

# ABILITIES DIGEST

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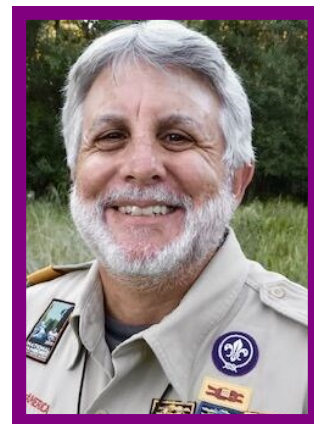
Spring 2023  BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

## From the Committee

### Thank you, Warren, For Your Service

At the May meeting of the National Special Needs and Disabilities (SND) Committee, our long-serving Chair Warren Wenner stepped down. Warren became Chair of the Nationals SND Committee at the 2019 National Annual Meeting. Since then, the committee has grown dramatically and has forged new directions for Scouting with special needs and disabilities. As a volunteer he modeled the consummate servant leader.

Warren used a lifetime of connections to get things in front of the right people inside BSA, both on the volunteer and the professional side. He easily related with volunteers as a fellow volunteer. He had an ease when working with Scouting professionals, both as an experienced nonprofit employee and former BSA Executive. Warren understands the different perspectives and deftly navigated the social dynamics of organizations that competed despite common objectives. Under Warren leadership, the committee has developed stronger relationships within the national BSA, with the different councils, and with other service organizations within the SND Community.



## In This Issue

- **From the Committee:** Big Thank You to outgoing Committee Chair, Warren Wenner; Welcome to Brent Worley, incoming Committee Chair; noting the tenth year of Abilities Digest.
- **Adapting Activities:** Having an oasis of tranquility for overstimulated Scouts; camp reviews for Scouts with special needs.
- **Awareness Events:** Service opportunities at the 2023 Jamboree; Quarterly online SND roundtables; summer SND activities at Philmont.
- **Recognizing Abilities:** 2023 Woods Services Award recipients
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## Welcome Brent , our new National SND Chair



Brent is an Eagle Scout and has been an adult leader in the Boy Scouts of America for the past 32 years, serving many positions at the unit, district, council, Area, and National level. Brent began working with Scouts with special needs in 1996 at the Heart of America Council's Rotary Youth Camp session for Scouts with Special Needs. In the 28 years he has worked on camp staff Brent has served a variety of positions including Pool Director, Camp Director, and Camp Commissioner. Brent also spent 14 years as the Venturing Crew Advisor for the special needs unit based out of the camp (2307). Brent has, for the past 15 years, served as a member of the Executive Board for the Heart of America Council BSA. He has also served as faculty and course director for the National Camping School and at Philmont. In the Central Region, Brent has participated in his area's camp visitation and assessment activities.

As a Scouter, Brent has received the District Award of Merit, Vigil Honor, Silver Beaver, and the Silver Antelope. He has also been recognized as a National Outstanding Eagle Scout.

Within his community, Brent served in a variety of positions. Brent has been a member of Rotary Club 13 of Downtown Kansas City for the last 17 years. He has served for 6 years on the Rotary Youth Camp Association Board of Directors as both a member and as the Board President.

Brent Worley is the President and Chairman of Wall-Ties & Forms, Inc, serving in this position for the past 11 years. Educated as a chemist, Brent has been working in the concrete form industry for the last 26 years. Brent has conducted onsite training to engineers, architects, site foreman, and workers at over 150 jobsites in over 42 countries.

Brent has been married to his wife Huong for 17 years and they have two sons Owen and Luke. He is a member of St. Luke's United Methodist Church. He has traveled the world for both work and pleasure visiting 86 countries on 6 continents.

## Tenth Year of Abilities Digest

We are also pleased to reflect on our tenth year of publishing *Abilities Digest*. [The first issue](#) was distributed in the summer of 2014. We generally publish an issue every season and distribute them electronically. There are over a thousand individuals signed up to receive the *Digest* via email, and another 200 receive it through the AbleScouts.org web site.

The *Digest* would not have been possible without articles and other contributions by subscribers, volunteers on council and national SND committees, and our volunteer staff: Marti Jernberg (reviewer), Janet Kelly (author/reporter), Rick Smith (editor in chief), Mike Traynham



(reviewer), and Mary Wangerin (production editor). Thank you all for your service!

On a related note, the AbleScouts.org web site received over 12,000 visitors last year. This year's traffic will definitely match or exceed the previous year. The most popular destination on AbleScouts is the [Inclusion Toolbox](#). More visitors go to the Toolbox than to the site's home page.

## Adapting Activities

### All Camps Need a Tranquility Base



The time for summer camp is quickly approaching. For many Scouts, the process of getting to camp and then being at camp can be a very stressful time.

Tranquility Base is a safe, quiet space Scouts and Scouters can go when noise and stress levels get to be too much. Many Scouts on the spectrum and others with sensory issues need time alone to regroup and recharge in order to rejoin the community/activity that caused the stress. Many stressors of the day can put many of us on overload. Imagine that high pitched screech from a

microphone: maybe your teeth are clamped together and your shoulders are lifting just thinking of the sound. If you consider the discomfort of that sound, you will have some idea of the stress and pain some of those with low tolerance levels or sensory issues experience. All will appreciate those places within the camp parameters that are quiet and allow one to regroup and reset their systems. All camp spaces should have a Tranquility Base.



These tranquil spaces are **not a punishment time out area**. The person simply removes him/herself and spends some time away from the stressful situation. These spaces are a way to help the

youth grow in self-management skills. Think about what you do when things get to be too much for you. Generally speaking, most of us walk away from whatever it is because we can. At camp, when under the direction of authority and rule following, a Scout does not have the luxury to remove him/herself without permission and sometimes that per-



mission is denied. Then what happens? For those who have issues, havoc can break loose. The bottom line is without YOUR sensitivity to these Scouts and Scouters, everyone loses out on a fun and enjoyable time.

**Ask the Scout** what works best for him/her. You may be surprised that their own idea of Tranquility Base is a simple solution that does not affect the surrounding activities. Remember one of the methods of Scouting focuses on personal growth. For individuals who have a difficult time holding on to self-control, Tranquility Bases at all your

Scout functions may prove to be the simplest solution for that Scout or Scouter to extricate him/herself from a potential meltdown or tantrum and reboot. Yes, adults included. As you know, it's hard being a leader sometimes.

Set a space up at your events as a Tranquility Base and allow those who need it to use it. Set up the basic rules (so as not to abuse the space and what it is primarily used for) and demonstrate its use, as needed. Tranquility Bases allow your Scouts to deescalate and get back into the action productively.



There are many ways to set up a Tranquility Base at your summer event, at a Council camp, or even at a national camp. Tranquility Base does not need to be complicated. It does not need to have a lot of equipment attached to it. Tranquility Base can be quite simple really.

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Sling a hammock** from two trees a little way off from the bustle of camp life. The Scout or Scouter can roll up in the hammock and hang suspended. Gentle rocking can soothe the nerve endings and in a few minutes one can emerge a bit calmer than when he/she entered.
- **Sit on a tree stump** (or comfy chair) a bit away from camp within eyesight of leadership. Maybe the seat is looking out over the lake. Maybe the seat is facing a marine harbor. Maybe the seat is facing the sunrise or sunset. You get the picture.

## Managing Subscriptions to *Abilities Digest*

*Abilities Digest* is designed for any leader who would offer a Scouting program to youth who have special needs. Any Scouting volunteer or professional may subscribe.

**Subscribing by email.** Send a message to [specialneedschair@scouting.org](mailto:specialneedschair@scouting.org), with "SUBSCRIBE" in the subject line. Indicate your name, email address, and council in the message text.

**Unsubscribing by email.** To decline future issues please reply and enter "REMOVE" in the subject line. We will remove the subscription within the next two weeks.

**Receiving Multiple Email Copies.** If you receive *Abilities Digest* at more than one email address, choose the one to be removed and reply with "REMOVE" in the subject line. Include a message requesting that we re-move only that email address.

**Duplicate Email Copies.** If you receive more than one copy of *Abilities Digest* at the same email address, please reply to all but one of them with "DUPLICATE" in the subject line.

**Address Change.** If you want *Abilities Digest* sent to a different address, reply and enter "ADDRESS CHANGE" in the subject line. In your message, enter your council name and the email address you prefer.

**Subscribing online.** Visit the web site [ablescouts.org](http://ablescouts.org). The page's lower left corner displays a small gray rectangle with the word "Follow" and three dots. Click on the word "Follow" and enter your email address. You will receive an email whenever a new *Abilities Digest* appears, plus an email when articles are republished.

- **Set up a table area** where one can be distracted by fidget tools such as chain link puzzles, search and find tubes or books, stretchy fidgets, or other manipulative items. It's very possible that the Scout has brought the fidget that best meets the needs of the moment. Allow that Scout to use it.
- **Listen to music** in that comfy chair that is facing the sunset.
- **Take advantage of the side boundaries of an area** for the Scout to pace, stand, move back and forth. Usually, they are listening to what is happening at the center of the action, so don't stress that the Scout is missing out on important information. Consider the fact that when something is bothering you, YOU probably have a very hard time concentrating on what's in front of you. These Scouts are very much like you in that respect. Allow them to self-regulate.



When all is said and done, remember that Scouting is supposed to be FUN! So, get out there and have a fun summer!!!

You can research other ideas by reading [a previous article on Tranquility Bases](#) from Abilities Digest, posted on AbleScouts.org.

## Camp Previews for Scouts with Special Needs



Perhaps all Scouts are anxious on their first trip to camp, especially long-term camp. For some Scouts, and even some parents, the anxiety may be justified by mobility problems. In other cases, cognitive issues may allow anxiety to reach extreme levels. You can help relieve anxiety by making a preview visit to the camp before the actual time away from home. Some Scouts might do well by watching a video of the camp or taking a "virtual visit"

online. Others benefit most by traveling to the actual camp and seeing it in person.

**Five minutes of looking at something is always better than five hours of talking about it.** The preview trip eliminates mysteries and allows Scouts and parents to spot possible problem areas. In some instances, a simple item brought from home will address a lot of challenges. For summer camp or day camp, see if you can go out during the staff training/set-up days for the camp. Not only can you address the physical obstacles of the camp, the Scout can get acquainted with some staff members and you can talk to staff about how to include the Scout

in the camp's activities. These conversations go so much better when the staff is not in the mad swirl of holding camp with large numbers of Scouts.

Even when camp administrators, rangers, and property managers carefully inspect places for obstructions to access, things get missed. For example, one camp's accessible path to the dining hall had a door latch that was sticky and would not open without fiddling it in a certain way. When you live with a mobility limitation or other disability



you know better than anyone else what to watch out for to take care of yourself. It's not just mobility and access



that could matter. There could be sensory issues with light and sound, or a need you never imagined until it crops up.

The best way to help ensure a good experience is to allow families of Scouts with special needs to come out to the camp location and walk through the areas where the Scout will need to go and then team with the camp staff to come up with work arounds.

Preview tours work best when the family can be met by someone who is actually on the leadership staff for the camp session. You can also have one of the specialists from your Council's special needs committee come out for the tour. The scope of the tour should be almost the same as the tour the camp host gives a unit when it arrives at camp.

For efficiency, camps may provide a scheduled tour opportunity and promote it in the camp's guide for leaders and participants. Here are opportunities to schedule such tours:



- a staff workday in the spring ahead of the camp session
- a weekend when a leadership staffer will already be at the camp for another event
- during the camp set-up week immediately prior to opening camp.



If these times don't work, you may have to be more resourceful. If the Scout lives close enough, the family can come out and meet with the camp ranger during the week, and the ranger can report any issues back to the camp director. If the Scout is coming in from a long distance, a realistic option may be to ask the Scout/family to arrive at the camp a day early, and give the tour right after the last week's campers leave for home.

# Awareness Events

## Jamboree Service Team



There are still opportunities available to support SND events and activities at the National Jamboree this summer. Visit the Jamboree web site for more information: [jamboree.scouting.org/jamboree-service-team/](https://jamboree.scouting.org/jamboree-service-team/).

## Next SND Online Roundtable is August 15

The National SND Committee sponsors a quarterly online roundtable about Scouting for youth with special needs and disabilities. These will usually occur on the third Monday in February, May, August and November.

Registration is open to all and we will post registration information as soon as it is available on the Able Scouts website and on SND-related discussion groups on Facebook, particularly “No Scout Left Behind” and “Abilities Digest.”



## Summer SND Activities at Philmont



The 2023 Zia Experience and the Adaptive Special Needs Conference have both been re-scheduled to take place **June 25 through July 1**. Register for these opportunities by visiting <https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/ptc-conferences/>.

The **Adaptive Special Needs Conference** spends a week learning best practices in outdoor and camping programs for special needs.

The **Zia Experience** is a customized, highly supported, personalized experience for Scouts, and their families!

The Zia Experience has an application process to attend. To make sure they are able to provide the best experience possible, families will apply to participate and Zia staff will reach out to parents to discuss the specific needs of the scout and help create a positive Philmont experience.

**Scholarships are available** to attend these Philmont events. Visit the [Rates and Scholarships](#) page for further information. There are separate applications for adult and youth scholarships.



# Recognizing Abilities

## 2023 Woods Services Awards

The National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee is pleased to announce the 2023 recipients of the Woods Services Award. Only two of these awards may be granted nationally each year to BSA volunteer Scouters for exceptional service and leadership in the field of Scouting with disabilities. The recipients are:

Eleanor Philips, Greater Saint Louis Area Council

Mary Margaret “Midge” Savage, Michigan Crossroads Council

The Woods Services Award is a community service award sponsored by Woods Services and administered by the BSA National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee. The award was created in 1978 by the Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center. Since 1913, the Center has provided services to children and adults with disabilities.

### Eleanor Philips Receives 2023 Woods Services Award



The BSA National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee is pleased to announce that one of this year’s awards goes to Eleanor Philips, member of the Greater Saint Louis Area Council (GSLAC). Eleanor has contributed beyond measure to special needs Scouting. She has worked tirelessly to ensure full participation of special needs Scouts in all Scouts BSA programs and events. Since the 1980s, she has been a Scoutmaster for a troop with Scouts with disabilities. She has been taking her troop to camp since 1988. Her Scouts have been to Boundary Waters once and twice to Philmont. Eleanor’s first trek to Philmont was long before Philmont was prepared to accommodate youth with special needs. Eleanor worked with Philmont and made it a very successful experience.

At the council level, Eleanor has served on the GSLAC Special Needs Committee in several capacities. As training chair, she has been the “go to” person in the council for training adult leaders in dealing with scouts with disabilities. She is also Dean of the College of Special Needs. She has been the special needs trainer for camp staff and NYLT staff for many years.

On the national level, at the most recent National Order of the Arrow Conference, Eleanor led an Admonition Team, setting up special quiet areas to give Scouts with special needs a place to “chill” when needed, and headed a group to answer special needs related questions from Scouts or leaders. Also, at NOAC, she served as a special needs presenter on a panel discussion. Nationally Eleanor was a special needs coordinator at the 2018 National Jamboree and was an assistant subcamp head at the World Jamboree in 2019. In addition, since 2022, she has been an advisory member of the National Special Needs and Disabilities Committee.



A few of the many Scouting Awards she has received are the District Award of Merit, the Silver Beaver, and the Special Needs Scouting Service Award.

In her home council, anytime anyone mentions Special Needs Scouting, Eleanor is immediately the first name thought of, with a whole-hearted endorsement and unquestionable knowledge that she will do all within her power to help and get any job done well. Doing her Best - Doing her Duty - To help others at all times.

## **Midge Savage Receives 2023 Woods Services Award**



The BSA Special Needs and Disabilities Committee is pleased to announce that one of this year's awards goes to Mary Margaret "Midge" Savage, member of the Michigan Crossroads Council. When it comes to special needs in Scouting, Midge is the council's "go-to" person. She is always willing to help district chairs with questions and advice on how to handle any circumstance that may arise while working with a special needs youth.

Midge is always willing to guide and help adult leaders and parents in helping Scouts with special needs or disabilities. She regularly presents national training programs at

Sea Base, the Summit, as well as local training programs. She attends every council advancement meeting to answer questions. She also represents Scouts that are looking to be registered beyond the age of eligibility or are asking for an extension. She works with district advancement chairs very closely to keep everyone in the loop.

Midge has professional experience in special needs as well as Scouting experience. She began teaching at Lincoln Park Schools in Michigan in 1969. In 1984 she became the Director of Special Education in the Woodhaven-Brownstown Schools, Michigan. She retired from that position in 2006. She has also been recognized for decades of service to the Crawford Armstrong Handicapped Organization and the James Caughlan Organization.

As a Scouter, Midge has served in division and council special needs positions since 2014, and she has worked with the National SND Committee and its precursors, since 2015. Midge has earned the District Award of Merit, the Silver Beaver, and the Torch of Gold awards.

The Woods Services Award is a community service award sponsored by Woods Services and administered by the BSA National SND Committee. The award was created in 1978 by the Woods Services and Residential Treatment Center. Since 1913, the Center has provided services to children and adults with disabilities.

We are proud to present the 2023 Woods Services Awards to Eleanor Philips and Midge Savage. The beautiful recognition is provided by Woods Services. In addition, the National SND Committee is presenting them with the community service square knot and the special needs device to wear on it. Congratulations Eleanor and Midge!

## Helpful Links

Scouting with Disabilities landing page: [scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/](https://scouting.org/resources/disabilities-awareness/)

AbleScouts: *Abilities Digest* articles posted online: [ablescouts.org](https://ablescouts.org)

## Links in Articles

2023 Jamboree Service Team: [jamboree.scouting.org/jamboree-service-team/](https://jamboree.scouting.org/jamboree-service-team/)

Inclusion Toolbox: <https://ablescouts.org/toolbox/>

Philmont Training Center:

- Registration: [philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/ptc-conferences/](https://philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/ptc-conferences/)
- Rates and Scholarships: <https://www.philmontscoutranch.org/ptc/rates/>

Torch of Gold Award: [filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf](https://filestore.scouting.org/filestore/pdf/512-945.pdf)

Understanding Behavior and Mental Health in Scouting Conference:

<https://www.samhoustonbsa.org/special-needs-and-disabilities-conference-2023-04-21>

## Social Media

Twitter: @AbilitiesDigest



Facebook *Abilities Digest*: [www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165](https://www.facebook.com/pages/Abilities-Digest/824105334298165)

Facebook *No Scout Left Behind*: [www.facebook.com/groups/1967878213431320](https://www.facebook.com/groups/1967878213431320)



Email your comments and questions to [specialneedschair@scouting.org](mailto:specialneedschair@scouting.org).