



Commissioner Newsletter

Your Single, Best Resource.

May 18, 2026 Edition

This is a special 2026 National Annual Meeting edition. The following are some of the highlights of the Dallas meeting.

Scouting America Military Family Fee Waiver

Effective June 1, 2026, Scouting America is expanding access to Scouting for military-connected youth by waiving the \$85 national youth registration fee for eligible families. This program applies to youth members only and is available for both new and renewing online registrations. The initiative is funded nationally through philanthropic efforts.

Eligible families include those with current service in the Active Duty, Reserve, or National Guard. The waiver covers only the national youth registration fee, reducing the \$85 cost to \$0 after the required verification and discount code process is completed. Local council fees, unit dues, optional add-ons such as Scout Life magazine, and processing fees may still apply.

To receive the waiver, families should select “Get Military Discount Code” during the online registration process, complete the verification steps, receive the verification code, and enter it at checkout. Once the code is applied, the national registration fee is reduced to \$0.

The \$85 fee may initially appear during checkout but will be removed after the verification code is entered. The waiver is available only for online registrations.

Sea Scout Advancement Updates

New Sea Scout advancement updates will take effect July 1, 2026. The previous requirements will expire on June 30, 2026, and the updated version will be available once it reaches production systems.

Key changes include:

- Lifeguard certification has been removed as a Quartermaster advancement requirement and moved to a Level 3 elective.

- NauticEd has been added as a new elective option with Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 pathways.
- Advancement alignment has been clarified:

Ordinary Scouts may complete only Level 1 electives, Able Scouts may complete only Level 2 electives, and Quartermaster candidates may complete only Level 3 electives.

These updates continue to modernize the Sea Scout advancement program while creating clearer progression paths and expanded opportunities for skill development.

Scouting May Be Available to Kids as Young as Four Years Old

Scouting America is testing an exciting new program designed for its youngest future members: Chipmunks.

Created for children ages 4 and 5, the Chipmunks program introduces families to Scouting through age-appropriate play, storytelling, creativity, and social connection. Unlike Cub Scouting, the program focuses on simple, playdate-style weekly gatherings called “Scurries” that help children build foundational skills and prepare for kindergarten in a fun and welcoming environment.

The program emphasizes family involvement, imaginative learning, and low-pressure participation. There are no ranks or badges. Instead, children participate in themed activities guided by a cast of “forest friends” and earn stickers as recognition for participation and growth.

Scouting America leaders believe Chipmunks can help reach a new generation of families looking for meaningful educational and social experiences for young children while creating an easy introduction to the Scouting movement.

The pilot program is currently being tested in seven councils across the country, with feedback helping shape future expansion. Learn more [here](#).

Pies In the Face Are Now Back on the Approved Activities List

Scouts and their parents expect all Scouting America activities to be conducted safely. To ensure the safety of participants, Scouting America expects leaders to use the four points of SAFE when delivering the Scouting program. [Here](#) is the pie-in-the-face safety guideline.

David Berg Presented the Silver World Award

The Silver World Award recognizes Scouters who are not registered members of Scouting America for their noteworthy and extraordinary service to youth on an international basis. This year's recipient is David Berg, and he will be honored at the National Annual Meeting, right alongside the Silver Buffalo recipients.

David is the 11th Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (WOSM), leading the world's largest youth organization across more than 200 countries and territories. A lifelong Scout, he began his journey as a Cub Scout in Belgium and remained deeply engaged through volunteer leadership at local, provincial, and national levels.

He went on to serve as CEO of his National Scout Association before joining Oxfam in Belgium as Director for Operations in Flanders. In 2012, David joined the World Scout Bureau, where he held several senior leadership roles, including Director for Strategy, Global Director for Organizational Development, Chief Operating Officer, Deputy Secretary General, and Acting Secretary General.

Appointed as Secretary General of World Scouting by the World Scout Committee in June 2025, David provides strong leadership to advance the organization's global mission to be the world's most inspiring and inclusive youth movement. Under his stewardship, WOSM upholds its commitment to strengthening its impact, supporting National Scout Organizations, and implementing the Strategy for Scouting.

Jay Bottorff Named 2026 National Alumnus of the Year

Congratulations to Jay S. Bottorff of Dearborn Heights, Michigan, who was recognized today at the 2026 National Annual Meeting in Dallas, Texas, as the 2026 National Alumnus of the Year.

Since earning the rank of Eagle Scout in 1988, Jay has dedicated nearly four decades to strengthening Scouting and reconnecting alumni across the country. His leadership has helped transform the modern Scouting Alumni movement by creating key resources and systems that empower local councils and volunteers nationwide.

Among his many contributions are the development of the Scouting Alumni Reunion Planning Guide, Camp Alumni Association Toolkit, Scouting Alumni Guidebook, and Council Support Database. Through his leadership, the number of councils without an Alumni or NESA committee has dropped dramatically from 86 to just 32.

Jay has also provided extraordinary service through the National Email Response Team, personally handling nearly 14,000 inquiries and more than 35,000 follow-up responses, saving the organization an estimated \$135,000 in labor costs.

His servant leadership, vision, and commitment have helped bring countless alumni back to the campfire and strengthened the future of Scouting for generations to come.

David Clark Received the 2026 National Eagle Scout Service Project of the Year Award

Clark of Troop 57 in Palo Alto, California, has been named the recipient of the 2026 Glenn A. and Melinda W. Adams National Eagle Scout Service Project of the Year Award.

Inspired by his own experiences receiving IV treatments as a child, David created and donated 110 custom “IV lily pads” to Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital at Stanford Medicine Children’s Health. The colorful wooden platforms help make infusion treatments less stressful and more engaging for young patients.

Over nine months, David organized 223 volunteers who contributed nearly 1,200 service hours to build, paint, and seal the lily pads. His project also raised more than \$5,500 in community support and required multiple design prototypes to ensure the platforms worked safely with hospital equipment.

With additional grant funding and partnerships forming with hospitals in Florida, Tennessee, and Washington, D.C., David is expanding the program to help even more children nationwide.

Learn more about David and his project [here](#).

Silver Antelopes and Buffaloes Presented

Scouting America volunteers make a lasting difference in the lives of young people by helping prepare them to make ethical and moral choices throughout their lives.

To recognize exceptional service to youth and the Scouting movement, Scouting America presents the prestigious Silver Family of Awards. These honors include the national-level Silver Buffalo Award, the territory-level Silver Antelope Award, and the council-level Silver Beaver Award.

See the members of the 2026 Class of Silver Antelope and Buffalo recipients [here](#).

We Are Here to Help You

A new National Commissioner Service Team (NCST) exists to serve commissioners. Meet the 2026-2027 team and learn what they do [here](#).

Ask A Commissioner

Q. We have recently had a Scout with special needs join the troop, and I am looking for guidance on how to handle camping, advancement requirements, and general activities. The Scout is very smart but struggles with communication, memorization, and some motor skills. What advice or experiences can you share that could help our youth and adult leaders support them effectively?

A. Great question, and you're already on the right track by asking it early. I've worked with several units in similar situations, and the biggest takeaway is this: the goal is not to "fit the Scout into the program," but to deliver the program in a fun way that works for that Scout while still maintaining the integrity of the Scouting experience.

Start with a simple conversation, not assumptions. Before changing anything, sit down with the parents or guardians. Ask what works, what doesn't, and what specific challenges show up in group settings, outdoors, and under stress. Many families already have strategies that transfer directly to Scouting. You'll save a lot of trial and error by listening first.

Also ask the Scout, in whatever way they can communicate. Even limited input helps build trust.

Camping is often where challenges show up most clearly, but also where growth happens fastest. Keep structure predictable. Share the schedule ahead of time, even something as simple as "wake up, breakfast, hike, lunch, free time, dinner, campfire." Visual schedules can help if communication is a struggle.

Break tasks into smaller steps. Instead of "set up your tent," guide with steps like "lay out the footprint," "insert poles," and so on. This helps with both motor skills and confidence.

Have a fallback plan. If a full weekend is too much at first, consider a one-night camp or even a daytime outdoor activity that builds toward overnight success. Depending on the situation, it might be appropriate to have a parent or guardian present.

When it comes to advancement and requirements, Scouting allows flexibility here, but it needs to be done thoughtfully. Focus on the intent of the requirement. If memorization is a barrier, ask yourself what the requirement is really teaching. For example, is it about recall, or understanding and application?

Use alternative methods when appropriate. A Scout who struggles to recite something might demonstrate it, explain it in their own words, or show understanding through action.

Document and communicate. If you make accommodations, keep the committee and parents aligned so expectations are clear and consistent.

If needed, look into formal advancement flexibility. There are established pathways for Scouts with special needs that allow modified requirements while preserving standards.

For meetings and activities, this is where small adjustments make a big difference. Keep instructions short and concrete. Long explanations lose Scouts who struggle with processing or

communication. Use demonstration over explanation. Show first, then have them try. The EDGE method is the go-to tool.

Build in movement. Scouts with motor or processing challenges often do better when they are actively engaged rather than sitting and listening.

Create roles that play to strengths. If the Scout is very smart, give them problem-solving tasks, planning input, or jobs that use that strength, even if physical execution is harder.

And, support the youth leaders. Your Patrol Leaders Council (PLC) is key. Coach them privately. Help them understand that leadership means adapting to help every Scout succeed, not lowering expectations. Give them specific tools like assigning buddies, checking in quietly, and giving clear instructions. Remind them that patience is part of leadership, not an extra.

If motor skills are a concern, pay closer attention during activities like hiking, cooking, or tool use. This doesn't mean exclusion. It means supervision, coaching, and sometimes modifying how the activity is done. Safety is number one.

Progress may look different for this Scout, and that's okay. Success might be staying the full campout, completing a task independently, or communicating more clearly over time. The patrol noticing and supporting that progress is just as important as the advancement itself.

In my experience, units that do this well don't create a separate experience. They create a culture where Scouts naturally help each other succeed. When that happens, the entire troop gets stronger, not just the Scout with special needs.

You'll find a lot of what you need to get started [here](#); I highly recommend looking over the Inclusion Toolbox. I refer to it often.

And, thank you for being a leader who believes that Scouting is for all.

You have questions? Commissioners have answers!

Reach out by email: commissionerserviceteam@scouting.org



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