, most importantly, the individual Scouts win because they get to participate in all the fun and learning that Scouting can provide.

Perhaps a single example will suffice. Like many venerable civic organizations, the Fraternal Order of Eagles has struggled in recent decades to attract younger members. That's why Cub Scout Pack 1047 has been a godsend to the Eagles of Aerie No. 1047 in Gilberts, Ill. Chartered to the Eagles, the pack recruited 36 boys and 15 adults in its first week alone, supporting the group's goal of serving its community, according to Joshua Baker, a district executive with the Three Fires Council.

But the pack has done more than that. By introducing dozens of families to the Eagles, it has helped the group bridge a yawning generation gap. "It really got the organization excited, especially since a lot of these leaders are Generation Xers and don't (typically) volunteer," Baker said.

The intergenerational interaction has continued to grow. "The club's starting to get involved, and they want to start a Scout troop," Baker said. "They've already had a few members sign up to be on the committee, which is going to be beneficial to the parents involved. It has really created a community atmosphere."

When an organization agrees to charter Scouting, it commits to do two things. The first is to provide an adequate place for the unit to meet. The second is to select adult leaders to work with the youth. Some are members of the organization, some are parents, and some are both.

The first person a new chartered organization selects is typically the *chartered organization representative*. He or she is a member of the organization and serves as a liaison between the organization and its Scouting units. The COR approves Scout leaders, promotes interaction between the organization and its units, and makes sure the units are following the policies of the BSA and the organization.

Two Sets of Leaders

Each unit—whether a pack, a troop, a team, a crew, or a ship—has two groups of leaders, although only one may be visible to the casual observer. The first group includes the unit leader and other volunteers who work directly with the Scouts. The other group is the unit committee. Understanding what these various volunteers do will help you determine where best to serve.

Let's begin with the unit committee, which combines the functions of a board of directors and a parents' auxiliary. This group consists of at least three members, including the committee chair, although the most successful committees have seven or more members.

The unit committee is responsible for the unit's administrative functions, including record keeping and correspondence, finances, advancement,

training, public relations, activities, equipment, and membership and registration. Typically, a committee member takes on each of these functions, although some volunteers serve as members at large.

In most cases, the unit committee meets once a month, so committee participation works well for busy parents. Of course, a lot of work also takes place between meetings.

Direct-contact leaders typically devote more time to Scouting. The key direct contact leader is the *Cubmaster*, *Scoutmaster*, Varsity *coach*, Venturing *advisor*, or Sea Scout *skipper*. He or she is responsible for the overall program of the unit, including both meetings and activities. How duties are assigned varies from one type of unit to another.

In Cub Scouting, the Cubmaster, usually supported by one or more assistants, runs the monthly pack meetings, which bring together all the families in the pack. He or she also coordinates the efforts of the *den leaders*, who (along with their assistants) run the weekly den meetings.

The other levels of Scouting rely more on youth leadership. In Boy Scouting, for example, one of the Scoutmaster's primary jobs is to train youth leaders, especially the senior patrol leader, who is the troop's top elected Scout. Depending on its size, a Boy Scout troop will have several assistant Scoutmasters who have specific responsibilities. For example, each patrol might have an adult assigned to it, or an adult might advise each of the other youth leaders. Varsity Scouting, Venturing, and Sea Scouting use adult leaders in much the same way.

If the distinction between direct-contact leaders and committee members is confusing, think about your child's school. The principal, teachers, and other staff members are analogous to the unit leader and his or her assistants. Supporting their efforts is the PTA (or a similar parent group), which functions somewhat like a unit committee.

The Registration Process

Although you don't have to be an Eagle Scout, an accomplished outdoorsman, a talented craftsperson, or a born leader to be a Scouting volunteer, you do have to meet certain standards. You must be 21 years of age (18 for a few positions), agree to abide by the Scout Oath and Law, and subscribe to the BSA's Declaration of Religious Principles. (This statement acknowledges the BSA's nonsectarian religious foundation.) All positions within the BSA are open to both men and women.

Also, you must complete an adult volunteer application, which must be approved by the unit committee chair, the chartered organization representative, and the local Scout executive or his designee. As part of the application process, the BSA conducts a criminal background check on all potential leaders, helping to ensure a safe environment for its youth members.

Along those lines, all new leaders are expected to complete *Youth Protection Training* within their first 90 days of service. This course, which is available in person and online, teaches leaders how to protect Scouts from child abuse and how to report cases of abuse that they discover.

The Role of Parents

We've said that each unit has two sets of leaders, but there's actually a third set that's also critically important: those parents who aren't also leaders. Just as teachers can't be completely successful without parental support, so too do Scout leaders rely heavily on parental involvement. That's especially true in Cub Scouting, which by its very nature is a family-oriented program, but it's true at other levels as well.

Throughout Scouting, parents drive on outings, bring cupcakes to meetings, stuff newsletters in envelopes, run one-time events like fundraisers, and handle a host of other jobs that make the unit function smoothly. In Cub Scouting, parents can also sign off their sons' achievements for various awards, which are then confirmed by the den leader. (That's not the case in other programs, although parents with specialized knowledge often assist with advancement activities. For example, a Boy Scout parent might serve as a *merit badge counselor* for a badge related to his or her career or hobby.)

Scouting Stool

To understand the role of parents, direct-contact leaders, committee members, and the chartered organization, consider this stool. If you take away a leg, the stool will remain standing, but it'll be pretty wobbly. Take away two legs, and the stool will soon come crashing to the ground.

Becoming a ScoutParent

You can emphasize your commitment to your son's Scouting experience by joining the ranks of *ScoutParents*—parents and mentors who have made a special commitment to support their sons in Scouting. ScoutParents formally promise to do what good parents have always done: to put their kids first in their lives.

To become a ScoutParent, check the box on your son's youth application and notify your unit committee chair or ScoutParents unit coordinator.

As a ScoutParent, there are many things you can do to support Scouting, including:

- Performing an occasional task to assist the unit's program
- Participating directly with your Scout
- Going to and observing Scout meetings
- Assisting with outings
- Supporting the program financially
- Coaching your Scout's advancement and the earning of recognitions
- Influencing your Scout's continued participation

Your ScoutParents unit coordinator or committee chair will probably have additional ideas. You can also find more information on the ScoutParents website: www.scoutparents.org.

The ScoutParents Unit Coordinator

Many Scouting units have a designated ScoutParents unit coordinator. This is a member of the unit leadership whose job is to welcome, inform, and involve the parents of the unit's members. ScoutParents unit coordinators orient parents about the Scouting program, keep them updated on the unit's program and their child's involvement, and assign them jobs throughout the year.

Melissa Mossbarger fills that role for Pack 263 in Franklin, N.C. Over the last few years, she has successfully convinced many of the pack's parents that BSA doesn't stand for "Babysitters of America" and that they should abandon what she calls the "dump-and-run mentality."

Recognizing that many parents don't have the time to be deeply involved in Scouting, Mossbarger doesn't ask them to do too much—or to do things that don't match their abilities. "I don't want somebody to step completely out of their comfort zone and be miserable—and at some point make their child miserable and then leave Scouting," she said. "It's my goal to find them their spot in their comfort zone—and maybe even just a tad outside of it."

Mossbarger does far more than just serve as a one-woman human-resources department, however. "ScoutParents is not about filling slots as much as it is about making parents realize the importance of family—of the fact that your child needs you there and that your other children need to be a part of whatever you're doing as a family," she said.

According to Cubmaster Fred List, Mossbarger's work has paid off. "I definitely see a difference in the boys whose parents are involved versus those that aren't," List said. "The boys whose parents aren't involved generally don't stick with it."

The pack is stronger as well since more adults are participating. And those who are participating are learning a valuable life lesson—as are their sons. "it takes many bricks to make a building, and no one brick is unimportant," List said.

Deciding How to Serve

Some parents, especially those with Scouting experience, know exactly how they want to serve their son's unit. Others need more information and guidance. This chart may help. Find your situation in the left column, then look in the right column for potential service opportunities.

Time Available	**Ways to Serve**
Up to one hour per month	Special projects
Up to one hour per week	Unit committee
One to three hours per week	Assistant unit leader
Four or more hours per week	Unit leader
Weekends only	Outing leader or driver
Summers only	Summer camp leader or driver
Variable by time of year	Special projects

Prefer to Work . . .	**Ways to Serve**
With my son	ScoutParent
With my son and his close friends	Den leader or assistant den leader
	Patrol advisor
With young people	Direct-contact leader
	Venturing consultant
With adults	Unit committee
	Chartered organization representative
With both young people and adults	Unit leader
	Assistant unit leader
Alone	Unit committee position such as treasurer
On a team	Committee chair
	Unit leader
	Assistant unit leader

Skills	**Ways to Serve**
Bookkeeping/finance	Treasurer
	Advancement chair
	Fund-raising coordinator
Camping/outdoors	Scoutmaster or assistant Scoutmaster
	Coach or assistant coach
	Advisor or associate advisor
	Skipper or mate
	Outdoors/activities coordinator
	Merit badge counselor
Crafts and hobbies	Den leader or assistant den leader
	Merit badge counselor

Faith development	*Unit chaplain*
	Religious emblems counselor
Leadership	*Unit leader*
	Assistant unit leader
	Committee chair
Leadership development	*Pack trainer*
	Training coordinator
	Unit leader
Organization	*Committee chair*
	Equipment coordinator
	ScoutParent unit coordinator
	Transportation coordinator
Recordkeeping	*Secretary*
Sales and marketing	*Public relations coordinator*
	Fund-raising coordinator
	Friends of Scouting (council fund-raising) chair
	ScoutParent unit coordinator
Strategic planning	*Committee chair*
	Chartered organization representative
Teaching	*Unit leader or assistant unit leader*
	Merit badge counselor
	Venturing consultant

A Call to Action

Picture a piece of string that's 18 feet long. It's far too long to stretch out, so imagine sliding it through your hands. Feel it on your palms as it moves along, sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly, until you finally let it go.

Those 18 feet of string represent the years when you have the power to mold your child's future, to help him become the person you've always dreamed he would be. At one end of the string is that wonderful day when you brought your son home from the hospital. At the other is that frightful day when he'll head off to college or a job or the military.

How many feet of string have already slid through your hands? How many years have already passed you by? However many years are left, you can make the most of them through Scouting.

For a hundred years, Scouting has been instilling values in young people and reinforcing those values in adults. For a hundred years, Scouting has been teaching leadership and life skills to both kids and their parents. For a hundred years, Scouting has been strengthening families and communities alike. For a hundred years, Scouting has been opening its doors to parents who only want the best for their children.

And now the door is open to you. Will you enroll your son in Scouting? Will you become involved yourself? Will you band together with the Boy Scouts of America to make our great nation even greater?

All you have to say is yes. Scout's honor!

Notes

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