

In a pandemic, Scouting is an ideal activity

BY JILL NOSSA

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While many youth activities were put on pause during the pandemic, Scouting was one exception. Not only did Sea Cliff's Scouts BSA Troop 43 never miss a beat throughout the past year, troop leaders say, the changes have been beneficial.

"While it's been a difficult year for anything, I think we're a unique youth group in that we didn't have to fully shut down," Assistant Scoutmaster Grant Kletter said. "We were able to remain safe and active in a restricted pandemic environment, and still do many of the activities that we would have done anyway."

Like most organizations, Troop 43, consisting of Scouts ages 11 to 17, initially transitioned to a Zoom format at the onset of the pandemic. "But the one thing I think we all got from that was that, it wasn't good enough, it wasn't what we wanted," Scoutmaster Kevin White said, "and we had to come up with something better."

White took on the role of Scoutmaster in June, when both the troop leadership and youth leadership positions change annually, and said he discussed possibilities with the new leaders to come up with a plan that followed the New York State and Scouts BSA guidelines.



TROOP 43 RECENTLY helped clean up Scudders Pond, along with the Coalition to Save Hempstead Harbor.

Photos courtesy Grant Kletter

"Camping was a nonstarter, that's a big part of scouting in a normal year," White said. "Normally, the Scouts go off on a trip about once a month. Without that component, it made it really challenging."

However, he said, they quickly developed an outdoor model where they could meet in-person under tighter guidelines—

wearing masks, using hand sanitizer, and "everyone being personally responsible for their behaviors and how it affects others," White said.

For years, the troop has met weekly at St. Luke's Episcopal Church, in the evening. When that location was no longer an option, the troop moved its meetings across the street to Roslyn Park. "Within our troop, one thing we've found is, even though it adds a level of complexity in terms of planning, taking the meetings outdoors has almost returned us to the basics," White said. "I think everyone agreed it's been kind of a nice change to drive the meetings outdoors and make it more meaningful for the Scouts."

Because they were able to meet in-person, they could focus on the basics to get the Scouts ready for next year: using a compass, building a fire, and setting up a tent. Kletter said that while they were not able to do overnight camping trips, the troop made a point to do more than just hold a meeting. "We were able to do things the kids did enjoy and implement those skills. We really looked at focusing on day trips and day activities."

Activities included long bike rides at Bethpage State Park and hiking trips at

Harriman State Park. The community service component was also negatively impacted due to restrictions, but the Scouts were still able to participate in cleanups at Scudders Pond and Welwyn Preserve.

Assistant Senior Patrol Leader Daniel Vogts, 16, has been a member of the troop for five years. He said he first joined after going to an open house and thought it seemed interesting. It turned out to be a positive experience, as he has not only developed basic Scouting skills but also built friendships and learned leadership skills. As next year's Senior Patrol Leader, he said, he's hoping to help bring back some of the normal activities Scouts do so the younger members can get the true experience, particularly when it comes to community service projects.

This summer, the hope is that the camping trip planned to the White Mountains in New Hampshire that had to be postponed last year will happen, and that next year will be more normal. Still, troop leaders agreed that skills learned this year will benefit them in the future.

"Hopefully the skills the boys picked up this year will be applicable to activities related to next year," White said.

With 12 members, the troop is on the small side, but the Scoutmasters are hoping to attract more members, both boys and girls. Though it's currently still comprised of only boys, girls are now allowed to be involved in Scouts BSA activities, which the troop leaders



THE SCOUTS COLLECTED bags of trash during a cleanup at Welwyn Preserve.

both said they are excited about. There are only three other troops in Nassau County with girls, and "we're looking to be the fourth," White said.

To include girls in the troop, White explained, a minimum of five girls would have to join with their own scoutmaster who would work alongside the boy's scoutmaster. The meetings would start together and the two sides could either continue working together or go in their direction, White said. The goal is to provide girls with the same experiences and opportunities that the boys have.

Simon Kletter, 11, joined the troop

last June. "It seemed like a great opportunity and is really fun," he said, noting that over the course of the year he has learned new skills that he can use "for life" such as first aid, cooking and orienteering. He also said he's happy that his troop is inviting girls to join. "It's great that anyone can join and anyone who enjoys being outdoors can get that experience."

Troop 43 will hold an open house on Friday, May 14, at 6 p.m. in Roslyn Park, Sea Cliff, open to both girls and boys. Rain date is May 21. Visit seacliff-troop43.org for more information.