

## Editor's Note

by Matt Comer . Q-Notes staff

### I'm a Boy Scout, and I'm here to recruit you



Most folks have heard me rant and rave at least one time about the Boy Scouts of America and their anti-gay leadership and membership policies. The discrimination by the Boy Scouts of America is something I've experienced first-hand, being dismissed from Scouting after I came out at 14 and started a gay-straight alliance at my Winston-Salem high school.

Other than ranting and raving, though, there isn't much that can be done to thwart the obviously immoral policies of this "private" organization. In 2000, the Supreme Court sided with the Boy Scouts in a case challenging their membership and leadership requirements, which ban openly gay or bisexual youth members and adults as well as individuals who identify as atheist or agnostic. Curiously, these rules have never appeared in a youth edition of *The Boy Scout Handbook*.

Recently, I received an email from a parent of a first grader in Winston-Salem. A local Cub Scout pack had come to her son's school, spoke about the organization during class time and passed out literature on how to join.

The mother, an atheist, was livid. How was she supposed to explain to her young son why he wouldn't be able to join the Cub Scouts like many of his friends would? She felt he was too young to understand the intricacies of Scouting's membership and leadership policies, so she simply told him the family already had too much on their plate.

In an email to the members of the board and in a letter to the editor published by *The Winston-Salem Journal*, the mother asked why no notice was given of a discriminatory organization's presence at her son's school, while four separate notifications were sent home regarding President Barack Obama's back-to-school speech.

She wrote: "Recently President Obama made a 15-minute speech to children about working hard and staying in school. I got a verbal message from the teacher, a note and two calls letting me know about the speech. Is the president's message that scary? Why does a positive message from the president require so much parental warning, while a discriminatory organization gets free rein to recruit during the school day with zero parental notification?"

Donald Martin, Winston-Salem Schools superintendent, responded to the mother's email: "The boy and girl scouts are allowed to advertise meetings — typically they have a back-to-school fall recruitment meeting that is held in the evening. We also have a special facility use arrangement with both the boy and girl scouts."

Martin added, "There should not have been a meeting with representatives of the boy scouts held during the school day that required students to attend. I'm sorry that this happened and we will review this topic at our

next elementary principals meeting."

In a follow-up email Martin said his system's partnership with the Scouts was first established over a decade ago.

Winston-Salem schools also partner with the local Boy Scout council to offer middle school students the

"Learning for Life" program. In the program, students travel to the council's reserve, Raven Knob, where they participate in life skills and community-building activities led by camp staff and Boy Scouts officials. Unfortunately, Learning for Life's little taste of the Scouting program is all gay or atheist youth will ever see of the organization.

It is shameful for schools, by law open to all citizens, to partner with organizations that unapologetically uphold discriminatory membership requirements. When we consider the response to student-organized gay-straight alliances by officials in this school system, we see a clear disconnect.

"We can't allow this gay-straight alliance to be school sponsored," I was once told. "If we did, we'd have to allow every club who wanted sponsorship. What would we do if the KKK or another hate group wanted to start a school club?"

If their actions concerning the Boy Scouts are any indication, I'm guessing school officials would have no choice but to allow the KKK club. They already have one club with stringent discriminatory policies and philosophies, how could they legally deny access to another? After all, the same Supreme Court decision protecting the Boy Scouts' private membership and Free Association rights would also protect hate groups like the KKK.

Further, the federal *Equal Access Act* mandates open and accessible schools. The law was originally passed to protect Christian groups like the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, but the *Act* has also been used by students seeking to establish gay-straight alliances. Because schools already allowed non-curricular clubs like Bible studies, they had no choice but to allow the gay-straight clubs.

For schools, working with the Boy Scouts is dangerous and obviously wrong. Their partnerships will inevitably lead to some of their students being discriminated against — something that should never happen in public schools. Secondly, their Boy Scout partnerships could very well open schools to other discriminatory groups seeking equal access.

For the Boy Scouts of America, these membership policies are hurting their ability to be the organization they once were. Their actions today are absolutely antithetical to the purpose and mission with which they were charged at their founding a century ago, and outlined in their Congressional Charter: "...to promote...the ability of boys to do things for themselves and others, to train them in scoutcraft, and to teach them patriotism, courage, self-reliance and kindred virtues."

The Boy Scouts' anti-gay and religiously-exclusive policies are tarnishing their sterling history and the honored place they once earned — but lost long ago — in American society and culture. ▀

**'online q-poll'**

Some say closeted, anti-gay politicians should be outed because of their hypocrisy. Do you think outing is appropriate?

See the options and vote at [www.q-notes.com/qpoll](http://www.q-notes.com/qpoll)



SEPTEMBER 26 2009

NC PRIDE

DUKE UNIVERSITY EAST CAMPUS  
DURHAM NC - 10AM UNTIL 5PM



SPEECHES 12PM PARADE 1PM

PARTIES FRIENDS FUN FLOATS

FIRST DATES SHOWS VENDORS

NORTH CAROLINA'S TWENTY-FIFTH  
ANNUAL GAY LESBIAN BISEXUAL &  
TRANSGENDER FESTIVAL CELEBRATED  
IN RALEIGH, DURHAM & CHAPEL HILL  
[NCPride.org](http://NCPride.org)

