

A tip or two from Chief Keokuk

TRAILBLAZERS

A fun route to companionship

Through countless Spring Campout Ceremonies I have noticed the look on dad's faces as they make passage from Indian Guides or Indian Princesses. They are sentimental, sometimes their eyes are moist. When I talk about how our children have grown and how the dads must now sacrifice impatience, the firelight show dads nodding their heads in agreement. I pass out the memento label-pins, reaffirm future companionship, and then give a little plug for Trailblazers. The kids look enthusiastic, with excited smiles, but the dads stop nodding, and their faces go blank. I can almost read their minds, "Have mercy! Not another program."

Trailblazers is not just another program. It's a menu of opportunities to spend time with your older children and other dads like you. Dads that you probably have known in Guides, Princess, Little League, Scouts, AYSO, the pool, and other community activities that all of us support. The Trailblazer dads are guys worthy of knowing.

Trailblazers outings are fun. You can pick and choose what you want. That's part of the beauty of Trailblazers. Attend when you can, stay home when you must. There are no tribes, no tribal property, no vests, no tribal cheers. These outings are a mix of adventure and companionship between fathers and their children, between kids and kids, and between all of the dads. Opportunities include downhill skiing, canoeing, white water rafting, go-karting, golfing, whirlyball, paintball, water parks, river boat rides, roller rinks, bowling and pizza. When Trailblazers are at a camp, they are not locked into the camp program. The camp serves as a base for activities in the area surrounding that camp.

As our kids get older, we don't get that many opportunities to just hang out with them. Pre-teens and teenagers have interests that take them away from us. That's the way it should be, but spending some dad-and-kid-time together is still a wonderful thing. I've been fortunate to spend time camping with my three sons in Scouting. But Scouting is not just companionship. It's also about outdoor skills and leadership development. It can get to be work. But Trailblazers is pure and simple companionship.

In the world of youth activities, dads and daughters have less opportunity to spend time together than dads and sons. When my ten-year-old daughter was in Brownies and Girls Scouts, I organized outings for her Troop at Camp Tecumseh. But I would never think of attending. It's all moms and girls. But take that same group of girls and place them with all their dads, canoeing the lazy Tippecanoe River, floating by the old dining hall at Camp Tecumseh, jumping in and out of the warm, shallow water, on a sunny day in early September. Now that's an outing! And that's Trailblazers!

My soon to be 18 year old son and I have attended a lot of Trailblazer outings. We'd telephone other dads and sons and attend together and bunk together. I remember one watershed moment when he was just thirteen. We were driving on a back road in Wisconsin heading from the camp to the go-kart track.

"What's the deal with girls?" asked my son. "They're so squirrely."

"Don't worry. Someday they won't seem goofy, I said. "In fact, in a few years, you'll be thinking about girls every ten seconds."

"No way, dad! . . . really? . . . how long does that go on for?"

"Until you die."

"That's terrible."

"Uh, uh." And so began our first birds and bees conversation while driving on a nice blacktopped road, lined with big green pine trees, under a bright-blue northern Wisconsin sky.

This winter, our Trailblazers are headed to Cascade Mountain for downhill skiing and tubing with a night at a Wisconsin Dells water park. Sleeping and dining accommodations are at a nearby youth camp. In February there is more downhill skiing and tubing on a day trip to Sunburst Ski Area. If your child is in fourth grade or older, you can attend. (If your fourth grade child is in Guides or Princesses, they have an automatic membership in Trailblazers and so do you dad!) Give Trailblazers a try. Call a friend or two. You'll be delighted at the level of companionship with your children and with other dads just like you.

Peace,

John C. Lorenzen, Federation Chief Keokuk