



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

Greater Niagara Frontier Council

20 South Meadow Drive

Orchard Park, NY 14127

March 22, 2016

To the Members of the Rhode Island Selection Committee,

When Russell Etzenhouser came to the Greater Niagara Frontier Council, we were in very uncomfortable financial circumstances, had maxed out our line of credit, were not paying all of our bills on time resulting in additional charges, and the Board had not been kept informed of the seriousness of our situation. Staff members were understandably discouraged, which was reflected in their work. The downward spiral had reached a dangerous level. When asked why he wanted to become involved in this situation, Russell calmly told us that he liked challenges and wanted to solve problems, which is exactly what he did.

Within months, he had established a review and support process to help staff grow and hone their skills in dealing with the boots-on-the-ground and in fund raising areas. Over the next three years, he strengthened and built a staff which now operates much more effectively in all aspects of their responsibilities and who genuinely like each other and what they are doing for Scouting in the Western New York area. They have even arranged the tables in the dining area so that when in the office, they can all eat together instead of at separate seating spaces. Further, their new, energetic enthusiasm has resulted in a much more friendly and supportive environment in which the volunteers work and are given professional assistance.

Financially, during Russell's almost four years with us, the entire debt has been retired, all bills are paid on time now resulting in even greater savings. The transparency of the budget process and the day to day meeting of our financial obligations is now overseen monthly by a combined team of staff and Board members. There is greater creativity and energy directed to fundraising and membership development than I have ever seen in my over twenty years on the Board. Communication among board members and staff is encouraged and has never been better.

Board members are encouraged, supported, and made to feel that their skills provide a vital role in the success of our Council. Although we have a large board of over fifty people, Russell has made it a point to engage each of us individually and has tasked us each with specific areas of the operation through which we can all make significant contributions to the GNFC in areas of our personal interests and in the Council's needs. In addition to staff review, an annual system of Board member review has been initiated which helps us to each understand our strengths and weaknesses and is an excellent method by which we can develop more effective ways to serve Scouting. Also by adhering to a more enforced time schedule for the duration of large Board meetings, busy volunteers are more likely to attend, knowing they will not get bogged down and be late for the rest of their day.

As the executive face of Scouting in our area, Russell has been extremely active. Within mere months of joining us, he knew the workings of Western New York and has been actively and effectively engaging present and potential supporters to our mission in a continuous manner. His quick smile, calm

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and articulate, professional appearance and conduct are immediately engaging. Simply said, Russell just looks like what we all want a Scout to be. Perhaps, it is because, like good Scouts, he is always prepared. When called upon, Russell knows the answers to whatever questions come up and delivers his verbal contributions in concise, logical, factual, accurate, and always honest ways. It is clear that he always does his homework. Because of his country-wide service in Scouting, Russell has a very solid handle on the big picture of Scouting's goals and mission. Frequently, he has been a good interpreter of the National organization's policies, activities, and intentions for us on the local level.

On the personal side, Russell is fun to be with and is basically unflappable. He is also a very active father in his sons' cub pack. His boys' good behavior, creativity, knowledge, questioning interest in everything, and humor are testament to his good and loving parenting. Additionally, both he and wife Beth are very active in their church, both teaching and supporting religious education and other church activities. Because of Russell's passion and knowledge of music, his family is getting a very healthy and happy dosing of the fine arts, both boys now studying musical instruments.

It must be very clear by now, that I have a very high regard for Russell Etzenhouser. Without exaggeration, he really is the walking personification of the Scout Oath and Law. As I think of each of the words in those basic tenets, I am sure that Russell is all of that and more. He is quiet, unassuming, modest, an effective leader of people by encouraging their strengths, an optimist, hard-working, punctual, and so much more. Then because nobody is perfect, and because I am extremely honest, I tried to think of areas where Russell could demonstrate a need for improvement. But try as I might, I can't come up with a single thing. This letter has been very hard to write to you because I have just described what you, what every council, needs, the complete package as a Scout Executive. With us, this has been Russell's first experience in the role. But by the way he does it, you'd think he'd been at it for twenty years. His leaving us and coming to you would be very saddening to all of us who care so deeply for Russell as our executive and friend. But because he has been so good in his service here, we have learned much from him that will enable us to keep growing and strengthening the GNFC into the future. As painful as the always-moving-on-and-up is to those of us who are left behind, it is that varied and diversified experience that makes our good Scout Executives better. A new set of eyes is very often extremely helpful. We have heard that your Council is strong and very solid. I wish you luck in your search for a new Council Executive, knowing that Russell could make it even better.

Most sincerely,

Nan Ackerman

Vice President for Financial Development

GNFC BSA

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