



BOY SCOUTS  
OF AMERICA®  
WESTARK AREA COUNCIL

# Westark Area Council, Boy Scouts of America: *Leading the Way*



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-Scout Executive  
Bryan Feather

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For more than 100 years, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) has proven—with research-based results—that its program prepares leaders by combining educational activities and lifelong values with fun, adventure and camaraderie.

Today, the Westark Area Council, Boy Scouts of America (Fort Smith, Ark.) is still committed to Boy Scouts of America’s mission to prepare young people to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetime by instilling in them the values found in the Scout Oath and Law.

## Providing a Moral Compass

Hartsook conducted a pre-campaign study for Westark Area Council, including an internal assessment of the Council’s development activities. The feedback from personal interviews and surveys demonstrated support for Scouting in general and for Westark Area Council in particular. The Council’s five-year strategic plan focused on the following initiatives: youth membership, volunteer leadership, community partnerships, Council properties and financial stability.

Prospective donors appreciated the Boy Scouts of America’s mission and outcomes in offering leadership training and providing a moral compass for youth to counteract the negative influences they face every day.

By proactively addressing its capital, operating and endowment needs, the Council knew it would be able to extend its life-changing program to another century of Scouts. Now, its integrated campaign—*Leading the Way*—has exceeded its goal and raised \$8.3 million for capital improvements and expansion, program support and endowment. This positions Westark Area Council, and the 17 Arkansas counties it serves, to move forward with confidence.

## Building on Its History

The Westark Area Council was originally organized in 1920 as the “Fort Smith Council”—one of the oldest councils in the nation. The Council continued to grow and was incorporated in the state of Arkansas as the “Westark Area Council, Inc. Boy Scouts of America” in 1947.

It was with this history in mind that the Council felt a responsibility to maintain its programs and facilities for a new generation. This is also why they chose Hartsook.

Offered Scout Executive Bryan Feather, “The staff of Hartsook all seemed to care about our Council, our people and our success. Matt Beem and the team were always committed to customer service. For example, we had to delay the start of our campaign for reasons outside of our control, and they worked with us, without any pressure, to find a time that worked best for us.”

## Capital Improvements

Gifts for capital improvements and expansion included support for the Hembree Scout Service Center; the Shewmaker Center for Scouting, a new facility in Northwest Arkansas (NWA); and the Council’s camps.

“Our sons learned life skills through earning awards, working with other boys and young men and the examples of their leaders,” said Lawson Hembree IV. “As an adult leader, I spent quality time with my sons and their friends. I had the opportunity to watch these young men grow in wisdom and stature.

“With the assistance of training and other volunteers, I had the opportunity to participate in helping them grow into young men. I learned skills and met people that made me both a better parent and person.”

Camps are some of the greatest assets a council can leverage for increasing and retaining Scout members. Camps also have the potential to strengthen community partnerships since well-equipped facilities may be utilized by other groups, businesses and organizations. In addition, a well-maintained camp increases area property values. The Council understood that maintaining and enhancing its camps was one of the best ways they could serve as a good neighbor in NWA.

All three camps—Camp Orr (located along the Buffalo National River), Camp Spencer (located on a 100-acre peninsula by beautiful Lake Norfolk) and Rogers Scout Reservation (home to “Scout World,” a 2,800-acre, themed camping experience)—received funding and improvements from the campaign.

## Programs and Endowment

With the addition of new facilities, Westark Area Council was committed to securing its financial stability long term. The campaign not only strengthened its endowment for grounds and building maintenance, but it provided support for the Council’s goals of increased membership and volunteer leadership.

“Scouting has been an important part of my life since I was a young boy,” said Sam Dunn, Campaign Co-Chair. “In my view, there is a greater need for Scouting today than ever before. It was obvious from the first interview that Hartsook was the best fit for the Westark Area Council.”

The Council’s largest gift came at the very beginning of the campaign. The \$1.35 million got things off to a great start. It generated an excitement and motivation for other gifts to follow. In fact, they received a gift from an individual whose name provided tremendous credibility in the community—recognition and influence with additional donors that could not have been earned any other way.

A third, especially meaningful gift, came from a donor who had not given previously. This donor was motivated by a solicitation request that focused on his passion versus the Council’s need. Once his gift was pledged, it grew into another \$475,000 gift given to further develop the Council’s mountain biking program.

Said Feather, “We started strong, but in the middle of the campaign, we seemed to lose our momentum. It was an exercise in perseverance to push through that ‘drought’ and finish strong.”

His recommendation to other councils: “Make sure you know what you want to accomplish. Decide the level of support you will need, based on the resources you have available within your organization. Then, press through to the end, even if it gets tough and you are tempted to quit. With Hartsook’s counsel and guidance, it works.”

Even before its campaign, the Council carried no debt on its camps or buildings. Now, with a very successful campaign under its belt, the Westark Area Council, Boy Scouts of America is well positioned to lead the way for Scouting in Northwest Arkansas.

