

Many thanks for the invitation. I've attended many of these, since my own Eagle dinner in 1974, and I hope to make this one just a bit special for this Eagle class of 2018.

To do so, I'm going to ignore hundreds of years of political precedents and NOT talk about my own experiences tonight. Instead, to prepare for this special night, over the last few months I attempted to contact the more than 80 Eagles from my troop in Tamaqua from 1960 to 2019....these guys are now scattered all over the country ...in my college multivariate statistics class, we'd call this research "statistically significant." —that means that these findings should apply to a broader perspective...as goes Tamaqua 776/777, so goes the world, so to speak.

I asked all of my troop's Eagles since 1960 two basic questions:

What was your favorite activity as a member of our local troop? And,

How did Scouting prepare you for your future?

Here are some of the highlights of my research:

According to all who responded, the favorite activity, by far, was our annual trip to Canada, from the 1960s until 2004. Bob Roche (33) an Eagle from the 1980s, described it this way:

Grown men and teenage boys of different generations, races, creeds, and economic backgrounds were bonded together in this experience that only they could explain.

Jim Gurcsik, (64), an Eagle from two decades later and now a teacher and a chef--said something very similar: we were a **band of brothers** that came from all walks of life...to experience many things that would never have been an option for us, had we not joined our troop.

Kevin Woodring (42) picked up on the same theme, writing about building bonds with older leaders, learning from their outlooks and their varied experiences

For Paul Vanek (19), an Eagle from 1980, now a surgeon in Ohio who has traveled all over the world, it wasn't just Canada, it was his role as our bugler in Canada.... He said this: "I think the trip to Canada was so eye opening for me as a small town boy...as a young musician as well as a young man to tolerate peer pressure." Any of you who have ever listened to a brand new bugler will understand...that's major-league peer pressure.

Our leading response for how Scouting prepared them for the future should be no surprise to anyone in this room:

Many just said that Scouting taught them to BE PREPARED...I'll bet the new Eagles in front of me have heard a good bit about that concept since you first joined your Troop!

Brian Hartz, one of my best friends in my old Tamaqua East End neighborhood, our Eagle #14 in 1973, put it this way—it taught him to be prepared, for school, for work, and for life in general.

46 years later, one of this troop's brand new Eagles, Nick Wall agreed, saying:

“Scouting has prepared me for the future by teaching me values that you could never get from any other activities or sports. Whether it be first aid or new friends, scouting has been preparing me since day one and I would not want it any other way.”

Dr. Josh DeBellis, our troop's first Eagle Dentist, an Eagle from about 12 years ago, said pretty much the same thing: “It taught me to be prepared for various situations, whether with knowledge, tools, or both...how to be flexible and to adapt to a changing world.”

Shawn Klitsch, (68), an Eagle since 2005 had this to say:

“Life will always provide challenges, knowing how to push through them and learn from them started in Scouting for me.” If you interviewed all of the Scout leaders in this room tonight, I’m sure that many of us have had very similar experiences.

Brian Connely, #29, an Eagle from the 1980s who is the new leader of one of the largest employers in this entire region, had this to say about being prepared:

“Our leaders were the most important in preparing me for anything. The lessons they taught me not only in Scouting but in everyday life are things I still cherish to this day and pass down.... “

And again, to quote Jim Gurscik (64):

“Being prepared for anything in my path, any obstacle or any situation became an instinct that I have learned and applied from my scouting days.”

His younger brother Mike agreed saying:

“I learned how to plan, prepare, and execute specific tasks with other people. The fundamental aspects of scouting carried over into my school, jobs, family, and career.”

The third Eagle Gurscik brother, Jay (63) told me that the leading lesson he learned in Scouting was how to be a citizen for life...from helping others and being a trusted neighbor, obeying the law when no one is watching, speaking out for what is right, and volunteering when not required.

Would any of our new Eagles be surprised to learn that older Eagles continue to follow the Scout Oath and Law, with friends for life?

My patrol leader Greg Hafer, #12, a very young Eagle around 1972, the third Hafer Eagle brother and the father of two of his own Eagles had this to say:

“I learned that our scouting brotherhood bond would remain throughout my life and would be a gauge I would use in my career when hiring people. As I got older I found myself still using the scout oath and law as a barometer when making tough decisions.”

A brotherhood bond throughout his life.....It’s no accident that Greg and I are still good friends, for more than 50 years. And if I were to start to tell you stories from my own Scouting experiences, he would star in many of them...but I promised....not tonight!

An Eagle three decades after Greg received his medal, Ray Dewire (60) said the same thing: “Scouting has taught me lifelong friendships that I cherish to this day. Professionally, it taught me the importance of team work, leadership, and being responsible for others or a group.”

Dr. Adam Jones (59) one of our three Jones brother Eagles, also speaks fondly of maintaining his scouting friendships, now 14 years beyond his Eagle, and

Vic Baddick (39) used the exact same term: LIFELONG friendships.

My younger brother Doug (26), an Eagle from 1986 who finished up his paperwork the day before his 18th birthday—sound familiar, anyone--also wrote of the importance of learning leadership:

“Nothing I’ve gone through prepared me better than scouting.”

On the subject of leadership, another Scout who needed a bit of, how shall we say it, “gentle encouragement” is our 70th Eagle from 2006, our troop’s first and only Eagle-lawyer, my son AJ.

Like my brother Doug, he's also a bit of procrastinator...I asked our Eagles to respond months ago, but he brought tears to my eyes with his response at 11:18 LAST night:

“None of this would have been possible without you pushing me (and often the rest of the troop) to keep the tradition of teamwork and the scouting spirit alive.”

Teamwork, leadership, tradition, those words were mentioned again and again in our responses....

Here's Matt Heffelfinger (34) from the '90s: it was the exposure to so many different concepts, activities, events, styles of leadership....I can lead a variety of people from different backgrounds...all thanks to my experiences in scouting.

And again, more on the value of leadership:

My son's soccer teammate CJ Rhode (69): “Scouting taught me how to problem solve in different environments, both planning and hands on...it has also helped me be a well-rounded team player”

Our ninth Eagle, from back in the 1960s, Larry Seligman, writing from Tuscon, AZ; described his leadership training this way:

“Even as a Chief of Police I used supervisory and management skills I learned as a patrol leader while I was still in junior high school.” Imagine that, putting Scouting skills from junior high school into leading a large city police department thousands of miles from good ol Tamaqua!

He learned something else in our troop, too, writing:

Over fifty years later, I am an outdoor and wilderness enthusiast...Last year I backpacked 160 miles of the Pacific Coast Trail and I will be 68 years old this November!

How’s that for a goal for all our young Eagles...160 mile treks in your 60s?

And Rich Brown, one of our three Eagle Brown brothers(27): His favorite scouting activity was our expedition to Philmont, NM in 1986: 33 years later, he’s going back this year with one of his sons as his Council’s lead advisor.

From our oldest Eagles to our youngest, many talked about learning a love of the outdoors:

Jacob Kropp, an Eagle from the past decade said this:

“I love the outdoors and have made working outdoors part of my profession. Leave no trace is not just a scouting slogan, it is a lifestyle.

Finding a future career in Scouting was one of the most frequent answers in the responses to my questions:

Corey Derr (48) explained it this way: “When I first started looking for my job, or even when I looked for internships...being an Eagle opened up many doors.”

Bill Brown (30) moved from preparing for First Aid meets in the 1980s to a role as a registered nurse and a hospital supervisor: cancer, trauma, neuro, cardiac, open heart....packing open stomach and chest wounds, comforting the dying, helping with drug overdoses... those are things we didn't train for in first aid meets!

He summed it up this way: “Scouting makes us leaders in the community and in society and it's as a leader we protect the weak, educate the present, and guide the future.” Bill, that's one great quote!

His brother Rich (27) summed it up this way: In my senior year of college when interviewing for a job with IBM, the first question asked from the interviewer was:

“What did I do for my Eagle project.” After that, the job was mine!

Dave, the youngest of the three Eagle Brown brothers, made a very similar point: “In Scouting... we have been involved in team building events and that helps you when you enter the work force. Many activities in scouting teach you problem solving skills and you can relate back to these items in your current life.”

And here’s another favorite, from Rick Christ (37) an Eagle since the early 1990s:

“Scouting has been instrumental in my life. I met my wife through a scouting friend, my college internship was with scouting and now I work for the scouts.”

What Rick didn’t explain is that Rick’s “work” with the Scouts is as the new top executive with our neighboring council in Minsi Trails. All because he joined our local troop!

His friend Bob Roche (33) from the 1990s had one of my all-time favorite Scouting career paths:

Bob’s first aid merit badge led him directly to a role as a student athletic trainer for Marian Catholic High School’s football team and his college major. Today, he’s in his

14th season in the NFL as an athletic trainer for the Minnesota Vikings. HOW cool is that, guys? Every time I watch the Vikings, there he is working on the sidelines, at NFL games all over the country.

Nathan Steigerwalt, one of our newest Eagles, had a similar experience:

A Scout visit to a local airport turned into his college major in aviation science and a pilot's license: His quote:

“Scouting has surely prepared me for my future, but more so than anything it has changed it...I can say without any doubt, without Scouting I would not be as prepared, or as happy as I am today.”

Nathan, you probably didn't realize it when you typed those words...but that's exactly the kind of message that keeps guys like John Vogel active in the program...for a lifetime!!

Speaking of Scouting for life, here's a fitting conclusion from our troop's very first eagle, John Roemer, from the early 1960s, writing from MN:

“Being an Eagle Scout has helped me throughout my working career. I listed it on every employment

application...This would usually lead to a discussion about Scouting, which would then lead to a job offer...

Now that I am retired, I am able to give back even more to Scouting where I am an Assistant District Commissioner and a Leave no trace/outdoor ethics master trainer.”

Do the math....Ladies and gentleman, for our first Eagle, John Roemer, that's 60 years of Scouting, and he's going strong....

At Eagle Scout presentations, Rep. Jerry Knowles likes to remind the audience that he was a proud part of the 96% of all Scouts who will never receive his Eagle.

As a part of my research for tonight, I also interviewed a few of my son's friends from our old Cub Scout Den which met at my home 20 years ago...and guess what, even though many of them did not earn their Eagles, their Scouting experiences and memories are very positive, as well. My favorite response was from a former Cub, Zach Chodur. He reminded me that our Cubs learned a German Christmas song for our visit to a local nursing home. 20 years later, he still remembers that song...auf Deutsch...in German.

Who knows what all of you will remember from your Scouting years, 20 years from now, or 60 years from now?

Now remember, all of these experiences are from just one troop from a small town in Schuylkill County, PA— Think of the impact that these Eagles have had, and are having, all across the country. Now multiply that impact by all of your troops across this Council, for more than 100 years of Scouting. It really is the gift that keeps on giving.

Now, to the Eagle Class of 2018, it's your turn, it's your time. BE PREPARED to make your impact. You've already made your parents and your leaders and your fellow Scouts proud. Now, for the rest of your lives, here's your chance to make us all proud!

It's time for you to be prepared to find your careers. Be prepared to build on those friendships. Be prepared to pursue those leadership opportunities. Be prepared to continue to enjoy the outdoors, all over the world. Be prepared to do all those things that my own personal band of brothers from Tamaqua has been pursuing since 1960.

Again, a very sincere thank you for this invitation so that my wife Beth and I could join you on your special night. Beth had no idea when we met how important Scouting was to me....but I promised, no personal stories from me....we'll save all of those for another time!

Congratulations to the Eagle Class of 2018!