



Adventure at Every Turn

Scouts transform legendary racetrack into festival of Scouting.

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Scouting

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Last May, Queen Elizabeth II traveled to Churchill Downs in Louisville, Ky., to watch the Kentucky Derby. Had she arrived just five weeks earlier, she could have visited with one of her most famous subjects, Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of Scouting.

Lord Baden-Powell—who bore a striking resemblance to Indiana Scouter Ed Fortener—was at Churchill Downs for the Lincoln Heritage Council’s 50th annual Scout-O-Rama, which filled the Churchill Downs infield. All day long, B-P roamed the site, posing for photos and telling visitors about how Scouting began.

Cub Scouts were eager to talk with B-P, but older Scouts were a little more circumspect. “Boy Scouts come up by themselves,” Fortener said. “They don’t want to come up when all their buddies are around.”

From water balloons to monkey bridges

No matter. Scouts who were too cool to be seen with B-P found plenty of other activities to occupy their time. They could shoot water balloons from a trebuchet, try their hands at archery and casting, play games at pack and troop booths, visit a Civil War encampment, participate in patrol competitions, crawl around on vintage military vehicles, and traverse any of a half-dozen monkey bridges. Other highlights included a parade, pushmobile and pinewood derby races, a chili cook-off, and even an evening

movie on the JumboTron. If anything, the Scout-O-Rama theme—“Adventure at Every Turn”—understated the array of activities available.

“It’s amazing the booth topics people come up with,” said Program Director Sarah Merman, the event’s professional advisor.

“In my mind, this is as good as I’ve ever seen it,” said Scout Executive Marc Reynerson. “It gets parents and kids out and lets them see who we are and what we do. It’s just a fun-filled, good activity.”

A location like no other

More than 230 Cub Scout packs, Boy Scout troops, Venturing crews, and Explorer posts participated in the 2007 Scout-O-Rama. Many camped out on Friday night, waking to the sound of million-dollar Thoroughbred horses exercising just a few yards away. Others arrived on Saturday morning, getting their first view of the world-famous twin spires as they emerged from a long tunnel beneath the track.

“I don’t think any other council has quite the venue that we do,” said Council Program Chairman Mac Barr. “It really makes it special.”

Churchill Downs has hosted Scout-O-Rama each spring since 1985 and gives the Scouts unparalleled access to the facility. “I was basically told whatever I could do to make this thing successful, make it happen,” said Steve Cummings, the track’s senior director of human resources and its liaison to Scout-O-Rama.

Cummings, who is an Eagle Scout, said the event represents a great partnership. “Churchill Downs is an icon in the community, and I think the Boy Scout program is an icon in society,” he said. “We’re just very, very pleased to be able to continue the partnership.”

Attractions for all ages

For Tiger Cub Sam Stiles of Pack 28 in Crestwood, Ky., the famous location wasn’t nearly as exciting as the prizes he could win at various pack and troop booths. “I earned candy by winning games,” he said. “Lots of candy.”

Older Scouts enjoyed winning candy as well, but they also enjoyed just hanging out or playing football with newfound friends. “It’s just a time for everybody to have fun and meet and greet,” said 13-year-old Boy Scout Kurt Conrad of Troop 341 in Louisville. “Once you go around to all the booths and you start meeting people, that’s what’s the most fun.”

New to the 2007 Scout-O-Rama was the Explorer Expo. Explorer posts chartered to five area fire departments came together to show off their skills and compete against one another. In one event, Explorers raced to roll and drag fire hoses and transport a dummy weighing “only” 225 pounds.

“They may not have the muscle tone that a 25- or 30-year-old man has,” explained Justin Hendricks, advisor for Post 81 and the Expo’s coordinator. “We try to

make this a little better for them, a little bit easier. But we don't want to make it too easy, because physical fitness is a big part of firefighting."

One competitor, 17-year-old Brandon Griffy of Post 31, acknowledged that firefighting is hard work, especially when you're wearing 40 pounds of gear. "It gets a little toasty, but it's a nice day out today," he said. "Better than in the summer when it's 90 degrees."

While the Fire Explorers were hauling hoses, members of Explorer Post 249, chartered to the Louisville Metro Police Department, spent the weekend on the job. "We've been patrolling, walking around, making sure everything stays all right," said Explorer Jahrell Thompson, 16, who was taking a break at the Explorers' command post near the winner's circle. "It's all right—a little slow," said Thompson, who will probably be a lot busier once he achieves his goal of becoming a police detective.

Raising money and increasing awareness

Next door to the Explorer's command post was the ticket settlement room, one of Scout-O-Rama's most important locations—at least for unit leaders. Like most Scouting shows, Scout-O-Rama is an important fundraiser for both the participating units and the council. Across the council, units sold more than \$86,000 worth of tickets and earned commissions of up to 30 percent. Individual ticket salesmen could earn prizes ranging from a commemorative Scout-O-Rama patch to sleeping bags and tents. The council's top salesman, Daniel James of Troop 376 in Louisville, received two annual passes to Six Flags Kentucky Kingdom and a free week at summer camp.

While Scout-O-Rama raised significant money for the council and participating units, it also raised Scouting's profile in the community. *The (Louisville) Courier-Journal* covered the event, as did several local television stations. High above the infield, near Millionaire's Row, the council hosted a luncheon to introduce African-American pastors to Scouting. "It's a great opportunity for us to broaden our outreach," explained Program Chairman Barr.

Some veteran Scout leaders had a similar idea. "We've actually picked up leads on some boys wanting to come to the troop," said Scoutmaster Scott Greenwell of Troop 341. "It's a good opportunity for people to see you out in the open instead of in a room."

Other leaders, however, were more interested in simply getting through the weekend without major problems. Scout-O-Rama was the first outing for Troop 747 of Louisville, which had held just four troop meetings prior to the event. "We're trying to get the boys to learn what it means to be a Scout," said Scoutmaster Mike Basham, a former Cub Scout leader. "It's nice to see there are people out there who see you're a new troop and are willing to help."

Passing the torch

Indeed, across Churchill Downs, veterans reached out to help newcomers, passing along the traditions of Scouting, and of Scout-O-Rama, to a new generation. Scout-O-Rama Chairman Carl Thomas echoed that theme during the opening ceremony. “I’m sure that some of you Scouts and Cub Scouts will be here when we celebrate our hundredth anniversary. Mark your calendars: that’s in 2057.”

Who knows? Perhaps Baden-Powell will show up again at the 2057 Scout-O-Rama, bearing a striking resemblance to one of those Cub Scouts Ed Fortener met last spring. It just might happen.

Fifty years (and more) of fun (*sidebar*)

Although the Lincoln Heritage Council’s Scout-O-Rama dates back 50 years, it’s an outgrowth of an older activity. Scouter Bob Rudd—who attended the very first Scout-O-Rama—said the event grew out of Scout circuses held in the 1940s by what was then the Old Kentucky Home Council.

The circuses looked more like trade shows, with rows of booths where Boy Scout troops and Explorer posts demonstrated Scouting skills and merit badge requirements. “Since many of the Scout leaders worked in jobs involving electricity, carpentry, masonry, railroading, plumbing, and the like, merit badges such as these were always promoted,” Rudd said.

Highlights of early Scout-O-Ramas included chariot races, wall-scaling competitions, tower building, and even concerts. In 1961, for example, the Old Kentucky Home Council Boy Scout Band offered three “concert and dance band programs.”

The band went silent long ago, but many traditions have endured, including unit displays, the pushmobile races, and the country store. Something else has stayed constant as well.

“Scout-O-Rama was, is, and always has been the foremost public demonstration of Scouting in action for the Louisville community to see and appreciate,” Rudd said.

Rotarians provide essential support (*sidebar*)

One of the country’s oldest Scouting shows, Scout-O-Rama has been sponsored since the beginning by the Louisville Rotary Club. The club provides event and campsite judges, staffs the Scout-O-Rama snack bar, and runs a country store (a sort of flea market) at the site.

“Rotary supplies a lot of the volunteers, which then allows the adult Scout leaders to stay with their troops and participate in all the activities,” explained Rotarian Mike Kull, who coordinated the snack bar. (Kull is president and CEO of Dairy Queen Corporate Stores, another long-time Scout-O-Rama sponsor.)

Kull said the club’s 100 to 125 Scout-O-Rama volunteers included many prominent Louisvillians, including a senior district judge, a retired Episcopal bishop, and

a nationally known hand surgeon. “That just gives you a little bit of an idea of the type of people that are out here working today,” he said.