



Venturing Crew 911 members Corey Lefever, 18, left, Justin Marburger and Tyler Bachman, 17, wash a fire truck at the Saxonburg Volunteer Fire Department Monday.
JACK NEELY/BUTLER EAGLE



Venturing crew member Katie McKeever rappels down a wooden structure. Camp Bucoco in Slippery Rock is sponsoring Quest, an annual area-wide gathering of Venturing crews April 11 to 13 that will host more than 300 Venturers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Northern Virginia. Participants will compete in shooting sports, climbing, computer-network gaming and other nontraditional events.
SUBMITTED PHOTO



From left, Knoch High School junior Steve Bandi, 16, Slippery Rock blacksmith instructor Ryan Stauffer and Knoch High School freshman Ben Lesniak fabricate metallic parts that will be used in a hay wagon restoration project with Venture Crew 50, which is sponsored by the Succop Conservancy.
RICK KROSEL/SPECIAL TO THE EAGLE

"We're going to Ohio and the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (and) maybe touring a radio station," Widman said.

The crew also will visit a snow tubing park.

Widman's mom, Carole Firth, is one of the troop's advisers.

"This is kind of a new thing that kind of fills the gap between Scouts and adulthood," she said. "The boys get to be 16, 17 years old, and in a Boy Scout troop, you have a range from 11 to 17. So suddenly when you get (older) they're in a completely different mindset from 11- and 12-year-olds. We kind of filled the gap that maybe the Scout Troop isn't really geared toward." Firth said the group has seven boys, about six registered adults and would like some girls to join too. Crew 10, a high adventure crew operating out of the Trinity Presbyterian Church in Butler, does have a female member along with five male counterparts.

The crew does activities like caving and white-water rafting, but as an annual fundraiser does service work like picking up trash in the common areas and parking lot at the county fairgrounds.

Gerald Heindl, the crew's adviser, said he's also working on starting a youth trap team and rifle team.

Nicole Smith, who's been a member for about a year, said she was exposed to Venturing through her older brothers, who were Scouts.

"Once (my brothers) started up the Venture crew, whenever I got old enough, I just joined it because they wanted me to," she said.

The crew went snow tubing just last weekend and has gone on a Night Owl weekend with other crews.

"We did stuff in the middle of the night and slept during the day," Smith said. "It was pretty fun. We took a big hike around the camp we were at and went on scavenger hunts."

While Smith's group is all boys, it doesn't bother her at all.

"I like how you make a lot of friends and do a lot of fun activities," she said. "I have enjoyed this decision."

For more information on Venturing crews, call the Moraine Trails Council at 724-287-6791 or go to www.orgsites.com/pa/mtcventuring/.



Venturing crews are an extension of scouting open to boys and girls ages 14 to 20. Some crews, such as the one backpacking above, are devoted to adventure, while others focus on engineering, architecture, culture, wildlife conservation or community service.

SUBMITTED PHOTO

"Our mission is all about environmental stewardship and preservation of local history and heritage," said Nancy Lawry, the crew adviser.

As its first project, the crew is restoring an old hay wagon at the conservancy, and Lawry said members are beginning to research grant opportunities for a biodiesel project designed by one of its members.

Although work on the hay wagon has been scheduled on Saturdays and Sundays for the past three weekends, 15-year-old Ben Lesniak doesn't consider his participation a sacrifice.

"It's always been sort of an interest. History in school has been one of my better classes," said the Penn Township youth, who has been absent from some of the Saturday work because of pit orchestra practice at school. "It's not hard to give up your weekend when it's something you enjoy doing."

Lesniak said a love of history will also carry over to fundraising, which will likely include the sale of handmade soaps or candles.

Although the Crew 50 crew includes about eight Venturers so far – an average size according to Ken McKeever, adviser of the Venturing Officers' Association – Lawry is expecting to have about 20.

"We're still recruiting," she said. "We have an advantage being so close to the airport. It gives us a nice little twist to incorporate history. Maybe we'll locate an old historic aircraft: It would be fun to try to restore something like that." Crews come together

Despite their diverse interests, Lawry said Venturing crews often work together or participate in larger events involving many crews.

From April 11 to 13, Camp Bucoco in Slippery Rock will sponsor Quest, an annual area-wide gathering of Venturing crews.

"It's kind of a milestone for Venturing in the county that we're hosting it," said McKeever, who lives in Butler.

The event will host more than 300 Venturers from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Northern Virginia.

Youths who were elected at last year's event have been planning Quest through e-mail threads and face-to-face and teleconference meetings. Activities will include shooting sports, climbing, computer-network gaming and other nontraditional events. Some of these activities fall under the high adventure category of Venturing. High adventure activities include extreme sports like white-water rafting, scuba diving, shooting and caving.

One high adventure crew just getting off the ground is Crew 425 in Cranberry Township, hosted by the Dutilh United Methodist Church.

One of the founding members, 15-year-old Michael Widman, was in Boy Scouts and Eagles and wanted to progress to another activity.

"My mom suggested Venturing, and there weren't any crews around here – so we started up a new one," he said. "It's been going pretty well."

Widman said the crew is getting some ideas from other high adventure crews, as well as coming up with its own.

The crew has its first event planned for next month.

Butler Eagle

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Crews guide, train youth Activity's involvement growing fast

Cory Lefever attends Knoch High School, works part-time at Concordia Lutheran Ministries and volunteers as a firefighter and EMT.

Lefever, 18, also belongs to Venturing Crew 911, a youth development group operating as part of the Boy Scouts of America.

Open to girls and boys ages 14 through 20, Venturing crews are sponsored by community organizations and focus on special interests or activities.

The Saxonburg Volunteer Fire Department sponsors Crew 911, which is preparing Lefever and seven others to serve their community as firefighters. As part of the program, Lefever and a few of his peers also have become certified EMTs.

"The training's really helped," said Lefever, who plans to pursue a career in nursing. "It's been a good learning experience." Although members of the Venturing crews lead their own groups, adult advisers provide guidance.

In the case of Crew 911, adviser Emil "Butch" Daubner said it's important for the young people to get involved because they're the future of the fire department, which once served as a post in the Boy Scouts' now defunct Explorers program.

"At present, 90 percent or more of our present line officers have belonged to that Explorer post," Daubner said.

Although child labor laws prevent many of the younger Crew 911 Venturers from participating in actual firefighting, Daubner said Venturing prepares them by offering safety and equipment training.

In the case of Lefever, the training paid off.

"He was working the day of the Concordia fire (in November 2006), and he's one of the people that helped get the people out of the place," Daubner said. "He happened to be one of the people that was instrumental in making a sweep of the building after the fire started." Venture variety

Founded 10 years ago, Venturing is the fastest growing branch of the Boy Scouts. Thirteen crews are currently registered under the Moraine Trails Council, which encompasses Butler, Lawrence, Armstrong and northern Westmoreland Counties.

Several of the crews are devoted to high adventure, while others focus on engineering and architecture, Native American culture, wildlife conservation and service projects.

Crew 50, sponsored by the Succop Conservancy, is the county's most recently chartered group, focusing on history.