

VENTURING MAGAZINE

The Corps of Discovery, Venturing's Servant Leadership Society by Joe Garrett

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Of the four major programs of the Boy Scouts of America- Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturing, the latter, Venturing (including Sea Scouts), is by far the best opportunity for creativity in working with youth. The other three programs are in a more mature phase of their program development and by nature are run according to a formula dictated by each program's advancement strategy. Venturing has no such formula, and if advancement is used as a tool in a Crew, the path to recognition is unique to the Crew and often to the individual Venturer. For example, within the same Crew, one Venturer may earn an Outdoor Bronze (focusing on outdoor adventure) on his way to Venturing Gold, while another Venturer in the same Crew could earn the Arts and Hobbies Bronze.

In the Boy Scouting program, the emphasis is on camping, at least through the first year of each new Scout's experience. While working on his Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class Scout Ranks, a young man is expected to learn all about camping, hiking, cooking and other outdoor skills. It makes sense, then, that there is an honor society in Scouting that focuses its energy on the promotion of camping. The Order of the Arrow exists to assist and encourage Scouts and Troops to go camping, and especially to go to Boy Scout Camp every summer. The Order of the Arrow (called OA) organizes work parties at Scout Camp to provide ordinary maintenance, special projects, and sometimes even to finance improvements. They also organize staff to help with such Scouting activities as Klondike Derbies (winter camporees) and other large camping events. They often assist with crossover ceremonies where older Cub Scouts graduate into Boy Scout Troops, and often provide other services to their local Scouting community where a need arises. Membership is by election, and joining requirements are relatively rigorous, as a new member, once elected by popular vote, must attend a weekend-long "ordeal", usually at a Scout Camp.

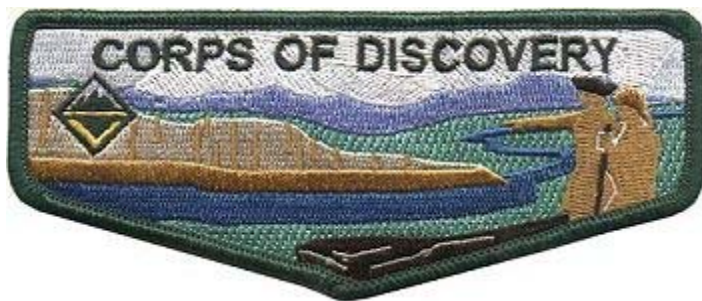
Venturing has no such honor society, nor are Ventures allowed to be elected to the OA from their Crews (it is possible for a young man who is also a Venturer to be elected to OA membership by his Boy Scout Troop, but under no circumstances may a Venturer be elected). There is an alternative for Venturing, but its purpose and scope are significantly different. The Venturing Corps of Discovery is a Service Society (not an honor society) that encourages Venturers and Venturing Crews to provide service to Scouting and to their home communities. The organization has as its theme the Lewis and Clark Expedition's original Corps of Discovery and promotes adventure, discovery, and servant leadership. The kinds of service efforts and projects that are common are staffing Council training events such as Wood Badge, Powder Horn, and Kodiak courses, teaching Venturing leadership classes, and staffing District Scouting events such as camporees.

The Corps of Discovery was first introduced by Venturing Crew 477 of the Northwest Suburban Council in Illinois in 1999. A nice website with details of the original intent and implementation of the Corps can be seen at



<http://ftp.pwp.att.net/v/e/venturecod/Corps of Discovery Index.html>. The original implementation was intended as recognition of past service, and included elections similar to those found in the Order of the Arrow. The recognition item was a wolf tooth suspended with a small wire from the right breast pocket button on the official Venturing green uniform shirt. From what records are available, this program was initiated with three Venturing Crews located in Illinois, Tennessee, and Utah. The program had the unofficial endorsement of the Venturing Division at National BSA headquarters in Irving, Texas and seemed to have a bright future.

Sometime in 2003, Joe Garrett, in a discussion with Bill Evans of the Venturing Division at National HQ, learned of the pilot project a few years earlier to launch a Corps of Discovery. Garrett was unable to find any information beyond what was provided in the original website, so he decided to take the concept and use it in his own Venturing Crew in Washington State. He contacted Craig Murray, a friend who advised a Venturing Crew in Los Angeles, and the two of them designed a Corps of Discovery pocket flap patch similar in style to an Order of the Arrow Lodge flap. They decided that their newly resurrected Corps of Discovery would be a Service Society rather than an honor society, and aside from the pocket flap patch, tried to construct an organization that was completely different from Order of the Arrow. The concept was based on servant leadership and used a "pay it forward" concept that asked its members to look forward for their service opportunities rather than backwards at their past successes. The newer website can be seen at www.venturingcorps.com, their Facebook page is at <https://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/16213695514/> and their Yahoogroups list is at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/corpsofdiscovery>.



Garrett and Murray held their first Corps of Discovery induction ceremony at the conclusion of their first Kodiak Leadership Skills Trek, on the Colorado River in Utah. That Trek, held in July, 2005, was a whitewater raft trip from the Colorado State border southwest about 50 miles to Moab, Utah. In the induction ceremony, each Venturer and adult leader who volunteered was asked to stand

before the group and pledge to go home and conduct a specific service project that would benefit both Venturing and Scouting in their home communities. The idea was described as a "pay it forward" pledge, as no prior service was required, but each inductee made a commitment and was also expected to go home and induct more members into the Corps of Discovery. Fifty new Venturers and adult leaders were inducted at this ceremony. This was the first time that the original Corps of Discovery pocket flap patches were distributed.

The next summer, 2006, Garrett and Murray conducted their second annual Kodiak Leadership Trek, this time on Idaho's Lower Salmon River. The trip was 75 miles long and passed through Idaho, Oregon, and Washington State. At the closing ceremony, another 40 members were inducted on a Snake River beach near where the Idaho, Oregon, and Washington borders converge, not far from where Sergeant Ordway of the original Corps of Discovery had camped on his way up the Snake River to the mouth of the Salmon.

In 2008, California's Klamath River near the Oregon border was the site of the annual Kodiak Trek and Corps of Discovery induction. Then, in 2009 the annual Kodiak Trek extended to two weeks with week 1 on the Deschutes River and week 2 on Montana's Middle Fork of the Flathead River in Glacier National Park. In 2010, their last really large Kodiak Trek moved back to the Salmon River in Idaho.

The staffs and guides for all of these Kodiak Courses were drawn from participants in prior years' treks who had joined the Corps of Discovery. Some Venturers served as Kodiak staff and whitewater guides in up to 4 or 5 years during this time. Two Venturing Crews, Garrett's in Washington and Murray's in California, took it on as their major program focus to become trained whitewater guides, whitewater rescue certified, and Kodiak instructors. It is fairly unusual for a Venturing Crew to focus so tightly on a single annual event, but both of these Crews benefitted greatly by hosting these Kodiak Whitewater treks as servant leaders. Of course, during the school year, they pursued other activities as well. Skiing, backpacking, skin diving, and Civil War reenacting were some of the other hobbies they pursued, but always, their focus on guiding whitewater river treks was their foremost goal.

This is a story about servant leadership, which is the focus and purpose of the Venturing Corps of Discovery. In many respects, this story is about the inspiration behind the current evolution of Corps of Discovery. These Venturers spent several years and lots of resources offering whitewater treks and specialized training to Crews from all over the United States. There were participants from VA, UT, CA, WA, MI, TX, OK, MT, NV and ID. These Venturers and their Crews took home the message that as Venturers, and as citizens, we should provide service and servant leadership in our home communities.



Now the baton of Corps of Discovery has passed to a new and different generation of Crews and Venturers from all over the US. You can watch the progress of Corps of Discovery by joining its Yahoogroups email list and its Facebook page. A new Corps of Discovery handbook will be ready for publication by the end of 2012, and guidance on how to form your own Corps in your Crew, your District, or your Council will be there. Our sincere hope is that Venturing leaders, both youth and adults, will recognize the Corps as an opportunity to emphasize community service and servant leadership in their Crews. It is not necessary to build your whole program around Kodiak in order to make a difference in your community and your Venturers' lives. The Corps of Discovery is just another tool in your tool box.