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BARON: Boy Scouts of America a leader in child protection

Safety of young men is first priority

By Les Baron

On Nov. 1 and 2 in Atlanta, Boy Scouts of America (BSA) hosted the National Youth Protection Symposium, which was facilitated by Michael Haney, executive director of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, and included representatives from nationwide youth-serving organizations that are positively impacting the lives of nearly 20 million children annually. While this symposium had been in the planning stages since late last year, its timeliness serves as a very public answer to the question of whether or not BSA has the welfare of its youth members as their primary concern.

Let me be very clear: The safety and protection of young people is our No. 1 priority.



Scouting has long recognized the need to create a safe environment for its youth. In 1911, the year after BSA incorporated in Washington, D.C., the organization began to require character reference checks for Scoutmasters. Two years later, BSA began to provide guidance to parents and chartered organizations in selecting Scout leaders. By the mid-1920s, Scouting was cross-referencing all adult volunteers against a list of "ineligible volunteers" to identify and keep out those persons deemed lacking the moral, emotional or character values for membership. Year after year, BSA continued to develop its youth protection policies with -- and often ahead of -- social norms.

Today, BSA is lauded for its multitiered, transparent youth protection training and procedures. In fact, in an article released in January entitled "Major youth groups make headway against sex abuse," Victor Vieth, a former prosecutor who heads the National Child Protection Training Center in Minnesota, told the Associated Press, "The Boy Scouts have the most advanced policies and training." Several independent child-protection experts said "that the Scouts -- though buffeted in the past by many abuse-related lawsuits -- are now considered a leader in combating sexual abuse."

In September, Janet Warren, professor of psychiatry and neurobehavioral sciences at the University of Virginia, the university's liaison to the FBI Behavioral Sciences Unit and a member of the Research Advisory Board of the FBI National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, produced a report analyzing BSA's Ineligible Volunteers Files, which have been the subject of much media attention lately. In her conclusion, she states, "Time and again in reviewing these files, I was struck by BSA's pursuit of information regarding a suspected sexual offender. These claims of abuse were not swept under the carpet and ignored. Rather, suspected offenders were pursued and often times barred from Scouting over their fervent objection and at times even the opinion of the local community."

BSA's president, Wayne Perry, a volunteer, has said, "There have been instances where people misused their positions in Scouting to abuse children, and in certain cases, our response to these incidents and our efforts to

protect youth were plainly insufficient, inappropriate or wrong. Where those involved in Scouting failed to protect, or worse, inflicted harm on children, we extend our deepest apologies to victims and their families."

I know we all agree that one case of abuse is one too many. While the circumstances that necessitate youth protection are inexcusable, the increased attention has brought the topic to the forefront of discussion for every youth-serving organization and institution worldwide. Soon, I hope the attention will be evident in their policies as well. In support of that, I encourage anyone who is interested to read Mr. Warren's full report, educate themselves about BSA's youth protection policies and take BSA's youth protection training at BSAYouthProtection.org. As the leader of an organization that serves more than 56,400 local youth -- and as a Life Scout, a Scouting professional for more than 30 years and the father of an Eagle Scout -- I applaud the millions of adult Scouting volunteers, including 21,100 local men and women, who on a daily basis uphold the Scout Oath and Law, who selflessly provide mentorship and guidance to millions of young people, and who faithfully adhere to our stringent youth protection policies.

Les Baron is CEO of the National Capital Area Council of Boy Scouts of America.

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