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# It's Not Just a Hike!

By David Setzer

Photos by Tom Wills

Since the beginning, Scouts from Northern New Jersey have been part of the Philmont story. For the past 30 years our council, Patriots' Path, and its predecessors have sent large contingents to Philmont annually. As Philmont attendance has grown, so have staff complaints about the increased number of crews unprepared for life in the backcountry.

Certainly we do not want our crews to be among that group!

We live in the land of the Lenni Lenape Indians. There is an unsubstantiated folk tale of a fellow in the tribe named Chief Watchu. He was responsible for tribe member development. So we chose Chief Watchu to represent what we are about. And we are about making adventure, fun and excitement the focus of our council's teenage Scouting experience. One of our new tools is our Philmont preparation process called Watchu.

Chief Watchu begins in September with a letter to all Philmont families. His letter outlines the adventure, opportunity and responsibility ahead. You can read this letter on our council home page at [www.ppbsa.org](http://www.ppbsa.org). Go to

"Council Activities," "High Adventure" and then "Philmont." Here you will discover that everything we do includes a bit of Philmont and New Mexican history. We want everyone to feel the excitement of the rare opportunity they have to step into the past. Each will experience the treasures of that history and they will know why we say, "It's Not Just a Hike."



Chief Watchu follows with Advisor Briefings in November, January, March, and June. These briefings are designed to inform, enlist, and excite. We support the

information presented in these briefings with our Watchu Guidebook, a loose-leaf notebook with chapters designated as Trail Stops. For example, Trail Stop #5 is "Equipment." As we go, we present timely information that is filed at appropriate Trail Stops. The Watchu Guidebook grows into a valuable crew reference manual.

The November briefing is about getting ready for Philmont. We provide a nine-month "Sample Crew Development Plan." It serves as the framework for monthly activities that include Family Gatherings, CPR/First Aid,

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COPE, Camping, Backpacking, Cooking, Itinerary Planning, Health & Safety, Team Development, Leadership, and their Crew Reunion on return from Philmont. Each crew tailors the sample plan to its specific schedule and needs.

Chief Watchu's Network connects all crew members and their families during the Watchu preparation and crew development phase. Via the network, Email is sent to all advisors. In turn our advisors forward the information to all crew families. The Chief calls these messages Watchu Grams. Watchu Grams are used to answer questions, offer tips, remind advisors of deadlines, issue bulletins, and provide a forum for crew feedback and discussion. Each Watchu Gram is identified by "Subject" and "Trail Stop" for filing in the Watchu Guidebook.

After all this, how do our crews measure their progress? On the first weekend of May all crews report to our camp for their self-administered mid-term exam. For the weekend our Camp Wheeler becomes Watchu Mountain. We attempt to simulate Philmont in all details. For example, Wheeler Lodge becomes Cimarroncito Lodge, and



Philmont-like signs replace the usual camp signs. The three-day weekend includes a "rugged" eight-mile hike as well as all the elements of hiking and camping experienced when hiking from one Philmont trail camp to another.

The Watchu Mountain Adventure (WMA) is designed to provide opportunity for self-discovery and improvement. Each crew evaluates its backpacking, camping, and hiking skills against accepted standards of performance. WMA gives each an opportunity to find the "gaps." The "gaps" are gems that define "where they are" with respect to "where they need to be." After Watchu Mountain our crews have eight to ten weeks to close the "gaps." These "gaps" become the focal point of the final phase of training and development.

So how are we doing? Crew and advisor recruiting has greatly improved. But by far the most important result is a new understanding that high adventure events are not just about the hike.



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Rather, they are about the entire exciting experience that also includes anticipation, preparation, training, and family enlistment. Seen in this way, high adventure programs can become many months of great teenage Scouting. And plenty of fun and excitement for all involved.

Maybe the best Watchu testimony is the excitement outside our council. Over the past five years, crews from Delaware, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, New York, and other areas within New Jersey have participated in the entire Watchu experience.

Finally, a note of thanks; much of what we do during the three-day WMA is patterned after a Philmont training weekend created and run by fellow PSA member, Bill Cass, and his team in Chester County Council, Pennsylvania. Thanks, Bill.

Details of our three-day Watchu Mountain Adventure will be covered in a 2005 Scouting Magazine article. We hope you will check it out.

*Dave Setzer is a Life Member of the PSA, a former Ranch Committee member, and a member of the 2004 PSA Nominating Committee. He facilitated the development of the present PSA Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan.*



## **It's that time again... ... time to help Philmont!**

Summer is here and more staff are already helping thousands of young people have the time of their lives in Philmont's magic New Mexico mountains.

And it is once again time for us to come together to pledge our support through the PSA's Annual Fund to help our organization increase its support of Philmont.

Last year's Annual Fund provided funds to help with Rayado Scholarships, ongoing conservation and fire restoration work, regional reunions, the wildly successful Phil-break alternative spring break program, and helped keep memberships affordable for many who joined the PSA at the end of their first or second summers at the Ranch.

This year's annual fund goal of \$60,000 will help us continue to do all these things—and so much more! So, watch for that brochure in the mail and pledge your support to Philmont—and the PSA!

**(To pledge your support online visit  
[philstaff.com/annualfund.html](http://philstaff.com/annualfund.html))**

**As always,  
THANK YOU  
for your support!**