

New Blue

BY MARIE BARTUSEK

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDY MANIS

STARTING THIS FALL, THE CUB SCOUT PROGRAM WILL CHANGE. WHY? HOW DOES MAKING IT MORE LASTING, MORE SUCCESSFUL, AND MORE FUN SOUND?

FIREFIGHTER TORIE RUFFIN of the Mequon Fire Station in suburban Milwaukee, Wis., dresses for a blaze in a 50-pound fire suit with a 20-pound air tank strapped to his back. He is demonstrating the equipment for an audience of 10 Cub Scouts

from Den 8 of Pack 3865 in Mequon. With every inch of his skin covered, Ruffin breaths through an air hose. "He sounds like Darth Vader!" shouts 7-year-old Cameron Karaba.

Except that instead of using a *Star Wars* lightsaber, Ruffin wields a canvas hose channeling 300 gallons of water. Removing his helmet and kneeling down, he offers each boy a turn at target practice, aiming streams of water



The reorganized den provides new opportunities for advancement and for taking part in cool activities. At left, Bay-Lakes Council executive board vice president Lucia Cronin works with Cub Scout Josh Garcia of Pack 3817. At right, Pack 3865's Cameron Karaba battles a mock blaze with help from firefighter Torie Ruffin.



Leaders Dave Hadcock, Thuy Barron, and Kathy Mortl (from left) conduct a flag-lowering ceremony for Pack 3865.

at a wooden model home the size of a dog house with a painted plume of fire issuing from its roof. Seven-year-old Scout Sunil Dass blasts the flame with perfect aim, "Take that, fire!"

In the den's sixth meeting of the year this November afternoon, the Cub Scouts not only awed at Ruffin, they learned what to do when caught in a house fire and had fun climbing on a fire truck. They also checked off *Wolf Handbook* benchmarks, including six requirements for Achievement 4. "We did a lot, but I don't think if you asked the kids they would know we did anything different," says Den 8's leader Thuy Barron. "They were

enthusiastic and really interactive." But the den meeting *was* different.

Mequon's Pack 3865 got a jump start on using the new Cub Scout delivery method that launches nationwide this fall. The new program organizes Cub Scout handbook guidelines into lesson plans focusing on logically linked topics. These fall into a 16-meeting timeline that allows Cub Scouts to work together on rank achievements during meetings.

"For many kids, this new approach will look a lot like what they were doing before," says Mike Surbaugh, Scout Executive of the Greater Pittsburgh Council, who was involved

in developing the program and launching its test phase in the Central Region.

Surveys found that the most successful dens were incorporating advancement into the meetings. "Kids told us that advancement was more fun than anything they were doing in their den meetings," he says.

RATHER THAN SIMPLY relying on families to work on these achievements at home, the new method streamlines existing meeting options into organized Scouting lesson plans. The boys then work together toward rank advancement during den meetings. That change, say organizers, acknowledges the increasing demands on working parents and the demographic rise of single-parent households.

"We encourage family involvement," says Bob Scott, an innovation coordinator for the BSA. But group participation, "is fun for the kids, and boys who advance with their peers are more likely to stay with the program."

In 2005, the BSA tested the redesigned Cub Scout meeting plans with 21 dens in Wisconsin's Bay-Lakes Council. Among the findings, the collective retention rate of participating dens soared from 64 to 85 percent. These figures were confirmed when 1,117 dens, roughly 2 percent of those in the Central Region, adopted the program in 2007. In 2009, 9,980 dens used the new materials. BSA officials estimate that, when rolled out across the nation, some 350,000 boys may remain as a result. "This is the biggest thing we've seen in terms of keeping kids involved," says Scott.

Bay-Lakes Council's executive board vice president, Lucia Cronin, who heads the stock-trading operations

'Cub Scouting forges character development. That core program hasn't changed. We now have a way to show parents how they can be engaged.'

THE NEW CUB SCOUT PROGRAM



What Will Change

▶ Sixteen meeting plans will be laid out for den leaders in the new *Den & Pack Meeting Resource Guide* (Supply Group item No. 34409), organized so that Cub Scouts work together efficiently toward rank achievement. The guide, pictured at top right, also offers pack meeting outlines, as well as den meeting plans for all Cub Scout ranks. Get it at local Scout council service centers or find the den meeting plans at scouting.org/cubscouts. With the release of this guide, *Scouting* magazine will no longer publish the Program Helps insert.

▶ The handbook-based program focuses on den meeting activities that lead to youth advancement.

▶ The majority of advancement happens in the den, and the den leader signs the handbook. For in-home advancement, the

parent/guardian signs, and the den leader initials to acknowledge.

▶ Den leaders receive specific den meeting plans to ease planning and enhance meeting organization.

▶ Wolf/Bear den meeting structure includes seven steps:

- 1 Before the Meeting
- 2 Gathering
- 3 Opening
- 4 Business Items
- 5 Activities
- 6 Closing
- 7 After the meeting

▶ Share/Discover/Search is no longer part of the Tiger Cub den meeting structure.

▶ Themes (crafts/seasonally based) will be eliminated. ▶



of an investment firm, inadvertently began the Cub Scouts redesign when she picked up the *Wolf Handbook* in 1995, her first of 10 years as a den leader in Mequon. After reading it, she sorted out the achievement steps, paired them with related electives, and plotted her meetings for the year. Topics that were similar—safety lessons such as knowing who to call in case of an emergency—were combined into the same meeting, and active events that might involve sports, for example, were inserted into meetings with quiet activities to provide balance.

“All I did was maximize efficiency,” explains Cronin. “I did it in such a way that at every pack meeting, every month, each Cub Scout would receive something, a tangible sign of his achievement.”

Leading the boys’ work on advancement during meetings, she

found den participation and enthusiasm increased. “The boys loved receiving tangible recognition at every pack meeting, like badges and awards, and the parents were proud!” Proud parents also attended more pack events where the den leader had opportunities to recruit them to help out with volunteer needs.

More helpful parents and an annual lesson plan made her a happier den leader. The changes made volunteers’ jobs easier by relieving them of planning each week’s activities. Throughout the year, the pilot Cub Scout program plots 16 den meetings—twice-a-month get-togethers not including pack meetings and activities—that function as lesson plans. Each outline identifies: achievement aims, measuring “full” or “partial” progress

toward them; materials required; pre-meeting preparation; meeting steps from flag-raising to flag-lowering; and how to get ready for the next meeting.

After five years of development, research, and testing, the new Cub Scout guidelines are ready for a national rollout. Rank advancement is based on activities laid out for the entire school year, a clearly sign-

Jackson Rusch,
Pack 3865.



