

THE GREAT ADVENTURES OF *Fluffy Kitty & Tough Bull*

BY DAN BAIN || PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROGER W. WINSTEAD



You've probably seen the bumper stickers. One depicts two feathers standing together, like a parent and child. The other consists simply of the phrase, "How-How!" If you haven't seen them, you probably will, as the program is growing. I'm talking about the YMCA of the Triangle Y-Guides & Princesses Program, aka the Arapahoe Nation. The Program is celebrating 40 years in the Triangle, and at 13,000 members and growing (battling with Dallas, Texas for the highest in the nation), it's thriving.

HISTORY AND GOALS

But what is it, you ask? It's the erstwhile Y-Indian Guides & Princesses Program, which has been associated with the YMCA since the first Indian Guide "tribe" was organized in Missouri in 1926 as a way to bolster the role that a father plays in his son's life. Founder Harold Keltner based the program loosely on elements of Native American culture, while adhering to the mission of the YMCA "to put Christian principles into practice through programs that build a healthy spirit, mind and body for all."

In 1954, the first Indian Princess tribes were formed as an outgrowth of the Guides, helping fathers become more closely involved with their daughters. Each program is for fathers, and each is "a solid, rewarding program," says Brendan Bailey, a 39-year veteran of the program from his childhood in Charlotte. "I cherish the memories of my experience

from when I was in it with my dad, and I wanted to have those same experiences with my kids."

Those memories consist of Brendan and his father bonding in ways that lived up to the Guides' motto of "Pals Forever" ("Friends Always" for Princesses). Adhering to those mottos is one of the programs' six goals: to be clean in body and pure in heart; to be "Pals Forever/Friends Always" with my father/son/daughter; to love the sacred circle of my family; to listen while others speak; to love my neighbor as myself; and to seek and preserve the beauty of the Great Spirit's work in forest, field and stream. Participants also share a pledge: "We, father and son/daughter, through friendly services to each other, to our family, to this tribe, to our community and country, seek a world pleasing to the eye of the Great Spirit."

There's another goal, one that pervades everything the Guides and Princesses do: to have fun. Both programs boil down to a child having fun with his/her father. Being together is an important element of that equation, Bailey says. "It's definitely different from the drop-off aspect of other programs," he stresses.

ACTIVITIES AND OUTINGS

That togetherness occurs most frequently at meetings of a tribe – a group of 7-10 dads with their kids. A child can join his/her respective tribe in the first grade and stay with it until the end of third grade. Each tribe generally keeps the same roster for those three years, meeting bi-weekly for fun and fellowship. Between the cheerful "How-How!" greetings at the beginning and end of each tribal meeting, members play games, do crafts, learn tricks, enjoy refreshments, hear stories and/or sing songs in keeping with the aims and pledge of the program.

At a tribe's first meeting, each member must decide on his/her "program name" (a vaguely Native American-sounding name such as Running Bear, which sticks with the child throughout the program) and vote on a tribe name. Bailey's kids – Aaron, 13 and Ashlyn, 9 – go by the names of Tough Bull and Fuzzy Kitty, respectively. In keeping with tradition, Bailey kept his program name from his youth – Red Cloud – when he became involved as a father.

"When Aaron and I first started Y-Guides, Ashlyn was upset that she couldn't go yet. She even picked her Y-Princess program name at that age," Bailey remembers with a chuckle. "Comparing Princess tribe names with Guide tribe names is hilarious; boys' tribes are 'Raging This' or 'Fighting That,' while girls' tribes are 'Prancing This' or 'Fluffy That.'" To illustrate this point, Bailey says Tough Bull belonged to the "Ragin' Raptors" tribe, while Fuzzy Kitty is in the "Dancing Turtles" tribe.

Each father-child pair receives vests and necklaces to assemble together and wear to bi-weekly tribe meetings. The vest is eventually adorned with colored feathers and other patches earned for making crafts, performing community and individual services, going on outings and other achievements. The empty necklace will quickly fill with beads and bear claws, each representing an hour together in the program.

While each tribe plans its own small outings, the Arapahoe Nation offers several large events to all of its tribes, such as the weekend-long Fall Outing at Camp Kanata, the entertainment-based Winter Inning, Kite Day at Carter-Finley Stadium, Park Clean-Up Day and the weekend-long Spring Outings at Camp Sea Gull and Camp Seafarer. Fall and Spring Outings include scavenger hunts, zip-line rides, canoeing, archery and other outdoor activities.

HOW-HOW TO JOIN

Fathers with rising first-graders are encouraged to attend the Dad's Orientation Meeting held by the Arapahoe Nation each September. The Orientation takes place in a large ballroom at NC State's McKimmon Center, where there was standing room only last year. This year's meeting will take place from 7-8:30pm on Tuesday, September 1st.

Bailey says it's best to join the program during the first year of eligibility, to allow a child to gel with their tribe from its inception, and he hopes to see plenty of new dads again this year. "I feel I've been so fortunate to be a part of this program with my children, and I just want to get the word out to other dads with rising first graders because it's such a great program to be a part of," he says.

If you're interested in joining but can't attend the Orientation, call the Program Office at 919.582.2266 and ask if there's a tribe near you that would be willing to take on new members. And prepare to get your How on...◆

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