

Girls in the Boy Scouts: How a national decision affects the Riverbend

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ALTON - Starting in 2018, families can choose the Cub Scouts for their sons or daughters, Chairman of the Piasa Group of the Boy Scouts said in an email Friday morning.

Earlier this year, the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America ruled in favor of letting girls join their rankings. The ruling would allow young women to join young men as Cub Scouts and continue with scouting all the way to Eagle Scout, but it allowed local chapters, groups and councils to make the decision for integration themselves. The Greater St. Louis Area Council to which Botterbush and the Piasa Group belongs made the decision to go ahead with the integration measures.

" will enable to take advantage of the life-changing experiences provided through Scouting," Botterbush said in an email. "A program for older girls will be announced in 2018 with projected implementation in 2019 to deliver the Boy Scout program to girls, allowing for participating girls to earn the highest rank of Eagle."

Botterbush said the Greater St. Louis Area Council tends to go with National Council of the Boy Scouts of America decisions, but added several aspects of Scouting were already open to young women, such as the Exploring and Venturing Programs, which were made co-ed in 1971. This decision, however, will expand the programs offered by the Boy Scouts for more young women.

Recent surveys of parents not currently involved with Scouting have revealed a high interest in enrolling daughters into programs like Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, Botterbush said in an email. He said as many as 90 percent of parents expressed interest in a program similar to Cub Scouts and 87 percent expressed interest in a program like Boy Scouts.

"Following an evaluation of what families and young people want and need when it comes to extracurricular activities and Scouting, the Boy Scouts of America welcomes girls into expanded programs from Cub Scouts to the highest rank of Eagle Scout," Botterbush said.

That highest ranking is a significant driver for young women to join Scouting, according to national media reports. Eagle Scouts are often more sought after for employment and colleges, because of the education and service involved in that ranking.

"To earn the Eagle Scout rank, the highest advancement rank in Scouting, a Boy Scout must fulfill requirements in the areas of leadership, service and outdoor skills," Botterbush said. "Since the first Eagle Scout of 1912, the rank has represented a milestone of accomplishment that is recognized across the country, and even the world. The skills, values and self-confidence instilled by the Boy Scouts will continue to serve youth well throughout their lives."



When asked about concerns about integration from the Boy Scouts, parents or young men involved in the program, Botterbush assured the Boy Scouts of America would do its absolute best to evaluate programs and ensure a fair, comprehensive and effective program was established for all of its members.

As far as the young men currently enrolled in the programs, Botterbush said he was "not sure" regarding any potential negative feelings or apprehensive regarding the decision.

He said the Scouts were currently working with parents regarding the decision as well.

"The Boy Scouts of America is committed to identifying and developing program options that will align with the needs of today's families and young people," Botterbush said in an email. "It comes down to providing parents with important choices that meet the character development needs for their youth. Their is research that indicates boys and girls together at the Cub Scout age in a nurturing environment have more benefits than single gender."

However, he said other research does show strong single-gender benefits as well, and Botterbush acknowledged parents will have diverse opinions on the matter, so he said Scouting will continue to provide options for what best meets their needs.

While the opinions on the matter may differ, Botterbush assured integration is deeply aligned with the ethos of the organizations.

"This change aligns with our mission and values," he said. "After all, the values of Scouting as outlined in the Scout Law - trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent - are relevant and important for both young men and women. Our mission is to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling in them the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law. To achieve our mission, we create innovative programs and evolve existing ones that respond to the needs of today's families and deliver them through dedicated volunteers in communities across the nation."