



May 23, 2014

Dear Chicago Area Council Scouters and Supporters:

The past year has brought many new opportunities for Scouting in Chicago and also posed a few challenges to the way we have always done business. Our high notes: The media recognition of Eagle Scout Lawrence Sellers for his steadfast bravery in the challenging streets of Chicago. The rollout of the new STEM NOVA program and the Woodfield Mall Discovery Outpost are examples of some of our brightest moments. The Board of Directors also approved some much needed renovations to Owasippe Scout Reservation which will result in improvements including a new STEM cabin. Among the challenges we face is declining enrollment; the ever changing demographic of the Chicagoland area and the reality of continuing to navigate our ever changing culture.

Some might say that Scouting's best days are behind us; we'd like to think that Scouting has a bright future as our changing cultural norms continue to signal a need for the character and leadership that Scouting can teach our young men and women. The cornerstone of this future is deeply rooted in addressing some of the organizational structures that draw our limited resources away from what is most important, serving our youth and providing life changing experiences for them. The future of the Metro Chicago area and Northwest Indiana Scouting will require action on plotting a path that allows us to best attract, develop and retain the Scouts who will become the leaders of tomorrow.

On April 14th a letter was sent to Scouts and Scouters for four area councils (Chicago, Calumet, DesPlaines Valley, and Northwest Suburban) regarding merger plans. There's been some confusion surrounding the letter, so this message is to provide an honest and transparent view into the issue surrounding our impending merger with other area councils.

Chicago Area Council has spent the last 20 months working with representatives from at least five other councils to explore the possibility of a merger. Inter-council committees were set up to explore topics including governance, finance, membership, and properties. At the Council board level there had been a lot of dialogue about what that merger might look like and what it would entail. On a side note, we know the letter from the Regional Office only reinforces what we already plan to do – merge with other area councils to improve our capabilities and to grow Scouting.

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Some may question why it is important that we merge with other area councils. If one was to objectively look at Scouting in this area, they would find a territorial landscape that resembles a fragmented grouping of states. While each council could continue to operate on their own, they would find it difficult to grow or improve. Even donors are confused as to whether they should contribute where they work versus where they live. By pooling resources – professional staff, properties, marketing activities, programs, and fundraising, we can show potential Scouts, Scouters, and donors the positive aspects of Scouting for our communities.

Up until recently, Scouting has not done a good job in marketing itself to area communities. As a result, some question Scouting's value, and again this reflects dropping membership numbers. It's time to become proactive. This is our main priority.

We have formed inter-council committees to combine strengths and take on bigger opportunities. The joint Technology Committee has looked at how several councils can improve IT capabilities and decrease costs. The joint Marketing Committee has created a list of area-wide events including the Chicago Children's Festival and Internet video programming. The joint STEM committee has started combining volunteer talents to improve opportunities for youth who might never have considered Scouting before. Furthermore, a professional staffing plan was generated last fall to coordinate better utilization of inter-council staff to bring them closer to their local communities, start new units, and help improve our programs and fundraising efforts.

More importantly, there are no plans to make any changes for units and camps as a result of the merger. All district territories, functions, and committees will remain the same.

The Path Ahead:

The existing Chicago Area Council Board of Directors will serve through June 30th. A transitional board consisting of many of our current Board of Directors will continue in their similar roles through the end of the calendar year 2014. **Because of this detail, it will not be necessary to conduct an annual meeting as scheduled in June of 2014.** Synergies with other councils to be merged will continue from July 1 through December 31. During this period a new board will be appointed that will start their term on January 1, 2015. This new board will represent the merged council (consisting of the former Calumet, Chicago, DesPlaines and Northwest Suburban councils).

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It is mission critical that we all continue to function in doing what we do best, providing a quality program for our youth and continuing to recruit, develop and retain youth for the Scouting Program.

We will be scheduling a series of meetings to meet with many of you and personally answer any questions you may have about the road we have before us. We will continue to play an active role in the merger process as we have for the past 20 months and will continue keep our Scouts and Scouters informed and involved. In turn we ask for your support during this important time.

Yours in Scouting,

John Leonard
Council President

Lou Sandoval
Council Commissioner

Matthew Thornton
Scout Executive/CEO

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