

## The Scout Achievement Center Story

Written by Mike Swofford

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### Need and Ideas



After a successful capital campaign in 1998 led to the opening of Cub World and the re-opening of Camp Friedlander at the Dan Beard Scout Reservation, eyes turned to the then-current Scout Service Center on Victory Parkway. With an increase in youth membership, greater staffing needs, and changes in modern technology and business practices, it was apparent that the 30-year home of the Dan Beard Council was no longer sufficient to meet the needs of the growing movement. The Victory Parkway office, with its modest Scout Shop, small lobby area, cramped individual offices, and minimal meeting areas, could not sustain these new demands. Scouting needed a new center in Cincinnati that would reflect its turn towards the future and be an active place for volunteers to lead the way.

The council Board of Directors responded and the 2005 council strategic plan called for the building and opening of a new service center within five years. Thus, the SAC project was born. The then Scout Executive, Tracy Techau, was charged with the enormous challenge of delivering upon this strategy, and a team of volunteers and staff were engaged to lead the way.

Soon thereafter, a growing realization came that a new facility would require a new way for the council to operate, a new depth of engagement for volunteers, and a new positioning of the Scouting movement in the community. These were big tasks that required a strong vision. The volunteers and staff of the Dan Beard Council heard the call, and the multi-year process of developing the vision for a facility that has changed the way the Scouting program is delivered began.

But first, the council had to be positioned to take on this elevation in service. The 2005 "Inspiring Achievements" capital campaign was kicked off, raising \$12 million from the local community while not affecting the regular operations of the council. The Lindner family led the charge with a \$1 million challenge pledge that was quickly met by generous supporters. The Marge Schott

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Foundation, in response to Marge's great love for Scouting, pledged \$2.5 million to the project, and fellow foundations, community businesses, and Scouting families pledged enormous support in the form of dollars and material gifts-in-kind. From this campaign, the remaining debt from the 1998 camp construction project was paid off. Seventy acres of new land were purchased at Camp Michaels, including the much-needed county road access to the far side of Gunpowder Creek. Finally, eight million dollars was set aside for the SAC project and its future maintenance. Momentum was so great, the capital fundraising was completed a year ahead of schedule.

Meanwhile, the vision for this unprecedented project was explored. A visioning process took place to determine what the SAC would be. What would it look like? How would it be used? Where should it be located? And what should it include? More than ever before, volunteers were asked to give their input on the future direction of the council -- the feedback was enormous. Through a series of focus group discussions, multiple surveys, and the direct involvement of volunteers in the planning of the project details, a vision began to form. This led to a stunning paradigm shift that set the SAC project apart from the previous council offices and similar facilities across the country: *The Scout Achievement Center would be a volunteer center first, and a council office second*.

This philosophy drove the decisions for the project from that point forward. The answers to so many questions came swiftly. The building itself should *look* like Scouting. It should be *the* training and conference center for volunteer and unit meetings. It should be easy to get to and conveniently located for the greatest number of people. And it should include all of the modern technology and features that today's volunteers need to advance the Scouting movement. This new project was bigger than just a building -- the term "Service Center" just didn't seem to fit, so a title that better described what the project would accomplish was given: "The Scout Achievement Center."

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### Building the Vision

Now having an idea of what the Scout Achievement Center would be and what was required to realize the vision, the work began to make it a reality. There were now two main priorities for the project: building the physical structure and building the operational infrastructure to make it work.

One of the first steps, and one of the most important, was to choose the location. From the feedback that was gathered during the visioning process, several requirements were

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established for the location:

- The SAC must be centrally located for the greatest number of people.
- It must be able to be reached within two turns off an interstate.
- It must not just be a building in the community, but an active partnership with the community.
- The land for the building must be secured for the next 100 years of Scouting.

Through a study provided by Time Warner Cable, the council membership was analyzed and the population center of the council was determined to be the Evendale area. Incidentally, a vacant lot sat adjacent to the Gorman Heritage Farm in the Village of Evendale, two turns from the I-75 corridor. With the Gorman Heritage Farm's 175 year history and great youth outdoor education programs, and the Village of Evendale's focus on a family-friendly community, it was a perfect match. After months of work between Evendale, the Farm, and the Council, a wonderful partnership was established. The Village of Evendale leased the land to the Dan Beard Council for 99 years for \$1 and a memorandum of agreement was signed between the council and the farm to provide shared programming and share facilities.

Several architects were engaged to provide sketches of the SAC. The design of the building was a challenging one: it had to be designed to fit into the natural environment, incorporate many of the green features that would lead towards silver level LEED certification, and at the same time meet the practical requirements of a conference center, Scout Shop, and service center. BHDP architecture was selected and many months of designing, revising, sketching, and revising was underway. Messer Construction, with a long history with the Dan Beard Council that included the construction of Camp Friedlander and Cub World in 1998, was selected as the general contractor. Baker Concrete, a strong supporter of Scouting for many years, donated \$500,000 in concrete for the project (which explains much of the natural look of the building and the great use of concrete).

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### Construction Begins



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Looking back now, it is hard to imagine the vacant lot that was marked with nothing more than a survey stake would be morphed into the grand facility it is today. The lot had sat vacant since the demolition of a small motel several years before, and prior to any construction, it was nothing more than a weedy lot in front of the Gorman Heritage Farm. On a blisteringly hot day in July 2008, an official groundbreaking ceremony attended by Scouters, capital campaign donors, and Evendale Village Council leadership was held. Participants of the ceremony buried "Scout Promise" coins inscribed with the Scout Oath and Law in the soft earth beneath where the concrete foundation would be laid (these coins are buried underneath where the reception desk now sits).



By September, the earth had been moved, foundational plumbing and electrical lines had been installed, and the concrete slab, retaining walls, and floors had been poured. At the 2008 Peterloon in October, thousands of Scouts and Scouters were invited to leave their personal mark on the building. Three steel beams to be used in the building's framing were brought out to camp where campers could write a short message or sign their names for posterity. One beam was used in the records storage room ceiling, one was used in the district locker room ceiling, and one was used in the Scout Shop storage room ceiling. Only the beam in the Scout Shop storage room is exposed today, and with a little exploration (and permission from the Scout Shop!), the beam, complete with hundreds of signatures, can be found without much trouble. This was one of many ways that our Scouts and Scouters are literally had their hands in the construction of the building process.

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### Branding and Design

Although the physical construction of the building was the most visible progress of the project, there was an entire world of planning and work being done behind the scenes. In the end, this work was just as important and visually impressive as the building itself. The Scout Achievement Center, as determined by the volunteer feedback, should represent and *look* like Scouting; it had to visually inspire achievements and highlight the great programs and activities that Scouting offered. An extensive branding plan was developed -- taking ideas from across the board and utilizing the creativity of BHDP architecture, DSD Designs, Luken Construction, and several other contracted designers, many unique and beautiful graphic design elements were imagined and created.



The main lobby area was envisioned as a shrine to the diverse opportunities of Scouting programs. The designers wanted a "Wow!" factor that would immediately inspire visitors. Included was the Scout Tower, which was first imagined as a signal tower, then a lookout tower. Wanting to show off the Dan Beard Council camps and the National High Adventure Bases, the idea of panels of photos and information became giant murals that stretch floor to ceiling. Artifacts from each camp were collected and placed in wall cutouts. A what-if idea of a Pinewood Derby track available for Cub Scouts to try out their car projects was realized as a real track permanently installed in the lobby wall. The functional needs of the lobby were married to their form -- the reception desk was designed to appear as part of the tower, but could be unlatched and rolled away for event space; information kiosks added to the graphic element of the room while housing flyers and forms; the camp mural walls doubled as

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information and promotion centers.



The Cub Den, originally the "Cub Scout Room," was envisioned as a space for new Cub Scout dens to come and have their first den meeting. What followed was an outdoor, unfinished look intended to be an okay place for young boys to be a little rambunctious and work on handicraft projects.

The Marge Schott Conference Room was designed to celebrate the passion of the late Marge Schott for Scouting and her foundation's enormous support of the SAC project. Pictures of Marge Schott and her involvement in Scouting, including Camp Friedlander's Lake Marge Schott, remind us of her commitment and generosity.

The Reverent Room was a unique and challenging design. While intended to be a spiritual space without being overtly religious, it was envisioned as a an inspiring room to recognize a Scout's duty to God and provide a place for reflection. Accomplishing this through color choices, wall decor, and furnishing proved to be one of the greatest design elements of the project, and many redesigns were done, including a stone and wood style chapel, various stained-glass window choices, and at one point, a Norman Rockwell art theme. The final design of the room incorporates many of these original ideas with subtle lighting, comfortable furniture and a collection of Scouting religious awards from a variety of denominations.

The Baker Activity Center was designed as a spacious, yet comfortable room for large meetings and events. Awash with natural lighting from the large windows that surround the room, it is accented by a stone fireplace and an inspiring eagle wood sculpture carved by longtime Scouter, Frank Borke. This room includes a thank you to the many volunteers that are the core of the Scouting program and various pictures of volunteers in action.

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The hallways and other small spaces of the building were each given similar treatment, each with its own touch or theme. The main corridor was a massive project in itself, designed as a parade of Scouting history, various parts of the Scouting program, and the people that make it happen. Editions of the Scouting Handbook, reaching back to the founding of the program were collected and encased in the wall, and photos of Dan Beard, James E. West, and other founders tell the Scouting amazing story. Historical photos, news articles, and magazine covers are sprinkled through the huddle rooms and walls -- nearly every foot of wall space gives tells a different story and can keep a visitor busy for hours as they take it all in!

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## Technology and Green Construction

As part of the project vision, the SAC was designed to be prepared for the next 100 years of Scouting. This meant that the information technology to be used in the facility was to be state-of-the-art and future-ready, and that the building itself would be environmentally responsible and sustainable.

The technology would not only be used by the staff and in office operations, but by volunteers and the general public in the meeting spaces. Over 150 internet ports were scattered throughout the building and wireless internet is broadcast across the facility. Thousands of yards of Cat. 6 wind their ways through the walls and ceilings (and thanks to a donation, all of it bright pink!), connecting the computers, phones, lighting, door, and heating systems. Twenty-three flat panel TVs are incorporated in the branding and provided in the conference rooms. Each meeting area was designed with full audio/video capabilities. This massive inclusion of technology means the building is networked together unlike most buildings and prepared to handle whatever the future may bring. Nearly every operational component of the facility can be controlled remotely, providing great flexibility on how the staff can support volunteer usage.



The goal to achieve [LEED certification](#) influenced nearly every decision of the project. Natural

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materials, many of them local, were used in construction accounting for the great amount of wood, glass, and stone. The angle of the building was chosen to provide the most amount of natural light, decreasing energy consumption. The slope of the roof and parking lot were designed to diffuse sunlight, reducing the "heat island" effect and provide a more natural rainwater runoff system. The roof itself is surprisingly white, helping to increase the energy efficiency of cooling systems by reflecting sunlight (and making it easy to find from an airplane!).

The project incorporated numerous requirements that led to the Silver Level LEED certification, including a continuing education program that influences the cleaning and maintenance operations of the building today and is intended to inspire others to use these techniques in their own lives. Learn about the green elements of the SAC by [clicking here](#).

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### Excitement, Moving, and Opening

With all of these tangents of the SAC project coming together in the spring of 2009, the excitement was overwhelming. Volunteers, staff, and the public were curious about this astounding achievement to be opened that summer. To ease the anticipation (or perhaps add to it!), a live camera feed was provided by Conexio, so anyone could watch the live progress of the construction via the internet 24-hours a day (when two construction port-o-lets blocked the view of the front of the building, they were quietly moved).

The council's Annual Volunteer Recognition Banquet was held next door at the UAW Hall in April, providing many volunteers with their first tour of the building. Still three months out from the actual opening, lucky visitors got to see the construction in progress and imagine what was still to come. Tour groups were led through the building, giving them insight into the design decisions and new features.



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~~On the night of 2010, the Scout Achievement Center (SAC) was officially opened and the staff and volunteers celebrated the grand opening of the new facility. The staff, A Few Last Things and a Grand Opening~~



With the Scout Achievement Center now in operation and a new model of "business as usual" was realized, the SAC project was not yet complete. There were plenty of minor touches and punch list items to be completed. As with any new facility, there were bugs and glitches that had to be addressed. The phone system wasn't working like it was supposed to (not surprising as anyone who has opened a new office will tell you), the cooling system wouldn't cooperate, and simple items such as directional signs to the restrooms had been overlooked. The project team pulled together and knocked them out one by one. But these were inconsequential when put in context to the excitement, surprise, and enthusiasm of those that came to see the SAC for the first time. Over the next few months, the building was brought to 100% completion and was the talk of the community.

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On October 15, 2009 a Grand Opening was finally held. Hundreds of people gathered for a ribbon cutting ceremony, performed by Scouts from every part of the program. And with a literal realization of the vision of the 2005 strategic plan, they walked through the front doors to celebrate the movement's past and enter together towards the promises of Scouting's future.