

Our Moment in Time

The year was 1935. The Boy Scouts of America was building its first ever National Scout Jamboree site in Washington, D.C. It was, by all indications, going to be an epic event. But a “serious epidemic of infantile paralysis” – polio - had other plans. The jamboree was postponed. On the occasion, President Franklin Roosevelt, who had been scheduled to host an event on the White House lawn, took to the radio waves to send a message of resolve and courage to Scouts around the country. Much of the nation listened on their tabletop radio. His message reinforced the resilient nature of Scouting:

When you go out into life, you have come to understand that the individual in your community who always says “I can’t” or “I won’t” or “I don’t,” the individual who by inaction or by opposition slows up honest, practical, far-seeing community effort, is the fellow who is holding back civilization.... We need more Scouts. The more the better.

By now, you know the rest of the story. The polio epidemic was defeated. The first BSA National Jamboree was held in 1937, with a sea of tents in the shadow of the Washington Monument. President Roosevelt was back and greeted the Scouts, praising Scouting as a great source of training in the virtues of good citizenship. The first national jamboree was a spectacular success, laying the foundation for many to follow, and it demonstrated to the nation the resilience and resolve of Scouting. Scouting was here to stay.

We are living our own moment in time eighty-five years later. Scouting is being challenged on multiple fronts. We once again have the opportunity to demonstrate to the nation our strength, resilience, and resolve, as we work together to continue the mission of Scouting.

In times such as this it is easy to feel frustrated. The enormity of the challenge is daunting. I find strength in the knowledge that the mission of Scouting is to change lives for the better. We develop character and leadership attributes one Scout at a time. I find strength in the ingenuity and passion of our local volunteers, professionals, and parents, who work every day in the midst of a pandemic to ensure the delivery of the promise of Scouting.

In this time, what is the clarion call for how we support Scouting? We will deliver the future of Scouting one small step at a time, all in the community where you live. Scouting happens in your local community. Our focus should be on completing the small steps that will support the effective delivery of Scouting in our councils and units. In that regard, we know that Commissioners own retention. If we can focus on one thing right now, I urge you to reach out and check on your local Scout leaders and professionals and build on your relationship of trust and confidence. We should virtually embrace them and offer support as we all work together to keep Scouts engaged.

Fall is a time to recruit new Scouts, and we no doubt have to think differently. Take part in the BSA Family Funfest on August 8th, our signature on-line Cub recruiting event for Scout and non-Scout families. Scouting Wire is a great source of new and innovative membership resources. Our Facebook Commissioner Service site is another great source. Collaborate with

your local professionals and volunteers to figure out how to best deliver Scouting in your community.

Two years from now, which will be eighty-five years after the first BSA National Jamboree, I am confident that we will look around, reflect on this most unusual journey, and be proud of how we responded in our moment in time.

A heartfelt note of thanks for our volunteers and professionals, local and national, all working as one team and one movement. As a Scouting family, we understand in our soul the magic of the Scouting movement and our ability to impact the future. Thank you for playing your part, today, one small step at a time.

Thanks for all you do for Scouting,

Scott Sorrels
National Commissioner