

APRIL – ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY

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KRISTEN: Welcome to the April ExploringCast. I'm Kristen Falatko, Senior Exploring Program Specialist, and joining me as always is the lovely Senior Boy Scouting Specialist, Garfield Murden. So let's talk about the Scouting family. Prior to 1998, the Exploring program enjoyed coexisting side by side with its siblings Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts. Then in 1998, the BSA gave birth to a baby brother Venturing and sent Exploring to live with Auntie Learning for Life. So with that little bit of history...

GARFIELD: ... Exploring Executive Amy Wiernik suggested we have an episode on how your Exploring program can work with traditional BSA districts and units.

KRISTEN: She also had some really great ideas on how to make this happen, so we invited her on the show to share with the rest of the Exploring community the best ways and the benefits of working with the other BSA programs. Let's explore.

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KRISTEN: Amy Wiernik is the Exploring Executive with the Bay Lakes Council in Appleton, Wisconsin. Welcome to the ExploringCast, Amy. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

AMY: I have been working Boys Scouts for about two and a half years now, serving as an Exploring Executive the entire time I've been here but I've been lucky enough to be able to work closely with a lot of the districts in our council. I've had a lot of support that's really helped me along the way. So even though I work in Exploring I've been getting a lot of experience working with our traditional programs and it's served our council well.

KRISTEN: That's fantastic. Well, we really appreciate your time and we're so happy that you're here. All right, Amy, why is it important for all the BSA programs to really work together?

AMY: With all of our programs we're really working towards a common goal of really building out the next generation to learn how to give back to the community, be just really role model citizens for our country and for the communities that we live in. And one of great things about all of our programs is that we really cover all of the age ranges for youth. So when our boys get through Cub Scouts and go on to Boy Scouts, maybe they get their Eagle at 16 and there's two more really awesome programs, with Venturing and Exploring, that they can then join to further learn all of the necessary things that they'll need to survive as an adult.

GARFIELD: Amy, how does the Exploring program benefit from being part of this one big, happy family?

AMY: The Exploring program has been something that really hasn't gotten a lot of the attention that it deserved over the years. And when we have – at least I've noticed with our council –when we have our Exploring program

out and involved in the community or working with our local programs, we have a lot of Scouting volunteers who say, “Oh, I didn’t know that that program existed. That’s fantastic. Let me tell my niece or my nephew about it or my older son or daughter about it.” So, it really helps with getting the word out about Exploring and letting people know that there’s another great program that we offer to help our youth.

KRISTEN: It’s kind of like Exploring is the best-kept secret. And so with that, how does the Cub Scout Pack, the Boy Scout Troop, and Venturing Crew benefit from this?

AMY: When we are able to bring in our Exploring program, it brings more people in to hear the Scouting story and learn what Scouting is all about. A lot of people maybe have some older, stereotypical views about what Scouting is. Like we just make things out of wood and camp and roast marshmallows, but there’s so much more to Scouting. And when we bring in our other programs and bring everybody together, it really helps to tell our story and tell what we are trying to do as a movement.

GARFIELD: Now, Amy, you had mentioned earlier that you’re interacting or engaging with individuals that are not familiar with the program. How would you approach the unit and the district to be involved in Exploring and why?

AMY: So, the best thing that I found to do, if you’re looking to work with a specific district and even a unit within that district is to go to the District Executive or the District Director for that unit first. They’re going to be the experts on their area and who to talk to, and they’re also going to know

their units well and know who you can connect with. Then you're not stepping on any toes and you're really being able to go to the correct person right off the bat. So getting them onboard is important and then the reason that we've approached units and volunteers in the past is that we know that a lot of boys might get their Eagle early. So, let's say they get it at 16. They still have a number of years that they could be involved in Exploring, so we want them to know that the program exists and how they can get involved, what their options would be in their community, and what's the benefit as to joining Exploring.

GARFIELD: So, Amy, would you also use this as a retention strategy to be a part of the one big, happy family by getting Exploring and as a continuation?

AMY: Yes, absolutely. It's really important for us to keep our youth engaged and to keep them on a path towards success in their lives and Exploring or Venturing are a really great continuation of our Scouting program.

KRISTEN: So, Amy, how do we talk to our Scoutmasters when we're talking about approaching the unit, so the troop in this sense, educating them on not necessarily taking the boys away from the Boy Scout Troop but retaining them once they get their Eagle Scout? How do you educate them on that for the Exploring program?

AMY: The very first thing we do when we approach them is to make sure that they understand that we're not there to try to take their youth away from their program, really reiterating that we understand the value of Scouting and the value of a youth working towards their Eagle is very important.

And then educating them more on Exploring and how it's a great next step for the youth to take in their journey. So, with Scouting they've learned a lot of life skills and how to be involved in the community, and then with Exploring the next step for them would be to figure out what exactly they want to do with their future, what career do they want to go into. So, again, just really making sure they, they do understand you're not there to take their youth away but that you want to continue to help them grow.

GARFIELD: Great point.

KRISTEN: Those are some really good points, Amy. What are some things that you've done personally as the council's Exploring Executive or maybe that you've heard from other success stories to engage the traditional Scouting programs in general?

AMY: One of the things that we've been asked in the past is to have some of our Explorers help out with Camporees. They might be doing merit badges with the Scouts and going through, say, emergency preparedness or something related to public safety, and we have the Explorers go in and actually teach those skills and engage. And it benefits the traditional units because they have somebody who can come in and know what they're talking about, and then it also benefits our Explorers because they're able to go in and teach and really hone in on those skills and solidify what they're learning in their posts.

We have, also, had some of our posts provide security at some events, so if they need security - if it's an overnight event or something like that we'll

have Explorers come in and help provide an extra layer of security for them.

GARFIELD: Amy, what are some of your suggestions to Explorer posts and clubs for them to engage with traditional Scouting programs?

AMY: One of things is to really look at Scouting as something that can be an extension of their program and what they're doing. Right now we're working on trying to see how we can get our Explorers to come to camps, and usually you might bring up going to camp to Explorers and they think, "Well, why would I want to do that? There is nothing for me there." But we can really start to engage them more with some of our traditional Scouting programs because we do offer things that will benefit them, whether it's, working with the Venturing Officers' Association or with the Order of the Arrow to do collaborative things, some events that may be outreach for the community or community service projects, things like that.

KRISTEN: It sounds like you've had some really great experience in seeing out some of these advantages of bringing together all the programs within your council. Are there any resources available to get some ideas of ways for Explorers and the traditional BSA programs to work together?

AMY: One of the best resources that we found, and it was kind of an accident the way it happened. We were looking to do a recruitment event for our Venture Crews and our Explorer Posts in one area and we weren't quite sure how to do it, so we brought in a handful of Explorers and a handful of Venturers and we talked with them - just kind of picked their brain - what

do they like to do; what stands out to them as a program and from that we really discovered that talking to our youth who are currently involved in our programs and just hearing from them what they are looking for in a program and maybe the right language to use when communicating with them, because sometimes we forget, you know, what it's like to be that age, and it's different with every generation. So the youth in your council are a fantastic resource when it comes to working together and bringing programs together.

Another thing that's been helpful for me is attending Roundtable or District Committee Meetings because I get to know a lot of the volunteers that I wouldn't know otherwise because I don't normally work with them, and being able to build relationships there and educate people on Exploring so that they can kind of brainstorm themselves on ways that maybe they could work together. So that's been very beneficial.

Just another thing too maybe looking at merit badge requirements and going through any advancements that are necessary and just seeing how the programs might be able to work together. And it's going to be different for every council, but first and foremost, I would say, that definitely talking with the youth and talking with the volunteers that you have at your council to begin the education process of learning more about each program. Because it's something too that Explorers need to be educated on traditional Scouting programs and what all they have to offer. And then from there it's really fun to see how people get excited and how they want to work together and can see where they can go with their ideas.

GARFIELD: Wow, Amy, you gave us a great deal of information. Is there anything else about Exploring and traditional BSA programs that we haven't talked about that you think should be shared with our listeners?

AMY: I would really say just to really dive into seeing what ways your council might be able to bring the programs together, put any hard feelings aside from the past. Sometimes in Exploring we get a little bit frustrated with the traditional Scouting programs but they really do have a lot to offer us and we have a lot to offer them. So definitely getting out there and really working with the people in your council to figure out how we can make the programs better by working together will be a great benefit for everybody.

KRISTEN: You're exactly right, Amy. And all these different BSA programs working together really does make us one big, happy family. Amy, thanks so much for this awesome idea to talk about and for joining us on ExploringCast to share it.

AMY: Absolutely. Thanks for having me.

GARFIELD: And for our listeners, have you considered getting your Explorers involved in the Exploring Officers' Association? With chapters in local, area, and regional and national levels, the EOA is a great way for your Explorers to develop leadership skills and character building.

KRISTEN: Okay, to get you started, check out the Exploring Adult and Youth Guidebook and the EOA Standard Operating Procedures at Exploring.org. EOA members and Exploring professionals will also be invited to participate in an Exploring Leadership Academy at the Summit in the summer 2018.

GARFIELD: The Leadership Academy will be a unique, three- to five-day training experience for Explorers by Explorers, as well as specialized training for Exploring Executives. Stayed tuned for more details.

KRISTEN: Have your Explorers signed up for the 2017 Jamboree yet? It would be the perfect place for your Explorers to engage with the Boy Scouts and Venturers! Check out the January ExploringCast to find out how the BSA National Jamboree will be a fantastic addition to your Exploring program.

GARFIELD: One last thing. Did you know that the Exploring program has a brand new Memorandum of Understanding, or MOU, with the National U.S. Chamber of Commerce? Be sure to take advantage of this opportunity by visiting with your local chamber and discussing ways to start Exploring programs in your community.

KRISTEN: And if you have questions on how to access the MOU or to discuss strategies on approaching your local chamber, not a problem. You can always contact your Regional Exploring Director for more information.

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KRISTEN: And the music cue means it's the end of our show, y'all. Thanks for tuning in and a very special thanks to our guest Amy Wiernik not only for being a guest but for her wonderful suggestion.

GARFIELD: Is there anything else you'd like to talk about? Amy Wiernik let us know and so can you. Just send us an email to ExploringCast@Scouting.org, or

a tweet to @ExploringCast. We look forward to hearing from you. Until then, I'm Garfield Murden.

KRISTEN: And I'm Kristen Falatko. Remember that Exploring.org is the site for all things, I mean all things including tools and resources that you need for a great Exploring program. Be sure to sign up for the newsletter, like us on Facebook and, as always, follow us on Twitter.

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