

Sleepovers:

That's When It All Comes Together

by Rob Stewart

As the parent of a Beaver and a Cub, and as a member of Scouts Canada's staff, I often get to view the work of committees and task groups related to programs, training, policies and procedures. Also, I get to see the end results at section meetings or events.

Everything Scouting stands for came together in technicolour during a recent sleepover of the Bell's Corners Eagle Colony (ON). What a wonderful example of planning, teamwork, and shared leadership, while providing Beavers (and parents) with a fun-filled learning experience.

"Set 'Em Up Beavers!"

The Beavers, leaders and parents gathered in our sponsor's church basement at 7 p.m. on Friday night; everyone immediately set about pitching their tents. This in itself created buckets of excitement for the little Beavers. Children love the idea of sleeping in tents, whether it's outside or indoors.

The program began when all "campsites" were established. With the tapping of a large pole on the floor, Hawkeye signalled the call for Riverbanks. From that moment until 11:30 a.m. on Saturday morning (pack up time), the leadership team had carefully planned a program that filled every waking second. It was magnificent. These talented leaders knew from training and experience that Beavers, left to their own devices, would create their own "programs" in about five seconds – not all of them healthy.

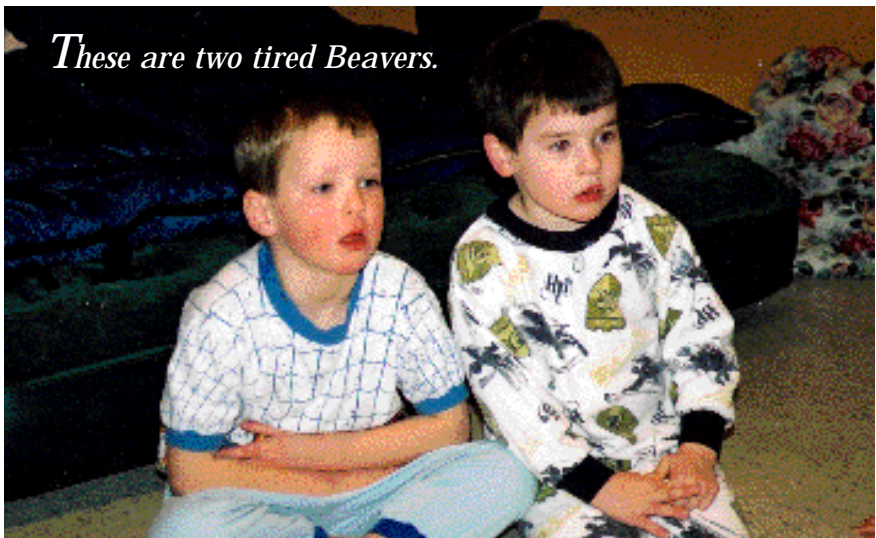
Precision Balancing Act

What followed was a mix of games, crafts and a campfire that were all de-

signed to maintain a delicate balance of burning off excess energy, creating works of art, play-acting and singing. The way Rusty and Tic Tac told the Beavers that they were going to show them some games they learned at Woodbadge would have been music to any trainer's ears.

The workload was divided equally among the leadership team; some

handled games, some lead the craft activities, some read stories, while all participated in a rollicking campfire. I never heard so many bad "knock knock" jokes during the singing of one of the songs. The cheers and skits were great. The lodges had practised their skits for several meetings prior to the sleepover, so everyone knew their lines.



These are two tired Beavers.

Photos: Paul Hulganga

This wasn't just a sleepover for Beavers, but also siblings. (What a fantastic linking opportunity!) Younger brothers and sisters fit into the program like a hand slipping into a custom-made glove.

By the time the lights were switched off, everyone (parents too) were exhausted and happy from a terrific evening.

Ready for More Adventure?

Next morning, the leaders and parents worked like a well-oiled machine to prepare breakfast of waffles, bacon, fruit and yogurt, all the while keeping the Beavers occupied during the cooking process. I think Malak invented a new way to "toast" frozen waffles using the stove's broil setting. After some training, I was certified to pour the syrup on the waffles; others practised their ability to separate strips of bacon, and make sure everyone got their fair share. (Remember: sharing, sharing, sharing?)

Coordinating all planning is crucial when you want to control and creatively channel the enthusiasm of 24 Beavers. This was highlighted during the breakfast clean-up. Following this activity, Rusty presented a slide show focussing on examples of God's love for them and the world.

Did the kids like it? You bet. The children had millions of questions about the wildlife and sunsets in the show; they were fascinated.

Fresh Air Experience

With breakfast nicely settling in everyone's stomach, it was time for some fresh air. Outside, behind the church, the property offered plenty of

space. Snow was piled up in glorious mounds for the Beavers to run and jump into. Having been advised in a newsletter (see sidebar below), parents made sure their Beavers had proper clothing for outside games. Of course, this made the outside fun even more enjoyable.

The sleepover newsletter included all information that parents needed to ensure their son or daughter (and themselves) were prepared completely for the event. Leaders listed every conceivable item that might be needed or wanted; this made packing an easy chore.

The Power of a Schedule

Often, new leaders ask trainers and Service Scouters questions about section discipline. The most frequently asked questions include: What do you do when difficulties happen? How do you deal with discipline problems?

Our leadership team had the sleepover program so well planned that there was little, if any, time for kids to find or make trouble. There's great power in a schedule that balances activity with quiet time, and doesn't have large gaps of unstructured time. I can't emphasize this wisdom enough.

While two Scouters were leading a game, Bubbles and Sunshine were preparing an interesting craft activity. (The one everyone liked best involved cutting out small pieces of "fun foam" – get it at a craft store – to create a pin that looked like a campfire.) This coordination was evident throughout the entire event; it resulted in a great experience for all who attended, and no discipline problems.

Scouting at its Best

Our sleepover proved an example of Scouting at its best for a Beaver section. It re-confirmed we have a program that kids love, and that leaders enjoy delivering. With dedicated Scouters who have taken training, support each other, plan their programs, and share the workload, the fantastic results are almost inevitable.

The Beaver section has seven program goals:

- Find examples of God's love for them and the world
- Experience and express love and joy
- Express themselves
- Be healthy and have good feelings about themselves
- Develop a sense of belonging and sharing in small group activities
- Develop a sense of co-operation through non-competitive activities
- Appreciate nature.

This event clearly included elements of all of these goals, and it reinforced the benefits of considering them when planning programs.

Do you have a favourite Scouting event that your members enjoyed this year? Tell us all about it, then e-mail it to: leader@scouts.ca. Our mailing address is: **Leader Magazine**, 1345 Baseline Road, Ottawa, ON, K2C 0A7. X

— Rob Stewart is executive director of Program and Volunteer Services at the National Office.



Include lots of outdoor running and activities during your Beaver sleepover.

NEWSLETTERS: Excellent Communications Tools for the Colony

My son's colony leaders use newsletters to keep parents completely informed about upcoming activities requiring their attention. If a permission slip is needed for an event, this is included in the newsletter.

Perhaps a Cub pack or Scout troop would like to help with your newsletter; that way the Cubs or Scouts could work toward one or more badges.

Newsletters: try them. They're very effective.