

The PHI GAMMA DELTA

VOL. 130 NO. 1 FALL 2008



ON MY HONOR

Former Archon President

John Gottschalk

Heads Scouts

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**Former Archon President heads Scouts****Freedom • Opportunity • Character • Service • Leadership**

These are the words and ideas that animate the conversation with John Gottschalk (Nebraska 1965) as he talks about the nonprofit organizations he has led in a life filled with volunteer service.

After 18 highly successful years as publisher of the *Omaha World-Herald* newspaper and CEO of the World-Herald Company, in January 2008 John stepped down from those positions,

while retaining the role of chairman of the company. In May 2008, he began a two-year term as President of the Boy Scouts of America, the latest in a series of major volunteer leadership positions.

The Upward March

With 4.6 million youth participants, 303 local councils, and 1.2 million volunteers, BSA is the largest youth-serving membership organization in the United States. If John's leadership role

with BSA is the capstone of his career of service, there is a certain symmetry to that.

John and his wife, Carmen, have volunteered as foster parents for the Child Saving Institute, caring, over a number of years, for more than 100 infants awaiting adoption. He says, "Watching babies get a chance to grow up in a caring and loving home, I learned to appreciate the meaning of opportunity."

As a civic leader in Omaha, he spent nearly 20 years helping to improve K-12 education, most recently working behind the scenes to bring about a plan to educate Omaha's poor and disadvantaged students. This experience, he says, "heightened my insight into the meaning of education and training, particularly character and leadership training, that becomes so vital later in life."

In Phi Gamma Delta, John led his undergraduate chapter as president and the International Fraternity as Archon Treasurer (1990-94) and Archon President (1994-96). His drive to make a difference as an Archon continues to pay dividends for the Fraternity today. John conceived and led a review of the Fraternity's governance and structure that resulted in the Financial Advisory Board, the Board of Conduct, undergraduate representation on the Archonate, and a much clearer focus on the roles of the Purple Legionnaire and the Section Chief. Of his experiences in the Fraternity, he says, "There I witnessed and participated in the capping of the preparation of youth into a commitment of lifetime service to others."



A devoted fly fisherman, Brother Gottschalk helps a young Scout with his lure.

Serving for 10 years as chairman of the board of the World USO, he saw “the extraordinary application of that leadership and commitment to those in our armed forces who sacrifice and serve our nation to preserve its freedom.”

After all these years and experiences in volunteer service, he describes his leadership role with the BSA as “the fulfillment of a commitment made long ago to be a part of the upward march of humanity.”

Simple and Powerful Truth

John is serving as president of the BSA as the organization prepares for its 100th anniversary in 2010. Considering this historic time for Scouting, John says, “For too long, others have been defining us. The greatest opportunity we have immediately is to define ourselves to America.”

Asked to elaborate, he explains, “The essence of America is freedom, and the BSA should be free to run its organization by a clear set of values for families who share those values through membership of their children in this important character-building program. No child, to my knowledge, has ever been denied membership in the Boy Scouts of America. All religious beliefs are found in the BSA. Our principles are straightforward and have not changed in our nearly 100 years of existence. A Scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, thrifty, cheerful, brave, clean and reverent. Period. That is the simple and powerful truth America needs to know about the BSA.”

With almost 100 years of history, Scouting seeks to serve a rapidly changing society. John notes in particular “the magnitude of diversity in our nation’s population, societal trends in single-parent families, increasing gaps in family economic status, alternative activities for youth, and the general mobility of society.”

Faced with these trends, how does Scouting maintain its relevance today?



Scouting volunteers are caring, giving mentors.

“Scouting is not only a wonderful outdoor experience,” he explains, “It is most importantly a character and values development program for youth. Although some could argue that personal values in our society have diminished, the need for strong character has not and will not change. Societies thrive or suffer based on the character of their leadership. Now more than ever, America needs Scouting and the values its members subscribe to in the Scout Oath and Scout Law.”



Discussing CPR with an older Scout

In Service To Others

There are a number of parallels between Scouting and Phi Gamma Delta. Each teaches leadership through experience, by “doing.” Each expects the more experienced members to train and teach younger ones, to “pass it on.” And each depends on volunteers for stability and continuity. John sees even deeper similarities: “Phi Gamma Delta is an exceptional continuum of Scouting, taking young men with good character and early leadership experience to the next level of serving mankind. Both present powerful growing-up experiences. What the BSA is able to start, our fraternity can build and develop in young adults. Both deliver extraordinary leaders to our country.”

Given these common aims and processes, how can Phi Gamma Delta brothers and chapters support Scouting?

“Number one,” John challenges, “remain true to our creed. As I frequently said during my time as president of the Fraternity, don’t just recite it, live it. In doing so, you will take your place in service to others.” ♦