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FEATURED

## New organizations 'not just another Sunday school'

By MARY PAT HOAG

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Norfolk Daily News/Mary Pat Hoag

Chuck Boerngen and Dawn Phelps hold a sign with the names of the two new Christian youth organizations that are forming in Norfolk.

Area youths will soon have the opportunity to become members of two Christian-centered outdoor adventure organizations forming in Norfolk.

One of the groups, Trail Life USA, is a new national organization. The outdoor scouting-like program is designed for boys ages 5-17; the focus is on adventure, character and leadership.

New troops are now being chartered across the country, with the program to officially launch on Jan. 1. Locally, Chuck Boerngen will be the troop coordinator, with Monte Glaser as chairman.

The other organization new to the Norfolk area is American Heritage Girls, which allows its members to learn leadership skills and faith values.

The new Norfolk troop will be only the third one formed in Nebraska, said troop coordinator Dawn Phelps. Currently, there is a troop in Omaha; there had formerly been another troop in Omaha. Phelps will be assisted by Kris Heimes, vice coordinator.

Phelps said American Heritage Girls offers girls ages 5-18 a progressive program of social development; girl leadership; life skill enhancement; character development; developing teamwork and building confidence; and spiritual development.

Trail Life USA and American Heritage Girls are described as Christian alternatives to the Boy Scout and Girl Scout organizations, respectively.

All youths — regardless of religion, race, national origin or socio-economic status — are welcome to join the organizations, Boerngen and Phelps said.

A meet and greet to introduce area families to both organizations is planned from 2 to 4 p.m. Sunday at Skyview Lake in Norfolk. In the event of inclement weather, the event will be conducted at Lutheran High Northeast. The meet and greet will include activities.

Boerngen and Phelps, both former Scout leaders, met through Boy Scouts.

His sons, Evan, 11, and Tanner, 13, will be transferring from Boy Scouts to Trail Life. Daughter Desarae, 6, will be in American Heritage Girls

Phelps' son Wesley, 11, will be transferring to Trail Life with son Levi, 5, to join Trail Life. Her daughters, Bethany, 15; Joy, 13; and Charis, 7, have been American Heritage Girls Trailblazers the past year as independent members.

Boerngen was among more than 1,200 people who recently attended the inaugural Trail Life USA Leadership Convention in Nashville. Forty-four states were represented.

Trail Life founder John Stemberger of Orlando, said the organization's "vision will be to become the premier national character development organization for young men, which produces godly and responsible husbands, fathers and citizens. Parents are going to love the new outdoor adventure program, and we are very excited to be part of this next chapter in the history of scouting."

Phelps said, "American Heritage Girls just celebrated its 18th anniversary, and it started similar to Trail Life . . . (by) people who wanted something a little different, to be outdoors, to be servants for their communities but not to be afraid of being Christian, and being out there and doing things with that mind-set."

En route home from Lincoln, Boerngen said he and the other two Norfolkans were deciding on a number for the troop.

Boerngen, an Eagle Scout recipient while a member of Troop 411 in Lincoln as a youth, said he typed "411" into his phone. The first reference that came up was Proverbs 4:11: "I instruct you in the way of wisdom and lead you along straight paths."

That fitting Bible passage and the number 411 have been adopted by Troop 411, the same troop number for Norfolk's charter Trail Life USA and American Heritage Girls groups.

Tentatively beginning on Nov. 4, both groups will meet weekly on Mondays at 7 p.m. at the Northern Heights Baptist Church. The joint meeting night will be advantageous for families, Boerngen said.

Depending on member numbers and interest by area communities, Phelps said, "The dream is to get more troops started. We're very excited about it."

Boerngen said he and Phelps have fielded positive responses to both organizations.

"This isn't just another Sunday school," Boerngen said. "Trail Life is geared toward building leaders in the community." Boys will assume leadership roles early on, with high-adventure journeys planned for the older boys every three months, he said.

"We are not against Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts," he said. "We have good friends in both organizations.

"We're offering a different option for families in Norfolk. Trail Life and American Heritage Girls are structured toward faith."

The new policies of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, he said, "don't align with my personal beliefs and Dawn's personal beliefs."

Through Trail Life USA and American Heritage Girls, he said, "We want to teach the boys and girls to honor God, their communities and their husbands and wives."

The major focus of American Heritage Girls, Phelps said, "is service, serving with integrity and serving the community at large. Each girl is required to do three service projects annually."

Phelps said she was a Girl Scout for seven years and then was a Girl Scout leader for six years while living in Illinois. Phelps also was involved with Cub Scouts for three years, including the past two years as a pack leader in Norfolk.

New members can enroll at any time in Trail Life USA and American Heritage Girls. Awards already earned in Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts will transfer to the new organizations.

Young men can stay in Trail Life through age 25. From age 18 through 25, American Heritage Girls can join Trail Life's Guide On co-ed program.

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### **Want to learn more?**

Contact Chuck Boergen at 992-0212 or Dawn Phelps at 750-8845, or visit [www.TrailLifeUSA.com](http://www.TrailLifeUSA.com) and [www.ahgonline.org](http://www.ahgonline.org).

### **If you go**

Event: Meet and greet to introduce area youths and families to the Trail Life USA and American Heritage Girls organizations

When: 2-4 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 6

Where: Skyview Lake (in the event of inclement weather, the event will be conducted at Lutheran High Northeast)

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## **About the two new organizations**

### **Trail Life USA**

Mission: "To guide generations of courageous young men to honor God, lead with integrity, serve others and experience outdoor adventure."

Oath: "On my honor, I will do my best to serve God and my country; to respect authority; to be a good steward of creation and to treat others as I want to be treated."

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### **American Heritage Girls**

Mission: "Build women of integrity through service to God, family, community and country."

Oath: "I promise to love God, cherish my family, honor my country and serve in my community."

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