

March 25, 2016

To: Selections Committee, Narragansett Council BSA  
From: Gary Butler, Deputy Chief Scout Executive/COO (retired)

Re: Russell Etzenhouser

I am forwarding this letter to you in support of the candidacy of Russell Etzenhouser as the next Scout Executive of the Narragansett Council. First though, let me congratulate the council leadership for another outstanding year of success in service to youth. I am also especially grateful to the council for leveraging its great assets and legacy of service in support of the members and volunteers in the Annawon Council. Scouting will take a big leap forward in southeastern New England with this impending merger.

I have known Russell for a number of years and have been an admirer of his leadership and record. Five years ago we selected Russell (as well as your immediate past Scout Executive) to be placed in our succession planning program. This elite group of Scout Executives are those who have shown a history of not only strong performance but also embody the values and competencies that we feel represent the kind of leadership the BSA needs in the future. While an honor, it also comes with additional scrutiny and added opportunities. Like John Mosby, over the course of several years Russell played a major role in our annual Top Hands conference providing leadership to design and execution of this conference. He did an outstanding job in demonstrating the selfless leadership style required in this assignment.

Russell also served as Scout Executive in the same council I did, the Greater Niagara Frontier Council (GNFC) headquartered in Buffalo, New York. Like all my former councils, including Narragansett Council, I keep an extra watchful eye on the leadership to ensure the youth and volunteers are getting the best professional leadership the BSA can and should provide. I know from speaking first hand with members of the Greater Niagara Frontier Council board of directors, that Russell has clearly exceeded their expectations in so many ways. That's impressive as I can personally testify that they have high expectations of their Scout Executives!

While the skillset, experiences and competencies he brings with him are broad and deep, what is evident is a financial acumen demonstrated by a record of strong fiscal management. GNFC is financially a much stronger council today than what it was when he found it. Both the council's cash position and net assets have significantly increased under his tenure. The council has also been a consistent leader in Area 3 in membership growth especially with Cub Scouting. As I wound down my tenure I was excited to watch the final 2015 results place GNFC as one of our top performing councils in the nation. I would be remiss however in not recognizing the importance of a strong program background required for any Scout Executive candidate that wishes to come to the Narragansett Council. Russell's robust program background helped him build strong relationships within the Scouting community, find resources to upgrade the camps, and significantly increase training at all levels of the council.

When serving as Deputy Chief Scout Executive/COO of the BSA, I rarely prepared a letter of recommendation to avoid interfering with our personnel promotion system. We designed it carefully to raise to the top only the best. Overtime this process will only get better. I am pretty confident there is no one else today that knows the strengths of our Scout Executive pools across the BSA than I do. That too will change overtime, however in the meantime, perhaps I can still be of some influence. The Narragansett Council is lucky to have Russell as a candidate and I would strongly recommend you take advantage of this opportunity!

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