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David Karp: A Guide for Unity in Scouting

By [Marc Ballon](#)

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Photographs by Kevin Scanlon

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When attorney David Karp reminisces about his time in the Cub and Boy Scouts, the good memories come flooding back. He remembers taking long nature hikes, making close friends and fashioning a pinewood derby car from a block of wood, four nails and four wheels. The Scouts, he said, taught him how to work well with others, play fairly and know right from wrong -- qualities that have served him well as an adult.

After the birth of his son, Samuel, in 1990, Karp decided that he would one day introduce the boy to the joys of scouting. But Karp wanted to touch more lives than just Samuel's. Through the Western Los Angeles County Council Jewish Committee on Scouting of the Boy Scouts of America, he has found a way successfully to combine his two great loves: scouting and Judaism, both of which shape his ideas, values and conduct. In the process, Karp, a Reform Jew, has done more than perhaps anyone in Southern California to bring local Orthodox Jews into the world of scouting.

"Once I accepted that I wanted to make a place for Jews in scouting, it was only a matter of time before I decided we had to be inclusive of all Jews," said Karp, who headed the Council Jewish Committee from 2002 to 2004 and remains treasurer.

Under his direction, Karp said he and other council members helped oversee the creation of a Boy Scout troop and later a Cub Scout pack at Shaarey Zedek Congregation in Valley Village. Subsequently, Karp's efforts have helped lay the foundation for other shuls to form scouting units.

"David Karp made it possible for us to have this program," said attorney Yacov Greiff, scoutmaster of Troop 613 at Shaarey Zedek. "Aside from personal kindness and modesty, exemplary menschlichkeit and tireless efforts on behalf of the Jewish community, he deserves particular recognition for going out of his way to reach across sectarian lines."

Karp also helped make it possible for Orthodox Jews to participate in the Kinnus weekend, an annual committee-sponsored event that attracts hundreds of Jewish scouts and their families from the Southland and beyond. At the suggestion of several religious Jews, Karp and others approved the serving of strictly Kosher meals, offered Orthodox Shabbat services and set up an eruv, or boundary, which permits the carrying of supplies and other goods during the Sabbath. The result: Orthodox Jews now account for more than half of Kinnus,

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participants, up from zero in 2001.

"David's been instrumental in uniting the three Jewish denominations into one identity as Jewish scouts," said Jeff Feuer, cubmaster of an Orthodox pack sponsored by Beth Jacob Congregation in Beverly Hills. "In my personal opinion, it's best if we work together and understand and learn to celebrate our differences."

As a professional mediator, bringing together Jews under the banner of the Scouts has come naturally to him.

"I suppose I'm a facilitator," said Karp, who is now a Boy Scouts of America district chairman for the East Valley. "I like to find common ground."

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