

# Message from the Chief Commissioner



**W**elcome back and thank you for helping to provide great programs to over 100,000 youth across Canada in 2003-2004!

I am very pleased to report that over 1000 Scouts Canada groups increased their membership last year. That's roughly 1/3 of our groups. I see this as a very positive step towards growing our Movement in Canada!

This is my favourite time of year – a time when we again turn our energy and focus to Scouting activities. No matter how many years pass, I will never forget the anticipation I felt each fall when I returned to our local church hall as a Cub or Scout. It was always so exciting to work with the other kids and our leaders to plan a fun year of outdoor adventures. And the friendships I made through Scouting, then and today, are ones that stand the test of time.

My challenge to you again this year is to maintain your group's size from last year. The more young Canadians we reach, the better able we are to achieve our Mission of contributing to the education of young people. Each and every child counts in this effort.

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To help us achieve the Mission, we continue to make adjustments to the organization that allow us to be more effective in providing support to our leaders. At a special general meeting in 2003, Scouts Canada approved a new By-Law. By-Law No. 2 establishes the framework for governing the organization and ensures that Scouts Canada continues to be a volunteer-led, volunteer-driven, staff-supported organization. I've read and heard statements indicating that some people believe that Scouting has been taken over by staff. This causes me great concern. As Chief Commissioner and Chair of the Board of Governors (a volunteer position) please be assured that this is not so. Volunteers are involved in every step of any decision-making process, identifying issues and trends, consulting with youth and sharing findings and recommendations with volunteers who sit on committees and the Board of Governors.

The Board, comprised entirely of volunteers with the exception of the Executive Commissioner/Chief Executive Officer (CEO), is the policy making body for the entire organization. In implementing Bylaw No. 2, Scouts Canada has moved to a governance model that allows for more representation by elected members from each of the councils and establishes a single line of accountability with the Chief Commissioner (volunteer) as Chair of the Board.

To ensure equal and fair representation for voting, each of our 20 councils select or elect three volunteers including, one youth under the age of 27. These volunteers are voting members at Scouts Canada's Annual General Meeting where members and officers of Scouts Canada's Board of Governors are elected. The exception is the CEO who is appointed/hired by the Board of Governors and the Chief Commissioner who is appointed by the Chief Scout (Governor General of Canada).

The Board directs the CEO who is responsible for implementing and achieving the desired outcomes in three main areas: Program, Operations and Field Services. The CEO appoints Deputy Executive Commissioners (volunteers) who, with staff support, form an Operations Advisory Committee to advise, consult, make recommendations, implement and provide feedback. Scouts Canada also employs a number of staff who are responsible for advising and ensuring that changes are properly managed and implemented, once approved by volunteers.

Why all of the changes in structure? And what about all of the new policies and procedures that have

been introduced over the past few years? After all, everything seemed to be just fine before. Good question!

In many cases things did seem to be just fine. In fact many of the things we were doing were perfectly acceptable at the time. Times change, however, and we must work to ensure that we meet the standards and expectations of today's society.

For example, at early Jamborees the washroom facilities were trenches dug in the ground with a burlap screen surrounding it. There were no shower facilities. We bathed in the river! With changing health and environmental standards this is no longer acceptable so we now provide portable toilets complete with washing stations and showers. Environmental and health standards have evolved and we have responded accordingly.

Experience has also taught us some significant lessons as well. Accidents and tragedies that have occurred in the outdoor industry show us that with new equipment and better training and planning we can minimize accidents and injuries. As a result, we now track and adhere to new standards and best practices which are presented in our Camping/Outdoor Activity Procedures. This provides our leaders with guidelines to follow when conducting outdoor programs.

Parents' expectations have also increased – and rightfully so. In placing their child in our care, they want to know who the leaders are, how they were selected and screened, their skills, training and experience, and in what activities their child will participate. Our volunteer screening process, Duty of Care and program standards address these concerns and are made readily available on our web site.

Providing opportunities for volunteers to develop and/or acquire the necessary skills to be a leader have also changed. We have adjusted our approach to be more effective and efficient with the time volunteers are willing to give. We have moved to competency-based criteria where individuals demonstrate skills and competencies to achieve their Woodbadge Basic or Woodbadge Advanced. The same applies for those who help others like Service Scouters, Trainers and Commissioners. An individual

can choose from a number of methods to acquire skills (i.e. reading our handbooks, working with a coach/mentor, on the job training or attending workshops or courses). The important thing is that we ensure that these development opportunities are provided as soon as possible to ensure that our youth receive a safe, challenging program.

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Volunteer trends across the country have changed. The number of volunteers in Canada has declined by over one million since 1997. We have over 30,000 adults working with youth and/or providing service and support within Scouting. Managing this resource to ensure that the focus is on program and support often means consolidating groups and/or areas/councils and even staff. Keeping focused on program and support is critical as opposed to preserving structures, names, titles, etc. for sentimental reasons.

Costs associated with supporting Scouting have increased as well. Scouts Canada provides a number of fundraisers. Our most successful fundraiser continues to be Scout Popcorn. In fact over \$4 million dollars was raised through popcorn sales last year! Most of that amount actually stays with the local groups and councils! While it is not compulsory for groups to participate in these fundraisers, the organization does depend on revenue from them and would have to significantly increase fees if groups did not participate.

I'm quite encouraged by a number of initiatives that have occurred over the last year that will ensure that we are *wise in the use of our resources*. For example, the Ontario councils have undertaken a review of their more than 260 properties. Over a two-year period, the property review committee, made up of volunteers from Ontario, has conducted exten-

sive consultation with members in communities across the province. As part of the review, members, including youth, were asked to fill out a questionnaire that would assist the review committee in determining their wants and needs with respect to camps. Some themes emerged including: toilets, indoor dining and food preparation facilities, sleeping quarters to allow year-round camping, and special program activities like high ropes courses. In addition, all camps were evaluated against a set of criteria, which included usage level and financial viability (cost of running property versus income from the property), and compliance with environmental, health and safety standards.

I commend the Ontario councils for their initiative in this area. Managing and maintaining over 260 properties is certainly a costly challenge. Once the appeal process has concluded, an integral part of the review, a final list of camps that will be put up for sale will be established. Any proceeds from the sale of these camps will be invested in neighbouring camps or local recruitment efforts. The final goal will be to have fewer camps but with better facilities to offer our youth.

Following the theme of being *wise in the use of our resources*, Scouts Canada also continues to review its structure as it relates to staffing, offices, and Scout Shops, trying to consolidate where possible to be more cost effective in meeting the needs of our membership. Managing our resources wisely to provide maximum benefit for our members is the right and responsible thing to do!

Keeping Scouters informed is critical to the success of the organization, which is why I felt it was important to share this "state of the organization" with you.

We will continue to focus our energies on achieving our Mission and we will DO OUR BEST to keep you informed through the *Leader Magazine* and Scouts Canada's web site. ^

Good Scouting,



Mike Scott  
Chief Commissioner