



High Performing
Lodge Spotlight

OCTORARO & ECHOCKOTEE

EVERY LODGE has a program or feature that make it truly unique. Some lodges, however, excel by the numbers – high event turnout, high membership retention and near-perfect unit involvement. Octoraro and Echockotee Lodges are two that fit this bill.

Sustained around 900 members, Octoraro Lodge serves the Chester County Council in southeastern Pennsylvania. In the last year, Octoraro saw the fourth-highest membership increase in its history. Lodge Adviser Gus Sauerzopf first says the lodge was blessed with the close geography and well-connected community they serve. "We have a strong commitment

and dedication to our council and surrounding communities within Chester County. Our lodge sets the bar high and continues to exceed our own expectations through a strong collaborative effort with our youth leadership, our council, and our troops and crews."

Octoraro puts on three inductions weekends each year in conjunction with their service weekends in late April and early June as well as their fellowship weekend in the fall. Both Spring weekends typically see 200-300 attendees and the fall fellowship sees 300-400 attendees. The staff is the most important aspect of the induction weekends, and the Elangomat team have a strong

identity and presence during the weekend. The staff is proud to show off the lodge's tee shirt, minted in the lodge's famous color – man-genta pink. Lodge Chief Steven Winn states that the Elangomat program wasn't always strong; however, "We went from begging for Elangomats to having a surplus of volunteers after revamping our program in 2014," he said. The refreshed program set much higher standards for the staff, with performance reviews after events where ineffective Elangomats were reassigned to a different committee.

Octoraro Lodge is also heavily integrated into its summer camp. The lodge estimates

maintenance of the property. After a series of severe storms in March, the lodge scheduled a service day for the very next weekend with over 70 members participating. Gus and Steven say that there's always something going on in the lodge, and that it's important to have a strong 12-month program to keep members engaged. Octoraro tries to keep its events evenly spread through the year to avoid have busy and empty months. Their largest event is in October, called "C5" which stands for Chester County Council Cub Camporee. The lodge totally prepares and executes this council-wide event that sees more than 600 Cub Scout participants each year. Their annual



Octoraros's Buzz the Beard Gala Dinner, September 2017.

that 90% of the camp staff are active members of the lodge. Octoraro supplies two camp chiefs to Camp Horseshoe to focus on the OA program in camp. The camp chiefs spend much of their time visiting every unit in camp to promote the lodge's events and conducting unit elections when necessary. The lodge also sponsors a social event every Thursday as well as weekly call-out ceremonies and candidate information sessions. Likely due in large part to their heavy ties to summer camp, the lodge remains highly committed to year-round

banquet this March saw 235 members plus guests. Throughout other times in the year, the leadership of the lodge focuses on visiting units – typically more than once in a year. The visitation team uses this time to promote lodge events, connect with the Scoutmasters and, of course, conduct annual elections.

Perhaps one of the most remarkable accomplishments from Octoraro was its "Buzz the Beard" event that raised funds for forest replenishment. Their original goal

was to raise \$5,000 by leveraging the idea that their long-time camp ranger would finally shave his beard. In about a year's time however, the lodge managed to raise more than \$25,000.

Echokotee Lodge services the North Florida Council, spanning across 17 counties and serving more than 57,000 youth in and around Jacksonville, FL.



Innovative games help keep members wanting to come back to fellowships!

Echokotee achieved a top JTE score last year. According to Lodge Adviser Marty Heesacker, the culture of excellence started three lodge advisers ago. "We began focusing on the specific deliverables of Journey to Excellence (formerly the Quality Lodge program) and spending our time on mission-critical elements," said Marty.

Like his recent predecessors, Lodge Chief Wyatt Wiltse holds weekly conference calls with his officers and chairmen. These virtual meetings focus on JTE performance updates and general accountability of the team. Marty and Wyatt describe their Scout Executive and staff adviser as extremely helpful and supportive of the work of the lodge. They also give a lot of credit to the districts in the council who are integral in implementing their program.

Despite covering 17 counties, the average drive time is only about an hour for most members to their camp events – with fellowships in every season and service/induction events in the spring and fall. "Communication is key," Wyatt says. "The more exposure we get the better. We believe it's an ongoing process for membership retention and we'll never



Echokotee Lodge Chief Wyatt Wiltse and North Florida Council Scout Executive Jack Sears, Jr. (left).

become complacent." The lodge's leadership stresses that their officers should always be available for feedback, helping to set a tone for future leaders of humility and zero-arrogance. They truly try to embody servant leadership in everything they do. "I am constantly identifying and cultivating talent, both youth and adult. When I am at an event, I am constantly interacting with Arrowmen with an eye toward how that person can help move the lodge forward," Marty stated. Marty frequently reminds his advisers that they are exactly that: advisers, and will do anything to guide the youth leaders into success without interjecting too much. ●

For more information on the OA Journey to Excellence program, visit oa-bsa.org/resources/ucl-support/journey-to-excellence.