

Graduation Campfires

by Peter Van Houten

One of our discussion prior was on 'When boys move to next level'. I'm putting together the final preparations of our graduation ceremony now, so I thought I'd share it with you.

First of all, other than the Webelos Crossing Over Ceremony, which is held in March, we keep boys in their respective dens/tiger cub groups until June 1 (irregardless of what Council/national does with our membership roster). We started this tradition last year and have found the boys are in exciting anticipation for this years event. We have TWO graduation campfires. One which addresses, graduation from Tigers/Wolfs to the next level, and the other for Bears/Webelos-1 to their next level!

We've reserved one of our local Day Camps for the setting. It's a VERY NICE camp, with a gathering area, and a long trail with a long suspension bridge over a creek that leads to a meadow 'Campfire' area. Our campfire is as follows:

1. Gathering of all boys in the upper area -- I'll lead two songs to get them in the spirit, "If you're Happy and you know it - clap your hands" and "Swiss Boy" (This is a favorite and we only do it at this campfire.)
2. After the songs, I give a brief instruction that we're about to be called into the campfire area. We will proceed in line, boys first, parents follow. They should maintain quiet and observe the surrounding nature as we approach the campfire bowl.
3. I signal my Assistant CM, who blows an Elk Horn. This is in return, answered by another Elk horn, blown from the Meadow. And in the distance we hear the tomtom begin beating.
4. I lead the boys down the path, across the bridge, down the trail into the campfire bowl, where we wait until everyone has arrived.
5. I stand with the fire between me and the boys and declare that because last years campfire was so special and meaningful, I've saved the ashes to spread on this years fire. I entice the boys to help me light the fire with their Scout Spirit as I spread the ashes on the fire. [Actually the ashes are 'Granular Cholorine, being spread into a container of Pine-Sol. The result being lots of white smoke and a flame flair, which will start the fire. It is very impressive if done correctly and with spirit.]
6. After the fire has started we do a action song. Something along the line of Zulu Chief, or "Robert Baden Powell-Had Many Scouts".
7. Cheer -- From our 'Cheer Box'
8. Skit -- This year's skit will be presented by a group of Boy Scouts whom have graduated from our Pack.
9. Action Song -- Malo.
10. Cheer -- From our 'Cheer Box'
11. Story -- The story this year is about 'Scout Spirit' I use a large gallon jar, filled 3/4 with fine dirt, and a ping pong ball. When I turn it upside down the ping pong ball is on the bottom. The ping pong ball is a Scout. As I talk about the virtues of Scouting I slightly Shake the jar. Within a few shakes (about one minute of talking) the ping pong ball appears at the top of jar having overcome the great weight of the dirt. The moral of the story focuses on that the virtues of Scouting overcomes all that is dumped on you.

12. Award ceremony -- This is the first year we've included major award presentations (ie. Wolf, Bear, Webelos, etc.) and that is because we lost the school for our last pack meeting.
13. Graduation Ceremony. Each group is called up around the fire - They are congratulated for being a part of Scouting and for continuing along Akela's trail. The Tiger Ceremony is really beefed up to include presentation of certificate, pin, patch and segment, then the presentation of their Wolf Scarf and book. The Wolf, Bear ceremony includes removal of the old scarf and presentation of the new, along with the book. Webelos-1 to Webelos-2 includes the presentation of a new Slide. It's one of those Safety Pin Indian Bonnet's made by one of our mothers (very nice).
14. After the Graduation Ceremony, we sing 'Mm Mm I want to linger'
15. I call all boys to circle the campfire in a friendship circle, with parents standing behind the boys. Standing in the middle I offer up the following closing remarks:

Wood smoke at eventide smoothes the soul
and makes an easy ladder for a prayer.
May the smoke of this fire
carry your thoughts Heavenward
and make your hearts strong for good scouting.
16. We than close the campfire with singing 'Cub Scout Vespers'. After the first verse, we break the friendship circle and my Assistant CM leads the boys back up the trail, over the bridge to the upper camp area. As they are leaving the campfire area we hum the Cub Scout vespers tune.

This graduation leaves a very momentous reminder in the minds of the boys! Many of the boys who've graduated recall the graduation campfire as one of those times they liked about Cub Scouting.

Hope your campfires are as memorable.