

# 2009 National Meeting Boy Scouts of America

## Report to the Northern Star Council

*Submitted by Jim Schuster, Many Waters District, Troop 89*

### 1. Summary

- a) Through a bi-annual program, 44 “Nationally Distinguished Scoutmasters” were identified from throughout the country and invited to participate in part of the 2009 National Meeting in Orlando, FL on May 21-23.
- b) Three invitees were from the upper Midwest: One each from Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota.
- c) The Scoutmaster agenda included:
  - May 21
    - Arrival / check-in
    - Visit vendor / BSA exhibits
    - Distinguished Scoutmaster Orientation dinner (with spouses)
  - May 22
    - Americanism breakfast (with spouses)
    - BSA Annual Business Meeting – open session
    - Scoutmaster-only luncheon with national committee members
    - Scoutmaster focus group working session
    - Closing banquet (with spouse) – for Silver Buffalo presentation
  - May 23
    - Distinguished Scoutmaster Breakfast (with spouses)
    - “Meet the Man”: Private roundtable with Bob Mazzuca & Tico Perez
      - a. Bob Mazzuca is the Chief Scout Executive
      - b. Tico Perez is the BSA National Commissioner
    - Group photo
    - Closing luncheon for Scoutmasters & spouses

### 2. Key Items

- a) Start playing offense
  - One of the key items presented by Bob Mazzuca and Tico Perez is that BSA has let others define it for too long.
  - The Supreme Court decision has run its course – it is time BSA once again starts to define itself and remind the public that we’re still around – and delivering the Promise of Scouting to young people throughout the nation.
  - Scoutmasters applauded the organization for once again “starting to play offense”.
- b) Own the brand / protect the brand
  - All Scouting publicity should align with one or more of the following enduring elements of Scouting:
    - a. Leadership
    - b. Achievement
    - c. Character

- d. Service
  - e. Outdoors
  - BSA is launching a “Words to Live By” campaign that focuses on the 12 points of the Scout Law
  - Television Show is being developed: “Are you tougher than a Boy Scout?”
- c) Eagle Scouts
- In 2008, BSA recognized 52,025 new Eagles.
  - On March 8, 2009, the 2 millionth Eagle Scout was recognized.
    - a. Scout from Lakeville, MN.
    - b. I met the Scout and his family several times.
    - c. This is a major commitment for the family, as the Eagle will take part in the Rose Parade in CA, ring the bell on the NYSE on 2/8/10, and will take part in interviews and will be on national television.
- d) New Items
- New Merit Badges: Scuba & Geo-caching
  - New Boy Scout Handbook will become available on 8/1/09
- e) No Child left indoors / fight childhood obesity
- One of the main areas of focus for BSA deals with the issue of childhood obesity.
  - More info will be forthcoming about this, but in the meantime, every unit should start preparing for increased focus in this area.
  - Getting boys up and off the couch is key. Scouting should provide interesting and enticing opportunities for young people to experience the natural world around them.
  - BSA version of “no child left behind” is “no child left indoors”.
- f) Embrace technology
- Bob Mazzuca and Tico Perez admonished Scoutmasters to stop banning technology from campouts and start encouraging it.
  - The thought is “if we exclude technology from campouts, the boys attached to the technology will stop taking part in the campouts.
  - The new Boy Scout Handbook and merit badge books will soon be fully-downloadable, so if the boys have their iPod, they’ll always have access to key reference materials.
  - The new uniform shirt has a sleeve pocket for iPods / cell phones.
  - Most Scoutmasters currently ban electronics from campouts, so this will be a significant policy shift for most units.
  - There are ways to encourage “acceptable” use of technology and discourage use at times when the boys should be experiencing nature or building relationships with other Scouts.
  - ***Concern from the Northern Star Council perspective:*** In NSC, we’ve aligned ourselves with Dr. David Walsh, who advocates “minimizing screen time” for young people throughout the year – especially during the summer. Embracing and encouraging technology the way Bob Mazzuca described seems to be in conflict with the advice we’re getting from Dr. Walsh.

- g) Scouting is an investment in the future – not just another activity
- Bob Mazzuca said we do a disservice to the program if we try to position Scouting as an alternative to organized sports or other activities into which parents may register their sons.
  - Need to “sell” Scouting to parents as an investment into their sons’ future.
  - The reality is that very few boys will become professional athletes, but all Scouts will gain skills that will serve them well throughout their adolescence and in the adult world.
- h) Focus Groups
- A key part of my participation in the National Meeting was a break-out session where all Distinguished Scoutmasters were divided into focus groups to tackle a broadly-defined issue.
  - Separate focus groups were established to address the following topics:
    - a. Time
    - b. Retention
    - c. Advancement
    - d. Recruitment
    - e. Training
  - Focus Groups will meet for the next 12-18 months to develop recommendations pertaining to their topic.
    - a. Recommendations from these focus groups have a very real chance of affecting official BSA policy / practices, so this is a rare opportunity to directly impact the national organization.
    - b. I’m a member of the “Time” focus group.
- i) Feedback about BSA gear (Uniform & catalog items)
- Met with a representative of the supply division.
    - a. He invited feedback, including comments after the meeting.
    - b. Comments were generally supportive of the new uniform fit / quality.
    - c. Criticism about the lack of a retail presence in some locations (Gulf coast)
    - d. Reiteration that everything is available to everyone online.
    - e. Pen sleeve in left breast pocket is not popular / reduces use of the pocket
    - f. Request for better-fitting uniform shirts for female leaders.
  - **Opportunity for units in Northern Star Council:** The representative invited comments and feedback. It is possible that feedback from the Distinguished Scoutmaster group may get more attention than other feedback. I’d be happy to solicit and consolidate feedback from throughout the Council if appropriate. (If approved, let’s discuss logistics.)
  - Q&A with Bob Mazzuca & Tico Perez
    - a. Question about why uniform shirts are not made in the USA
      - There no longer are any manufacturers in the USA to produce the shirts with the desired quality & price point here in the USA.
    - b) Question about why uniforms aren’t available in retail outlets such as Sears or Wal-Mart – either on the shelves or through a kiosk
      - Decisions about shelf space are made by the chains -- not by BSA.

- In order to preserve the profit margins stores would expect, price of uniforms would need to go up – which could make uniforms more price-prohibitive for some potential Scouts.
- Every home with a computer has its own kiosk, as all gear can be ordered online from [www.scoutstuff.org](http://www.scoutstuff.org).

j) Additional Q&A with Bob Mazzuca & Tico Perez

- OA Cultural Sensitivity: Question about how some OA ceremony teams reinforce negative stereotypes
  - a. Tico explained that the National OA leaders have met with every recognized tribe in the USA and have reviewed the approved practices & ceremonies to ensure acceptability.
  - b. Susan Freemon – one of the event co-hosts (who wrote part of the ceremony guide) was present and pursued additional feedback for follow-up action.
  - c. Documentation about OA Ceremony guidelines are very clear that face paint should not be used in ceremonies.
- Height/Weight Guidelines for Leaders: Question about how the “30 minutes from medical help” guide will greatly restrict the outdoor opportunities for Scouts if their leaders can’t participate.
  - a. Bob Mazzuca explained that the BSA organization is simply tired of having to explain or comfort Scouts who were forced to provide care for an out-of-shape leader who had a medical emergency in a backcountry setting.
  - b. This policy is simply basic risk management. While thinner individuals have medical emergencies too, the odds are greater for those with poor height/weight ratios.
  - c. Clarification: the guide is “30 minutes from medical help” – not “30 minutes from a hospital”. Hiking on trails with fairly easy access to roads / ambulance service (such as parts of the Appalachian Trail) would not necessarily present a problem.

k) Scoutmaster Networking

- Another personal highlight of the trip was the opportunity to network with other Scoutmasters from around the country.
- It was great to hear how each unit deals with common challenges & opportunities.
  - a. Unit sizes ranged from under 10 to over 120 boys.
    - Average unit size = 45 boys.
    - Average units have 11 ASMs.
    - Troop 89 has 50 boys and 4 ASMs.
  - b. No consistency about Patrols: some have “permanent” Patrols and others have age-specific Patrols. Both work.
  - c. Spousal Involvement: 45% of the Scoutmaster spouses are actively involved in BSA.

# 2009 National Meeting Boy Scouts of America

## Report to Many Waters District

*Submitted by Jim Schuster*

1. Topics for Troops in Many Waters to Consider
  - Contracts with elected leaders
    - a. To enhance the leadership learning for each boy, develop a contract with SPL, ASPL, Patrol Leaders, and other “leadership” positions.
    - b. Contract to include goals and metrics.
  - Expand the application of youth leadership
    - a. Campouts:
      - i. Boys do more active planning about activities for each campout?
      - ii. Boys own the signup sheet? (Scribe?)
      - iii. Boys write the event report? (Historian?)
      - iv. Boys keep track of who brings tents home after campouts? (Quartermaster?)
      - v. Website Updates
        1. Some units have Patrol sites where the Patrol leaders post info. (How would we control / monitor what gets posted?)
  - Games in meetings or at campouts
    - a. Games like “Waddle relay” will help reinforce Scout skills and allow the boys to do improved teamwork.
    - b. Could have boys / patrols plan the games
  - NYLT Age – after 8th grade
    - a. Suggestion from National NYLT advisor is to send boys after 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade – not 7<sup>th</sup> – but exceptions are okay.
    - b. Waiting longer may cause us to miss out on encouraging some boys to stay active
  - Recruiting MB Counselors
    - a. One unit has the boys ask adults to be MB counselors, since it is hard to say “no” to an 11 year old.
  - Scheduling SM Conferences & BORs.
    - a. Some units require the boys to schedule at least 24 hours in advance, and they require the boys to do the scheduling via email or over the phone (following a general script).
    - b. The thought behind this is that this prepares the boys to adhere to protocols -- just like they’ll have to do in the adult world.

- Meet Year Round
  - a. Most units – even northern ones – meet year round.
  - b. I'm not a fan, but we should discuss.
  
- Campouts every month
  - a. Most units have a campout – or at least an outdoor event – every month. Should we move to this model instead of clustering our campouts in spring & fall?
  
- Fight Childhood Obesity
  - a. We could update our campout planning guide to include a matrix – with a column for each food group.
  
- Utilize High Adventure Bases
  - a. With Northern Tier in our own backyard, we could reserve a slot and likely fill it without too much trouble.
  - b. Coaching from peers stated that Sea Base is actually the easiest trek, as the guides & staff prepare everything – all the Scouts/Scouters have to do is literally show up.
  
- Website Enhancement
  - a. On their websites, some units keep a chronological of all their completed campouts and other past notable events. If we did something like that, we could use the listing as the place where we link the event reports for each item. (When we have them.)