

BOY SCOUT ADVANCEMENT NEWS

July 2007

First let me thank everyone for providing our scouts with the opportunity for advancement. Our council is fortunate to have a great record of advancement due to the work and dedication of the scouters involved with our units. The program provided to our scouts by our units, districts, and council is one to be envied by many other councils.

A couple of important dates to put on your calendar for the upcoming year include:

- Saturday, December 1st: the annual "University of Scouting" with training opportunities in many areas including advancement. Watch for more information forthcoming on this.
- Saturday February **23rd**, 2008: the annual council advancement training class open to all scouters. This is a full day of advancement training conducted by the council advancement committee along with a question and answer session aimed at getting all of your advancement questions answered. Watch for a flyer on this class at your November roundtable and on the council website.

If you haven't checked out the national website in a while find some time to check it out. There are training sessions on it that are very good. There are also videos your scouts can use that teach them advancement requirements thru first class. Speaking of websites you may want to check out our council website under "resources", "advancement" - we have some good information there also.

The council advancement committee is addressing the merit badge counselor approval process (many units and leaders have asked about this process) to conform with BSA national policy on merit badge counselor approval and to be able to verify that counselors approving merit badge work are registered and approved to teach these badges. I expect this endeavor will take the best part of a year due to the large number of counselors we have in the council. In order to do this as efficiently as possible we will need the help of units in getting this done. Here is what we are going to implement and a time frame we are planning to get it done:

Approval of counselors: National policy requires the council advancement committee to approve all merit badge counselors, both those that teach "unit only" and "district wide". The process for this is as follows. Anyone that wants to be a merit badge counselor must fill out an adult application as a merit badge counselor and a merit badge counselor application. The merit badge counselor application is on the council web site and we ask that they use this one as we have modified the form to make it easier to get everyone rechartered every year. The completed applications can be submitted to either the Jefferson or Lawrenceville Service Center where they will be used to conduct the Criminal Records Background Check. After the background check is completed the council advancement committee will review the merit badge counselor application for approval on the merit badges requested. After review the counselor will be contacted either by phone, email or letter to confirm they are approved and may start counseling scouts. I expect this process will take three to four weeks to follow and we will do all we can to speed it up so counselors can start working with the scouts as soon as possible.

Verification that an approved counselor signed off on the merit badge: Since only registered, approved merit badge counselors may sign off on a merit badge the process to verify this presents a challenge. We are implementing a process that other councils have tried and seems to work the best in accomplishing this. That process is as follows : When a unit turns in their advancement report at the Service Center to obtain the badges of rank and merit badges they will have to attach to the advancement report a copy of the signed "blue card" that the counselor signed off on (you can fit a lot of them on one sheet of paper). Upon doing this the ranks and merit badges may be purchased. These will be picked up by the council

advancement committee from the Service Center and the counselors that signed off on the merit badges will be verified as registered and approved for the ones they signed off on. This will enable us to get in compliance with national policy and should not delay a scout from receiving a merit badge. If the council advancement committee finds that an unapproved counselor signed off on a merit badge the unit and the counselor will be contacted as this could cause the badge to not be allowed. We realize that until we get the process fine tuned and all counselors into the system this will occur. We will work with the units and counselors to resolve these issues as they come up on a case by case basis. We are not looking to disallow any merit badges only to get in compliance with national policy and realize this will take some time to work out. The entire process is in place to ensure scouts get a quality experience working on a merit badge and from a youth protection stand point as well.

Recharter of merit badge counselors : Once we get this up and running we will be able to better ensure that merit badge counselors get rechartered each year as required and hopefully eliminate the current confusion over how and if they did get rechartered. We hope to do this by including in the recharter packets a list of merit badge counselors currently registered thru your unit and have the unit do as they do with the youth and adults. Draw a line thru those not wanting to recharter as a counselor and updating (if needed) information on those that want to recharter. Those counselors not associated with a unit will be contacted by the council advancement committee and asked if they wish to recharter.

Counselors wishing to add or delete badges they can teach : Counselors that want to add or delete badges will (as currently required) need to fill out another merit badge counselor application (no adult application needed if currently registered) listing the badges they want to add or delete. This is turned into the Service Center and forwarded to the council advancement committee for approval. Once reviewed the counselor will be contacted as above (phone, email or letter).

Time frame for implementing the above: Notification of council approval of merit badge counselors will begin starting with applications turned into the Service Center as of September 1st, 2007. New counselors or those adding merit badges may not start working with scouts after this date until they are contacted by the council advancement committee and approved. Submitting copies of signed "blue cards" with advancement reports will be implemented as of September 1st 2007 also. These will need to be included with the advancement report in order to purchase the merit badges.

Merit Badge Counselor lists: Lists of approved counselors will take some time to compile due to the amount of data to be collected and inputted. We will do all we can to expedite this but it will take some time to accomplish. Most units currently have their own list of counselors most of which are approved and registered already. Continue as before to use the counselors you have used in the past as we work on getting everything up and running. We will work with the counselors and units as the copies of the "blue cards" come in starting in September to get our list up and running as soon as possible.

Summer Camp and Advance-A-Rama Merit Badges: Copies of "blue cards" for badges earned at a summer camp or advance-a-rama will not be required to be submitted with advancement reports. In this case include with the advancement report a list of the merit badges earned as "summer camp" or "advance-a-rama" merit badges signed by an adult leader in the unit. Since all merit badge counselors at camp are approved prior to camp by the council advancement committee and advance-a-rama counselors are verified by the district advancement committees this is all that will be needed.

Please work with your district advancement committees as we work on the process of getting us in line with national policy. As I mentioned earlier this is going to take some time and everyone will need

to work together so we can accomplish this in a timely manner. All of us are involved in the program for one reason – to teach the values of Scouting to our youth.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or ideas that may help in this process. Once again thank you for all the work and dedication you devote to the program that serves our youth.

Ed Foster

Chairman, Council Advancement Committee

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