

A tip or two from Chief Keokuk

Our Federation is blessed with a fun, activity-based, smorgasbord of activities for older boys and girls. I'm talking about Trailblazers: a menu of fun things to do with your kids, that you probably wouldn't take the time to do on your own, and are just plain more fun to do with a group.

We are privileged with a team of exceptional Nation Chiefs who are dedicated to the notion of father and child championship through participation in exciting outings. Nation Chief Dads like Brian Whitlock, Mike White, Dave Hight, Bob Konold, Eric Sundstrom, Kevin Jelley, Tony Nilles, and now John Gosiewski.

April 2007, was Trailblazer's Month, busy, with Paintball, Whirlyball and an Open House at the Western Springs Village Club with activities to introduce new-comers to Trailblazers. The Annual Spring Campout, a weekend jam-packed with a variety of great activities, just took place on the weekend of May 18, 19 & 20.

I'm suggesting to the Trailblazer Leadership that a special Trailblazer's 2007-2008 Calendar be published on the YIGP.com website and be mailed to all potential Trailblazer members. You can save the dates, plan well in advance and come out and have some fun. And in keeping with this Spring's promotion of Trailblazers, here is a reprinted tip from two years ago, newly edited and enhanced, with the hope that you'll join:

TRAILBLAZERS

A fun route to companionship

I have stood in the campfire light, as the speaker in countless Spring Passage Ceremonies at Campouts, and have seen the look on dads' faces as they, and their children, make Passage leaving Indian Guides or Indian Princesses. The dads become sentimental. Sometimes their eyes get moist. As we experience the Passage Ceremony together, I speak about our children growing up and how dads must now sacrifice impatience. The glow of the firelight shows dads nodding their heads in agreement. They understand that their children will not need their dads as much as they did before. We sacrifice corn into the fire. The moment is poignant and meaningful. I pass out memento label-pins, reaffirm future companionship, and have the children and their dads hug each other and proclaim, "Pals Forever" or "Friends Always." It's a memorable, sweet moment.

Then I give a quick promotional plug for Trailblazers. The kids look enthusiastic, excited and smiling. But the dads stop nodding. Their faces go blank. I can almost read their minds. They have just survived five years of sleepless campouts, tribal meetings, keeping track of patches and bear claws, Longhouses, picnics, craft projects, and more fun than old bones can barely tolerate. I look into the glazed eyes of the fathers making passage, now thinking they were "done." I extol the wonderful virtues of Trailblazers but the dads look back at me with a pleading glint in their eyes that says: "Have mercy! Not another program for us and our kids."

But, Trailblazers is not just another program. And dads are never "done" being dads.

Trailblazers is a menu of events: opportunities to spend time with your older children and dads like you. Dads that you probably know from Guides and Princess or Little League, Scouts, AYSO, or from just around town. And Trailblazers Outings are great fun. You can pick and choose what you want. Attend when you can. Stay home when you must. There are no tribes, no tribal property, no vests, no tribal cheers. Trailblazers Outings are a mix of adventure and companionship between fathers and their children, kids and kids, and dads and dads. Opportunities include downhill skiing, canoeing, go-karting, nine-hole golfing, whirlyball, paintball, water parks, river boat rides, roller rinks, bowling, laser-tag, and tons of time spent with your growing kids.

Trailblazers will use one of our many YMCA Camps, but are not locked into the camp program. The camp serves as a base for activities which are found, not only in the camp, but in the communities surrounding that camp.

As our kids get older, there are fewer opportunities to enjoy activities together. Pre-teens and teenagers have interests that take them away from us. That's as it should be. So spending some dad-and-kid-time together, in a shared activity, is a wonderful thing. I've been fortunate to spend time camping with my three sons in Scouting. But as one of the adult leaders, I am responsible for a whole bunch of other boys. This is not the case with Trailblazers. For every kid there is a dad, and the result of that equation is meaningful father and child companionship.

Dads and daughters have even less opportunity to spend time together than dads and boys. When my daughter was in Girls Scouts, I organized outings for her Troop at Camp Tecumseh. Of course, I did not attend. It's all moms and girls. But take that same group of girls, with their dads, canoeing the lazy Tippecanoe River, floating by the old dining hall at Tecumseh, jumping in and out of the warm, shallow water, on a sunny day in early September. Now that's an outing for dads and kids! And that's Trailblazers!

Trailblazers fits into the busy schedules of our children. No matter what else you, or your kids, are into, there is always time for Trailblazers. There are no regular meetings; just a selection of great activities.

When Smoke Signals includes a flier for a Trailblazers Outing, telephone other Trailblazer dads and kids. Or telephone other dads who were in your tribe. Get folks that you know to go on the outing. Attend together, and bunk together. Just a few phone calls to old friends and you'll make it happen. But even attending with friends, there will always be moments of precious companionship that will occur between just you and your child.

I remember one such time, a watershed moment, when my eldest was just thirteen, that took place on a Trailblazers Outing. We were driving on a back road in Wisconsin heading from the YMCA camp to the Go-Kart track. (Yup! A Go Kart Track. You don't get that in Indian Guides or Indian Princesses.) Anyway, John started talking about girls.

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

"Don't worry, buddy. Someday, they won't seem so 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 distant blacktopped road, lined with big green pine trees, under a bright-blue northern Wisconsin sky, on our way to the next activity on a Trailblazers Outing.

If your child is in fourth grade or older, you may join Trailblazers and attend. If your fourth grade, (or fifth grade), child is enrolled in Guides or Princesses, you both have an automatic membership in Trailblazers. Call a friend. Give Trailblazers a try. 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