

# Gilwellian Scouters celebrate in Acton

By Frances Niblock

The 59th annual Gilwell Reunion at the Blue Springs Scout Reserve on the weekend was probably the most fun adults could have – without alcohol. Forget the notion of earnest Scouters in multi-pocketed shorts, sensible shoes and neck scarves – one group of Gilwellians on Saturday was decked out in grass skirts, incredibly garish Hawaiian shirts and face paint. They were the election campaign team for a Gilwellian attempting to win a seat on next year's reunion committee. Another election team sported a 1950s Grease theme and staged a sock hop, and another dressed with a Wizard of Oz theme.

Approximately 1,500 Gilwellians, Scouters – men and women – with advanced leadership training have gathered at Blue Springs since 1952, to have fun, learn new Scouting practices and revel in what one called “a carnival/group hug fest.”

Along with the unorthodox uniforms, all Gilwellians wear, with pride, a leather necklace strung with wooden beads, a tradition began by Scouting founder Lord Baden-Powell who was given beads by a Zulu warrior in Africa. He gave the beads to participants at a Scoutmaster training session in Gilwell Park, England, to signify their leadership in Scouting. The course is now called Wood Badge, and graduates who receive their beads and scarf and are known as Gilwellians.

Like a well-oiled machine, the Gilwellians from across the province and 110 from the United States, turn the Scout Reserve into a mini-city every year on the weekend after Labour Day. They boast high-tech communications, a mayor, fire department, kitchens, hospital, waste disposal system, welcome wagon and a daily, multi-edition colour newspaper called the Log ‘N’ Bead.

While there is some business over the weekend – a Youth guest speaker, appearances by the Board

of Governors and Commissioner and elections – several Gilwellians said the weekend is a chance to get psyched up for this year's Scouting program, for Beavers, Sparks, Cubs, Brownies, Scouts, Guides, Rovers and Venturers. To that end, they raced electric wheelchairs and home-made sleds around a track, silk-screened this year's butterfly logo on shirts, learned how to make instruments with plastic cups and twine and attended workshops.

One Gilwellian from Cleveland, Ohio, who had been coming to Acton for the past 11 years, said this year's theme “Make a Difference” said it all.

“You take what you

learn home with you and you ‘pay it forward’ – either to other leaders or to the kids themselves. It's an incredible weekend,” said Debra Miller, a sentiment echoed by many Gilwellians who said the annual weekend “rejuvenates” them for the coming Scouting year.

The North Halton contingent of Gilwellians was busy preparing for the 100th anniversary of Scouting in Acton, and the October 16 Acton Apple Day and open house at the Scout House on School Lane.

By Sunday night, the Scout Reserve looked like no one had been there and plans were well underway for next year's reunion.



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