

# VENTURING MAGAZINE

## Starting a new Venturing Crew from scratch, the Passion of the Advisor... by Joe Garrett

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Over the years, I have started many more than my share of Explorer Posts and Venturing Crews. A lifetime ago I served as an Explorer Executive while I was in graduate school and more recently, in semi-retirement I served as District Executive, mostly for fun. In between, I have started quite a few special interest Explorer Posts and a few Venturing Crews. Exploring was BSA's Young Adult Program before the advent of Venturing in 1998. For all intents and purposes, Venturing is the High Adventure child of Exploring, redesigned, modernized, and brought back into the fold of mainstream Scouting. Career Interest Exploring retained the name "Exploring" and was spun off into a wholly owned subsidiary named "Learning for Life" that is better equipped to function in the public sector where values-based learning is problematic.

So to get down to the nuts and bolts of starting a new Crew, there needs to be a dream and a passion. If the dream is attractive to teens, there is a good chance for a successful Crew to get started. The dream needs to be realistic and achievable within about a one year planning horizon, too. Teens, like us, are impatient. When you first start out, remember that you will have no credibility with them so early success is critical. I have often observed that teenagers have very, very good bullshit detectors (I apologize for the use of this term, but I am at a loss for a more descriptive phrase for teens' ability to know when they are being deceived). The best way I know to describe this start-up process, which is an art, not a science, is to tell a story.



It pays to give some thought to your appearance to a visiting teen.  
You may want to save the uniforms for later.

Years ago, when my eldest son, Tommy, was just reaching Venturing age and was losing interest in his Boy Scout Troop, we moved about 15 miles to a new community in an adjacent Scout Council. We decided that Tommy would stay active in his home Troop until he finished his Eagle, and that in the meantime we would start a new Venturing Crew in our new home community where, incidentally, there were no Venturing Crews and almost no promotion of the concept had occurred. Because it was the beginning of a new school year, we decided to start it up immediately and to concentrate on winter sports with a longer term view to a big canoe trip or backpacking trip the following summer. Since we live only 200 miles from Whistler Village in Canada, skiing was a natural draw, and Whistler was a big, adventurous draw for high school skiers and snowboarders. It is consistently rated the best ski resort in North America and is always in the top 2 or 3 in the world.



A very informal meeting may be appropriate.

Our first step was to find an appropriate Chartered partner, an organization that could sponsor us and which had a meeting room we could use on weeknights. After kicking this around for a while, we convinced the local YMCA that a ski program would be a good idea. Then we recruited a couple of Tommy's friends from his new school. It is very, very important to get a core group of youth together early on in this process. The next step is going to be an open house, and you do not want to conduct an open house with no youth there to serve as a welcoming committee as you will lose ALL credibility. For a coed Crew, it is important to have at least one

young lady there to show that the Crew will truly be coeducational. Teens are commonly reserved to the point of shyness, and so like in adult life, first impressions are critical.

Our second stop was at the local school district. We needed to find out if we could recruit at the high school campus, and exactly what the rules were. We were pleased to learn that we were welcome, and that the most efficient way to get the word out was with posters and morning announcements on the public address system. We had some paperwork to do, but this was one of the keys to our success. We also discovered that for a small fee, we could hold our open house in the school commons, a kind of lunchroom/meeting area that the local kids were very comfortable with. Our "value proposition" was that we could take a beginner to snowboarding or skiing lessons at a local ski area, then take a weekend trip to Whistler, and take advantage of group discounts, camping out in Whistler Village, and have a great time as a group, all for under \$200 for the weekend (we didn't get into the costs at our open house). This is a spectacular savings, and as a Crew activity has the draw of going with a group of friends from school instead of your parents. We also talked about monthly activities such as bowling nights, bike hikes, etc. but these do not engender the kind of excitement it takes to get a teen to stand up and join something.

Once the open house was all set up, and I had a few "core" teenhosts we began promoting the Crew and especially the open house. I discovered that I could get 11 inch by 14 inch color posters made at my local copy shop for less than 50¢ apiece. I got a dozen of these along with a similar color flyer on standard copier paper. These went to the local high school, and the local junior high for its 9th grade class. I have always had much better success with ninth graders than with upper classmen, who tend to already have their social life lined up.

Everyone who works with teens, whether as parents, Scout leaders, coaches, or teachers knows that they have many, many more distractions than they did just 10 years ago. Sports, jobs, dating, Facebook, video games, and a variety of other activities compete for their attention. If you want to compete, you need to use all the latest methods. Flyers and posters aren't enough. A website, a Facebook page, text messages, Twitter, and blogs are all opportunities to get the word out. Email is no longer an effective way to communicate with young people. If they check their messages at all, they will be late responding. Also, I have stopped leaving voicemail messages, even though virtually all cell phones come with free voicemail. It isn't just teens who are abandoning their email and voicemail boxes, but they seem to be much more consistent. Texting is the only way to go!

A recent article about teen driving habits pointed out that the average age for a first driver's license is now closer to 18 than to 16. I have observed this phenomenon myself, where my Venturers show little interest in getting their driver's licenses. The article cited the fact that kids can get as much social interaction as they want over the internet without ever leaving home. The distraction of social media is another reason why teens aren't joining groups like they once did. This is why, now more than ever before, you will need a BIG IDEA in order to get a Crew started. You will also need skills in social media and internet marketing. If you're local school district is helpful, the job will get much easier.



With a larger crowd, a circle may be the best way to communicate.

When I approached the school district I didn't hide the fact that Venturing is part of the Boy Scouts, but I didn't lead with it either, until I had a sense of the reaction I was likely to get. I was able to coat-tail on the local District's Cub Scout recruiting efforts since the school district people were already familiar with the process. I usually don't tell the kids about our association with Scouting until they are filling out their membership applications. Again, I don't hide the fact; I just deliver the news after the initial sale has been made. For the kinds of Venturing Crews I have been associated with, the BSA connection has been of little importance to the youth. The discussion about how similar your Crew should be to a Boy Scout Troop or a Cub Scout Pack is best left for a later article, but I have strong feelings that Venturing is something very different. In my experience, a Crew should look more like a Rotary Club than a Boy Scout Troop, but that is just one guy's opinion.

Most of these ideas work equally well when recruiting for an ongoing Crew. It is a great idea to recruit every fall when school starts, as Crews tend to "clump" in age groups, a tendency that results in entire Crews aging out together, leaving only a few or no younger members. This is a shame for the younger Venturers and is unnecessary if you can keep the Crew recruiting at all times. Remember, that the overwhelming majority of Venturers join up as a result of a personal invitation. No amount of posters, announcements or advertisements can ever be as effective as that personal invitation.