

Blue Angels, Scouts, persevere through lousy weather

A Navy pilot sings the praises of Boy Scouts.

By **TOM ARNEBERG**
Community Columnist

What a great weekend! The weather wasn't the best, but there was plenty of adventure at the Chippewa Valley Air Show.

I got to hear one of the Blue Angels pilots speak at a campfire Saturday night at the airport. Lt. Frank Weisser recounted his high school days in Atlanta, where he lettered in football and track, and about the process of applying for admission into the U.S. Naval Academy, one of the most selective schools in the country.

He talked about making it through a rigorous four years at Annapolis, then getting into flight school after facing some fierce competition for that next step.

He talked about the 34 combat missions he flew in "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Yes, he was one of the few in flight school to become a fighter pilot.

Then in September 2007, he reached the pinnacle of his career (so far), being selected to fly with the Blue Angels, the most elite group of pilots in the world.

After telling the assembled



Arneberg

masses at the campfire about his rise through the military ranks, he added an interesting comment:

"Twenty years from now, if someone asks me what my biggest accomplishment is," he said, "it is unquestionably . . . my Eagle Scout rank. Unquestionably."

That certainly brought a cheer from the guys around the campfire, for they were themselves all Boy Scouts and adult leaders.

Lt. Weisser went on to describe how Scouting prepared him for life after high school.

"It's all about goal-setting," he explained. "In Scouting, you learn to set goals for the next badge, then the next rank, and you learn that any big accomplishment can be broken down into smaller pieces that you can do."

He cited examples of his Scouting experiences, from the fear of his first campout to his reign as Senior Patrol Leader in charge of the entire troop.

"Sports are great," he continued, "but there are leadership lessons you learn in Boy Scouts that you

To look at hundreds of photographs of the Air Show Camporee, go to www.troop72.com.

just can't get anywhere else."

As a Scoutmaster, that was music to my ears. It's one thing for the boys in my troop to hear this kind of talk from a 48-year-old desk-sitter, but to get that advice from a Blue Angels fighter pilot was priceless.

I also enjoyed his opening line. If you were at the air show Saturday, you remember how disappointed you were that, due to the low clouds, not a single plane took off that day. It was worse for us Scouts and Scouters, since almost a thousand of us were camping out all weekend just north of the runway.

Lt. Weisser opened our campfire by asking who was cold, wet, and miserable. (Most of the boys fit that category.) Then he said something that I hope will sink in over time: "You boys have GROWN more this weekend by facing adverse conditions than your friends who are home watching TV will grow in a year."

He's right — even apart from the leadership and goal-setting

lessons of Boy Scouts, the simple act of enduring hardship can be a great character-builder.

Fortunately, the clouds lifted enough Sunday to allow the Blue Angels to get into the air. Their show was spectacular! They did have to move up their show starting time from 3 p.m. to 1 p.m. to avoid the new wave of incoming rain.

Sure enough, the rain hit later Sunday, and it hit hard. Still, the Boy Scouts persevered and cleaned up the grounds. By the time we caught the shuttle bus back to the campground, it was already dark.

In our infinite wisdom, we had left our tents up so they could dry out Sunday morning when we caught the 7:15 a.m. shuttle to the airport. (It was a beautiful morning!)

So we had to take down our wet tents by lantern light. As soon as we were done, we high-tailed it back to the hangar to stuff some pizza into our starving bodies, having not eaten since our 11 a.m. lunch of hot dogs and chips.

Sad to say, the only thing we found in the hangar was two tall stacks of empty pizza boxes.

We did something we had never done before — ordered Domino's

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pizzas delivered to our church to eat after we unloaded our troop trailer at 9:30 p.m.

Hot pizza never tasted so good. We were still cold, soaked and exhausted, but we had the inner glow of persevering together. Not to mention some great memories of an air show that finally got off the ground, and a pilot that took the time to inspire us.

Tom Arneberg of Chippewa Falls is a community columnist for The Chippewa Herald. He can be reached at Tom@Arneberg.com.