

Secrets to Successful Service Projects

You've decided to have your troop or pack get involved in a service project for your community. Now, all you have to figure out is how to convince the Scouts that it's not only the *Scout thing* to do, but they are going to like it, and that they will actually have fun. That's a tall order, but with a little planning, and a little help, your unit can tackle just about anything and come away excited and proud.

Planning a service project that has impact is challenging. No matter how they look at it, the Scouts just see it as unpaid work. However, once you add some pizzazz and fun, even traditional service projects like highway & street clean ups, *Scouting for Food*, and aluminum can drives, can take on new life. The key with *any* service project is to make sure it has the five basic elements:

MAKING IT HAVE IMPACT

The Scouts and other adult leaders need to know that what they are doing matters, and the project should have a very real impact on your community. Choose projects that make a difference and help your Scouts measure the impact that the project has had, either through raised awareness for a cause or by other means.

- *Create a 1 mile pile during your next highway clean-up. Make an exhibit out of the junk and debris you've collected, and display it at your school or library. While you're doing the project, have Woodsy Owl there with you, holding signs that say "Give a Hoot, Don't Pollute!" — cars will honk as they go by! You can also have your Scouts make up signs that state, "How much trash in a mile?" You'll increase litter awareness.*

MAKING IT MEANINGFUL

You must make the service project meaningful to the participants. Scouts have to be enthusiastic about the work they are doing, and need to relate to the value of their work. Projects that show immediate results from effort are a great way to build excitement for the service.

- *Your Scouts can help out at a soup kitchen, or collect coats and blankets for a homeless shelter. If the Scouts themselves could actually hand out the coats and blankets, or the meals, the project can have much deeper impact. Your Scouts will be directly meeting and helping those in need, and will hear their appreciation*
- *Have your Scouts create a Sidewalk of Life with custom made bricks. Pick a charity or cause to support, have people buy a brick with their name engraved into it, and use the brick in the sidewalk. Have your Scouts get involved with the laying of the bricks. They can point to this project for years to come with pride and see immediately the fruit of their efforts.*

MAKING IT PERMANENT

People like to see the fruits of their labors, no matter how small. And real gratification can come many years later by revisiting the site of the service and seeing the long term effects. Your service project should have some permanence to it. Whether it is planting a tree or building a sidewalk, people should be able to look back at what was done and say "I was a part of that." Another variety of *permanence* can be achieved through repetition and building a tradition around a project. Doing the same service every year (or several times a year), will result in your troop becoming known for that particular project and its impact. That's a way to bring *permanent impact* to a project not otherwise easily measured for its permanence.

All of the service projects listed portray elements, to some degree, of all 5 ingredients. Being innovative and creative with any project helps to keep it from becoming a dull and tedious task. Letting the boys be involved, making them work hard to make it a success, then giving them recognition and credit for what they've done will make them proud of their involvement in Scouting.

Need a Project? Visit These Agencies on the Internet

Cyberspace offers a wealth of information for the Scout unit, O.A. Lodge or the individual Scout to get involved. A number of agencies have websites, or at least email, and can be reached via the Internet. Many of these organizations have programs specifically for Scout groups. A few of the programs, like Colgate's *Youth for America* campaign, will award cash prizes for Scout troops with unique and exceptional service programs. You'll also find that many of these destinations have links to other volunteering and service-related sites.

AMERICA'S PROMISE

www.americaspromise.org/

America's Promise connects those that can, like corporations, with those that do, like volunteers and grass roots efforts. Their efforts serve our nation's at-risk youth, by offering better access to five fundamental resources: mentors, safe places, healthy start, marketable skills, and

returning service to the community. Chaired by Retired General Colin Powell, this is the national organization that *BSA* has responded to with a pledge of more than 200 million hours of community service. Additional information on the initiative can be found at the www.citizenservice.org/digital/ which describes the President's Summit launching the *America's Promise* effort.

COLGATE'S YOUTH FOR AMERICA CAMPAIGN

www.colgate.com/Community/youth.html
email: fcw001@aol.com

Every year, the *Youth For America* program awards hundreds of cash prizes to Scout troops who perform outstanding acts of community service. The *Youth for America* program is sponsored by *Colgate*, and is now in its 26th year, since starting in 1972.

Colgate provides monetary grants to those packs & troops whose projects are the most innovative and successful. The projects must

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- *Plant a new tree in your community park for every new boy who joins the troop and obtains Tenderfoot. Over the years, your grove will become quite large, and it will be exciting to adults in the community to visit and show off the tree that was planted when they joined the Scout troop.*

- *Do a color guard and flag ceremony every time there's a parade, or an important event. People will start expecting to see your Troop. Make sure your Scouts are dressed neatly in full uniform. Make them feel important. Don't forget to submit pictures and a news release to the local media.*

MAKING IT KNOWN

Any service project you do deserves attention. Scouts and leaders like to be recognized for the volunteer work they do, and deservedly so. Make sure all service projects get the proper recognition.

- *Send out press releases to local newspapers and television about upcoming service projects. After the project, send a report and pictures.*
- *Keep a scrap book of all unit activities and show it off at Courts of Honor, Scout Shows, and special events.*
- *Get local businesses to give window space for posters about your event.*
- *Have a display of Troop Service Projects during Scout Week at your local library.*
- *Get local businesses or radio stations to help sponsor your event. Ask your sponsoring organization to help you with the event.*

MAKE IT FUN!

Probably the most important ingredient to a successful service project is to make it fun. This will keep your Scouts interested and coming back for more each time it's done. This can also be one of the more challenging goals, but with a little ingenuity, enthusiasm, and innovation, any project can be made to be fun.

- *Here's another interesting twist for your blood drive: hold it during Halloween and have your Scouts dressed up as vampires. Hold a haunted house at the same time with people giving blood as one of the exhibits.*
- *Have your Scout unit or district make a series of totem poles or spirit poles with local high school mascot, Lions, Moose, Rotary, or other service organizations emblem, city seal, etc.*



Illustration: Mark Schuler

6 PAGES OF RESOURCES TO HELP YOU GET STARTED!