

New Boy Scout Council Comprises Five Counties

Merger of Otetiana and Finger Lakes provides Scouts with additional programs

ROCHESTER, NY- The Otetiana and Finger Lakes councils of the Boy Scouts of America voted last night to merge, with the new council overseeing the five-county region of Monroe, Ontario, Seneca, Wayne, and Yates. The new council will maintain its current offices in both Rochester and Geneva.

The reasons stated for the merger are enhanced services and smart financial planning. The new council will be led by Larry Pritchard, who will be the Scout Executive and CEO. He has been the Otetiana Council's Scout Executive for nine years and has more than 35 years experience as a professional Scouter. The Finger Lakes Council's position of Scout Executive has been vacant for several months.

Peter Pape, co-chair of the merger committee says that "this merger allows us to build on the strengths of each organization. Otetiana has done a lot for children in tough circumstances in the city of Rochester, and Finger Lakes has done very good work for teens with their traditional Venturing programs. Together we can apply those successes across our region. Neither of the past councils had any debt; we did this to ensure financial stability, not to avert crisis."

There will be no staff cuts due to the merger. The four-county Finger Lakes Council founded in 1924, has employed six full-time staff members and the Otetiana, founded in 1943 and encompassing only Monroe County has employed 35. Together the councils employ over 120 summer staff to provide camping programs.

In addition, all programs, camps, and activities will operate as planned in 2009 and there are currently no plans to close any Scout camps. This merger will allow Scouts access to three camps, whereas Otetiana has run two and Finger Lakes oversaw one. The three camps are the 3,600-acre Massawepie Scout Camps in the Adirondacks; the 1,300-acre Cutler Scout Reservation located north of Naples in Ontario County; and the 360-acre Camp Babcock-Hovey located on the east side of Seneca Lake in Seneca County. Each camp offers unique opportunities, including canoe treks from Massawepie; the Babcock-Hovey science and technology camp and the fort, castle, long house, and ships of the Cub Scout Adventure Camp at Cutler.

Each council's voting members will decide a slate of officers to run the merged council. The merger study was overseen by a steering committee, created in January from representatives of both boards. The committee formed study groups and held town meetings in Rochester and Geneva. In addition to the individual boards, the United Way of Greater Rochester has pledged its support for the merger, as have representatives from the Northeast Region of the Boy Scouts of America.

"This merged council enables us to serve the Scouts and community more efficiently, as it allows the Finger Lakes executives to focus energies on their primary role as district managers," said Robert Oaks, Finger Lakes Council president "The overwhelming vote in support of the merger demonstrates commitment to the future of Scouting in our region. People understand we will now have a stronger combined council with more support staff and access to the Otetiana camps. This is a win for both councils, our Scouts and their families, and the entire region."

The programs of the Boy Scouts of America include the Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts and the co-ed Exploring and Venturing programs. In 2008, Otetiana supported programs for 13,063 Scouts and their supporting adult volunteers, which represents 22 percent of the total youth available in Monroe County. The Finger Lakes Council in 2008 supported programs for 2,800 Scouts and adult volunteers, representing 13 percent of the youth population.

The mission of the Boy Scouts of America is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetime by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Law.

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