

OCTOBER – PUTTING THE UNIFORM IN UNIFORMITY

Music Full then Under

AMY: I hear the music, so it must be time for the October CubCast. I'm eager to start this discussion, and I think our listeners will be as well because what Scouter doesn't love a spirited discussion about the uniform?

AARON: This topic reminds me of something I read in the Think and Grin section of *Boys' Life* magazine. Okay. Amy, what kind of clothes do frogs wear?

AMY: I don't know, Aaron. Tell us what kind of clothes do frogs wear?

AARON: Jump suits. Get it? (Laughter) Jump suits. It works perfectly for this show, am I right?

AMY: Yes, very clever. So I'm just going to go ahead and introduce our guest now.

Music Fades

AMY: John Andrews grew up in the Scouting program and was active on camp staffs, the Order of the Arrow, and has been a professional Scouter for 32 years and is currently the Scout executive of the Northern Star Council in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. Welcome to CubCast, John.

JOHN: Thank you. Glad to be here.

AMY: First, let's get established with what we mean by "uniform." Are we talking about just the field uniform or can it mean something else?

JOHN: It depends upon what a den leader or a Cubmaster might establish as practices for their pack. They may have their own T-shirt, or they may use some Cub Scout T-shirts and they may refer to those as a uniform, but of course, typically, there is just the Cub Scout uniform itself.

AARON: And so John, what's the purpose of the Cub Scout uniform?

JOHN: For a boy, its evidence - a tangible, representation of belonging to something. While the boy may not think about this, we certainly know that it's an equalizer. If everyone's wearing that uniform, not only are they all members, but the differences of what a family might be able to afford for clothing or what a person's tastes are or even whether it's clean and not wrinkled, that's made a little bit more equal if everybody's in a Scout uniform.

AMY: So what's the benefits of the boys in the den all dressing the same?

JOHN: I don't know that Scouting has to tell a den or a Cub Scout pack that every one of them does have to dress the same. Certainly, we encourage use of the full uniform, the shirt and the pants and so forth. But lots of variations emerge. If there's a benefit, it would be if it helps build retention and if it helps build excitement on the part of the boys. Otherwise, I don't know that the uniformity carried down to the last detail is that important.

AARON: I kind of think of it like maybe a casual sports pick-up game of basketball. You take one game when all the boys are dressed in their just random whatever clothes they happen to be wearing that day, and then you take another game where the boys are dressed shirts and skins or something like that. Is that, kind of, a valid comparison?

JOHN: It's a great example of the difference between boys having fun with each other whether their friends are in Scouting or not; and then, being a part of an organization that has a belief system and things that teach life skills. So one activity and mission and purpose is very different from the other. And the uniform, yes, it can illustrate what it is that everyone is there doing and why they're doing it.

AARON: Are there different types of uniforms for ceremonies and outdoor activities and things like that?

JOHN: There is probably a benefit to asking boys for an important occasion to dress well, pay more attention to what they're wearing, to what their appearance is. It's a sign of respect to one another; for example, at an awards ceremony, for people to be on their best and show in tangible ways that what's happening is important.

AMY: Are there instances when a den or pack can get a Scouting project accomplished without a uniform?

JOHN: You bet. A Cub Scout outing, even being at camp on a weekend for a resident camp or a day camp having the uniform on or a Cub Scout T-shirt on is great, but if you're wearing clothes that are more

casual, everybody still knows they're involved in a Scouting event.

AMY: So John, when Scouts are in the community all dressed alike, does that help with the image of Scouting and how the community perceives what they're doing there?

JOHN: It's certainly branding. That little blue uniform is pretty familiar to most people. It might depend upon what community you're in and what the cultural tradition of Scouting in that community is. But anything that we can do to help the community know that Scouting is an organization that cares about kids and teaches kids to care about each other and to be citizen servants and to grow up as people who are going to take care of the world they live in and play leadership roles, all of those things are important. At the same time, it's important that we don't appear to be a closed institution that is so identified by brand that it seems like others aren't welcome. It's a great thing to be mindful of, but we also want to be as welcoming as we can be.

AARON: John, in my experience as a Cub Scout leader, you can encounter a variety of attitudes among mainly the adults about the uniform. Some of the adults, the guys, who were in Scouts as kids maybe have a different attitude than some of the younger adults who were not in Scouting. Some of them maybe think you should be super strict; some of them think you shouldn't be - things like that. Let's say you're having an activity or a ceremony and one of the boys shows up without a uniform on. What's your advice on how to approach that?

JOHN: You're right, it does come down to individual personalities on the part of the leaders, but there's always that balance between

accountability and establishing ground rules and helping the boys to understand the importance of paying attention to ground rules. The balance comes, however, with regard to whether the boy feels welcome, whether or not the boy feels intimidated, whether or not there are circumstances beyond the boy's control. It's most important to make sure that all of the boys know that they're welcome and that they have a rich and rewarding experience and then to treat it after the fact whether it's a guided-discovery conversation with a boy or even just relaxing and understanding that if a boy's there, and he's the only one not in uniform, the parents are going to notice, and they're going to do their best to help their son the next time.

AMY: John, what would you suggest to Cub Scout leaders to make sure everyone in their den has a uniform?

JOHN: Lots of ways to accomplish that. Whether it would be through the pack budgeting process for camp fees, registration fees, handbooks, uniforms, to be able to have a private, quiet conversation with a family to say if he needs some help with some of these costs, we've got a budget that can accommodate that. That's always best dealt with at the unit level. These people are developing relationships with one another that may last for years, and so our unit leaders should feel like that's something that they need to be mindful of is whether or not all families can afford the cost of Scouting. A lot of Scout councils will have uniform exchanges.

There's something to be said for having a uniform that a boy knows was his. I remember when I bought my son his first uniform at a hardware store that was a distributor. I paid for the patches and was looking for the uniform, and the person said, "He's wearing it,"

(Laughter)

JOHN: because he had it on. And he slept in it that night. And so there is something to be said for a boy being able to have something that's brand new and theirs. But if you can't afford it, a uniform exchange is a great way to go.

One of the other ways in which we approach it here is through a uniform drive. A local dry cleaners, one of the larger chains here in the Twin Cities region, that actually pays for radio advertising and print advertising and encourages people to bring uniforms into their dry cleaners, they then - once they're dropped off - they repair them, they clean them, they hang them, and then they provide us with several hundred. And we then work to make sure that they're distributed to people who have the financial need. And so it might be through our Scoutreach programs or through those discreet conversations within a Cub Scout pack.

AMY: That's fantastic.

AARON: Yeah, the uniforms are not super cheap, John. We've had in my Cub Scout pack an instance where an adult offered to sponsor a child who needed a uniform. I wonder if you have any thoughts on things like that. If someone is more fortunate and able to help out, is that okay? How do you approach that sensitively?

JOHN: It's good to establish that because Scouting is paid for in different ways at different levels - from the unit, to the council, to the national organization. And so it's good to establish that those costs should be dealt with as directly as possible by families rather than by donors. That said, if someone wants to help someone else in their

pack by contributing themselves to the pack budget, that's great. Having the conversation with a family, you can generally catch clues when the family is stressed. If it looks like somebody is balking to say, "If this is a tough time for you right now, let us know, and we'll figure out how to help you with part of the finances."

AARON: So John, where can a parent who is not familiar with the uniform, doesn't know how to put it all together, where can folks go to find more information on the Cub Scout uniform?

JOHN: By going into the Scout Shop of most any local council office, someone there is going to be able to help. It's great if at joining times, some of those basics are provided in a new-parent letter by the pack or by the council. There's a lot of online resources. But, certainly the National Council's resources is the first stop which is www.bsauniforms.org giving you guidance on badge placement and uniform wear.

AARON: For new parents who have just joined up who don't know the Cub Scout uniform from whatever... best advice? Just go to the Scout Shop, and they'll take care of you?

JOHN: You bet.

AMY: John, is there anything about "putting the uniform in uniformity" that we haven't talked about that you think we ought to share with our listeners?

JOHN: It's about belonging and about pride in the organization and about helping a young person be able to demonstrate achievements

through what they've earned and been formally presented and that might be worn on a shirt. So it's great for a pack to have a conversation about what their rules are and to put it into print and new parent information that's given to all the brand new families. Here are the things that we practice with regard to when we wear a formal shirt; when we wear a T-shirt; uh, what kind of pants we wear with it. And it's most effectively implemented when it's a pack policy.

AMY: Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Boy Scouting said, "*The uniform makes for brotherhood, since when universally adopted it covers up all the differences of class and country.*" John, thanks so much for joining us on CubCast and explaining the meaning of that so beautifully.

JOHN: Thanks for the invitation.

AARON: After this short break, we'll be back with Reminders and Tips.

(ScoutCast: Advanced Training – What's In It For You?)

AARON: Now it's time now for our magnificent monthly reminders! Let's start with council roundtables. To locate roundtable sites and times, check with your unit commissioner, or your local Scouting professional, the council service center or website or the Cub Scout calendar.

AMY: There's really no better way to help deliver a quality program than to experience the idea sharing that goes on at those meetings. You can listen to the January 2012, Cubcast to hear an in-depth discussion of roundtables.

AARON: Now here's a question you should be asking yourself: Are all your committee positions filled? Just to review, you should have a committee chair, pack trainer, secretary/treasurer, advancement chair, outdoor chair, membership chair and a finance/fundraising chair. The responsibilities for each role are outlined on scouting.org. The link is too long to tell you but you can find it on the transcript of this CubCast.

www.scouting.org/scoutsorce/CubScouts/Leaders/About/ThePack/pcomm

AMY September is a great time to recruit new parents to help fill all of these important positions. The committee chair is responsible for filling all the slots, but leaders can help out by remaining on the lookout for good candidates at their work, church, or neighborhood. Make sure all new leaders complete their Cub Scout Leader Specific Training and Youth Protection Training.

BEGIN MUSIC UNDER

AMY: So that's it for the October CubCast. Thanks to John Andrews for joining us.

AARON: And thank you for listening. Hope you're back next month as we explore the topic of Duty to God and Cub Scouts.

AMY: Are there other topics we should be discussing? Don't be shy. Just send us an e-mail at CubCast@scouting.org or Tweet @CubCast. So with that, I'm Amy Hutcherson.

AARON: And I'm Aaron Derr. Are your boys dressed for success?

MUSIC FULL TO FINISH