



Jamie Soetaert's
“Lessons Learned”
for
Venturing Crews

Reprinted from

[The Venturing Electronic Magazine](#)

Preface.

Jamie Soetaert, Ex-President of a California Venturing Crew, was a very active participant on the Dynopolis Venture List (now USSP) and the Yahoo Groups Venturing List. During the summer of 2001 she posted the following message:

"I've been asked by a member (off list) to share some lessons that my crew and I have learned in our three years of existence. This is an especially appropriate time for me because my term as Crew President will expire in October and I should be gathering my thoughts about the crew's performance during my tenure and sharing it with my successor, as Tim did with me at the conclusion of his term.

"I am somewhat reluctant to share this information outside of my crew for fear of coming off as a braggart or a know-it-all, but I think that I may take some of the bumps out of the Venturing path for newer crews or newer Venturers by publishing my thoughts here. These are mine alone, and not the official policies of BSA, the Venturing Division, the Western Region or the Council.

"What do you think? Should I do it?"

Another list member responded with the following message, which I heartily second:

"Jamie, having been a member on this list for some months now, as an Advisor I always look forward to your posts, as do my crew members. Our crew is new and still floundering somewhat, trying to find their way. They eagerly soak up all the hints, tips, clues, successes and failures that they hear from others, while they learn to paddle their own canoe (so to speak).

"Please share! It wouldn't be bragging about your successes and, if you've had any what you consider 'failures,' those are great learning experiences, too. Often, learning what does NOT work, is just as valuable, and sometimes more so, than learning what DOES work.

"Venturing is so new, just getting started in a lot of places, with confused youth and well-meaning, but often clueless adult leaders. The shared experiences of somebody who has 'been there, done that' is worth more than I can tell you to the "newbies" in our crew.

"And, since you're an outgoing president, the youth value your perspective and the adults, who are sometimes afraid to let the kids have the ball and run with it, may realize that their kids CAN do it - because they'll see that other kids have DONE it and done it well.

"So, PLEASE share! (The clamoring you hear in the background is my crew officers yelling, please, please, please - they're a little hyper, we just came back from a one day Council Summer Venture to Islands of Adventure where they all got stuck on the Jurassic Park ride (and apparently loved every minute of it)."

Jamie kindly gave me permission to reprint her lessons on the [*Venturing Electronic Magazine*](#). Surnames and other ways her crew can be identified have been removed.

Since the original publication of Jamie's Lessons Learned, these pages have been some of the more popular on the *Venturing Electronic Magazine's* web site. They have proven invaluable to many crews, new and old, who are trying to improve their Venturing programs. Jamie has now given me permission to publish her insights in this electronic book.

Jim Winters
Editor and Publisher
[*Venturing Electronic Magazine*](#)
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Lesson 1. Organization

Thank you for your encouragement, to share our Lessons Learned here, I'm sure writing them will actually help me get this project done. Please remember that these are my observations alone and not those of any official BSA or Venturing policy.

I'm going to do these on a periodic basis as I find the time between college, work, Venturing, Sea Scouts and dating (not necessarily in that order). I'll give a Lesson Learned and I hope that you will all comment much as the Scouter Magazine does with their monthly topics. Hopefully I'll be able to post frequently.

Organization - The crew needs a common purpose.

When [we] came together, we had a common background from the White Stag Leadership Program. The seven original members of the crew were all staff members and we came from two different districts within our council. There were originally four boys and three girls and the thing that we had in common was our staff experience.

As we added members to our crew, we started getting kids that didn't have the camping or hiking skills that you learn in Scouting and they didn't have the communications skills or the leadership skills that White Stag teaches. These people were fine at social events, but failed miserably when they were put in charge of anything. They didn't have the equipment, they couldn't make decisions and they slowed the unit down.

After the first six months, we decided that since [we] was going to be a High Adventure crew, we needed to insure that new members were equipped to keep pace with the rest of the crew. Eventually, we passed a by-law to require new members to have graduated from a council level JLT or to agree to attend the next White Stag-Phase III course offered.

We created a Mission Statement that includes the purposes for which our crew exists: 1. High Adventure 2. Advancement of our members, both in Scouting and in Life 3. Service and 4. Fun.



We've grown to 26 registered youth from all four of our council's districts and although we've never had 100% attendance at any one meeting or event, we are an active crew with very few "drop-outs".

Lesson 2. Finances and Budget

A Venturing Crew needs money to run and you should have a plan to fund it. There are charter fees, costs for advancement items, postage, phone bills, film and processing

charges, unit patches, T-shirts, jackets, sweatshirts, activity fees, unit flags, unit equipment, transportation costs and others.

Our crew decided to minimize our costs by prioritizing what we wanted and finding ways of paying for them without holding our hands out to our parents. Our first priority was our unit identity. We wanted one-piece unit numbers, we wanted a Venturing Flag and we wanted a Crew Patch that had a special meaning to us. Crewmembers and registered adults chipped in to order the one-piece numbers. We held a car wash at Wal-Mart (they match funds) to raise the money to purchase our flags and poles and a unique circumstance led us to our distinctive crew patch.

Several crewmembers were on a three-day outing to Fort Hunter Liggett to work on Ranger requirements. They met the pilot and crew of a Blackhawk helicopter from the Alaska National Guard who gave them a tour of the Air Base Operations and the Blackhawk. The pilot was the Scout Master of a BSA troop in Fairbanks and his crew chief was an Eagle Scout. In return for us sharing a bar-B-Q dinner with the air crew, the pilot explained how the GPS system (based upon military satellite technology) works and helped us program way points into our crew's GPS for our next day's activities.

Our crew, at that time, lived in the Northern portion of our council and the Alaska National Guard patch is a blue and white depiction of the Big Dipper, so after writing a letter to the commanding general of the Alaska National Guard and getting his permission, we adopted their patch as ours. This is fitting because we, as Venturers and as Rangers, provide guidance to Scouts and other Venturers as the North Star does.

Our best fundraiser was providing a color guard for the opening of our local Census 2000 office. The office manager paid the crew \$100 to present the colors at the grand opening of the office. During the discussion of our responsibilities in the ceremony, the manager asked if we could recommend a local vending machine company. They had a large office staff coming in to occupy new offices and Federal regulations wouldn't allow them to receive any profit sharing from the machines installed. The brother-in-law of one of our crewmembers installed the machines and for 18 months, we received 7.5% of gross sales for our treasury.

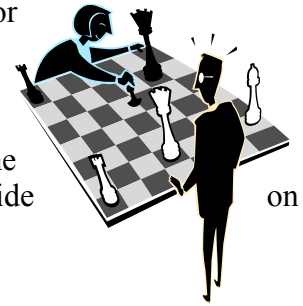


We rely on individuals to be equipped for outings and to borrow what we don't have. The crew often "works" our way to events by providing our skills instead of paying fees. An example will be at our council's Labor Day Scouters Weekend. We will run the rifle range, provide lifeguards, operate the archery range, the nature lodge and offer guided nature tours of camp for Scouts and their families in exchange for free admission, food and lodging. We then get the use of the camp on another occasion without being charged.

Lesson 3. Planning

“Failing to plan is planning to fail” - I wish our crew had a buck for every time we’ve heard that from my Dad (Crew Advisor). We’d have a crew Suburban or an RV or something by now.

Our crew uses a method of planning that takes us from the outcome to the beginning. In other words, we plan backwards. We first decide our goal(s) and then we add steps of planning back to the start of preparation. It sounds silly, but it works.



Let’s say that we’re planning an outing to work on BSA Lifeguard, Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat. We start our planning with the meeting where the certificates will be awarded and plan backward. We role-play the activity as if it had already occurred and we change our plan as we go. If someone says that it was fun at the municipal pool, but the lifeguards weren’t cooperative, we change the venue to a lake and provide our own lifeguards. This allows us the flexibility of adding a boat or two to the plan.

If we had used a traditional method of planning, we would have started with a plan to go to the pool and modified our goals to fit that venue.

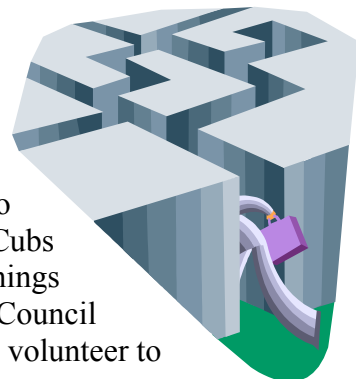
[Our] plan must have at least 7 elements:

1. Mission Statement - Why are we going?
2. Objective(s) - What will we do?
3. Leadership, Communications - Who’s in charge & how are they contacted?
4. Transportation, Logistics and Coordination - Who drives, who buys the food, who pays fees, who do we talk to (coordinate with) about our outing?
5. Equipment - What do we bring and who is responsible?
6. Advancement - Always include opportunities to meet advancement requirements. Most of the requirements are fun.
7. Fun!!!

Lesson 4. District and Council Relations

I’ll let you in on a little secret. Venturing is so new that the Commissioners and the Scouting Professionals at the district and the council levels don’t know much about it.

They know that somehow it replaced the old Exploring program and that the participants wear green shirts. They also are aware that Venturers are allowed to do some things that Cubs and Boy Scouts aren’t allowed to do. The secret is to make things easier on the Red Shirts by being there to help them. If your Council Commissioner is hosting a Commissioners Training Session, volunteer to



help with the registration. I met National Director Holmes that way.

If the district is doing a Scout-o-Ramas, have your crew do a display or an activity that involves the Cubs and the Scouts and hints on the fun of Venturing ahead of them. Our crew set up a line toss game where the object was for a Scout to toss a half inch line 20 yards to another Scout who then tied a Bowline around the waist of a cub scout who then was seated on a snow disc and pulled back the 20 yards.

Volunteer to help staff a Camporee or provide a First Aid and Communications Booth at the Camporee. We have First Responder and EMT qualified Venturers in our crew and it's fun to utilize skills that you have learned.

Go to Round Tables early and help set up. Stay late and help pick up. Share crew experiences that troops or packs may benefit from.

Your crew will be known and appreciated. You will show that you have your act together and it just may lead to benefits for your crew. It had helped us with recruiting and with staff employment for our Venturers at our council's summer camp.

Lesson 5. Recruiting

How large of a crew do you want? That was our first question, and "What type of people do we want in the crew?" came next. A small crew of friends is flexible, easily transported and comfortable. We decided that being comfortable wasn't why we were Venturers and decided to recruit and to grow.

We also decided to target people without a Scouting background as well as those whom we knew from Scouting. Other members of White Stag came first. They were easy. Friends from school and the community came next. We decided that we would invite them to an outing, not just to a meeting. Action draws kids better than another classroom like environment. About a third on our total membership are new to Scouting.



Some techniques that we have used to draw members are:

1. We attend Eagle Scout Courts of Honor with a present, an invitation and a Venturing Membership form.
2. Wherever we go, we set up a table with picture boards that show our crew in action. These photos show high adventure activities, conservation projects, community service activities, participation at an art show, and helping with Special Olympics. We also include photos of our Venturers in sports uniforms, dance clothes, at school, church photos, etc. The table has application materials.
3. Our council and district(s) refer kids to us because we are very visible to the commissioners and to the professionals.
4. We submit articles to the Council newsletter on a regular basis.

Recruiting never stops and the program sells itself if you get the message out.

Lesson 6. Youth Led

Boy Scouts constantly hear that they are “Youth Led”. Except in rare instances, such as OA, this is an area where the promise isn’t delivered. Scout leaders consistently impose their will on their troops and pay “lip service” to youth led.

We take pride in insisting that our advisors, consultants and guests are either observers or participants, but not leaders unless asked by the crew. Typically, we report our planning/coordination progress to the adult appointed by the Advisor to assist us with the activity. That adult is supposed to guide us and make suggestions, but not to take an active role or interfere unless we are violating the GSS or BSA regulations. Exceptions are made only when youth members can’t possibly do the task themselves, such as making a credit card guarantee of payment, scheduling the use of a military training area or renting equipment or a vehicle.

We encourage our adult advisors and guests to participate in our activities to the best of their abilities and to have fun with us because one of our goals is to always include fun in our plans. We’ve had a water balloon fight that included Army helicopter pilots, we had a three-hour capture the flag game with teams composed of Venturers, Navy Seabees and a Boy Scout troop (including 4 Webelos). Two captains were chosen (both female) and teams were chosen equally from the three groups. We insisted that the buddy system be used so that no one was separated or “lost” and we played. There was really no clear winner, but the Navy Chief Petty Officer who supervised the Seabees complemented the Venturers on our teamwork and leadership and said that he, the Scout Master and our advisors enjoyed watching our game through the Night Vision Devices (NVDs) that he had brought.

The point was that we had terrific clean fun. It was youth led (the Seabee team captain was 19 and the rest of the Seabees were under 21), the Advisors kept an eye on the Boy Scouts and us were in awe that they were allowed to participate.

Lesson 7. Crew Leadership

Once a crew has defined itself, it needs to establish leaders. In the beginning, it was easy for us. There were seven of us and we were all affiliated with the White Stag Leadership Training Staff. Tim was 19 years old, an Eagle Scout, The Senior Patrol Counselor for White Stag, and the Assistant Program Director for Camp Pico Blanco. He was also the Clan Chief for his chapter of OA and really gung ho about trying to earn the Ranger Award. He very naturally became our 1st crew president and set the tone for how the rest of us would pattern ourselves.

Tim was one of the quiet, competent and confident types. He often surprised the Advisors and the Commissioners by volunteering the crew to



do tasks such as providing the leadership for a council-wide Camporee. He would commit us and then pull together the resources from OA, Summer Camp Staff, White Stag Staff and friends that he had made along the way.

Tim used to tell us that we needed to use the “Duck” theory of leadership. Above the surface we were to remain calm and composed, not exhibiting any signs of stress or hard work. But, beneath the surface we needed to paddle 101 mph and kick each other’s heinies.

My Dad taught us the 3 “Ds” of management: DEFINE the task, DELEGATE it, and then DISAPPEAR and let it get done. Of course you had to check and make sure that it is on track.

Within our crew, we delegate a lot of tasks. Each event has an event leader and an event staff to plan and coordinate the activity. (Shared Leadership) These are not usually crew officers. Liz might lead a horseback trip and Chris might coordinate first aid training, while Debbi and Brian work out the details of a caving expedition.

With 26 members, we’ve never come together all at one time for anything. None of our members have ever attended every crew activity or every crew meeting. We all stay in touch through the internet and e-mail and we publish a crew newsletter that is distributed at our monthly meeting or mailed if the crewmember misses that meeting.

I view the leadership positions within the crew as the glue that keeps the crew together. The officers have knowledge of the history of our crew, previous accomplishments, and the successes & failures of things that we have done.

Lesson 8. Troop Relations

How do you create and maintain an active Venturing crew without offending Scout Masters by “stealing their Scouts”?

That was one of the first issues that Crew 2000 faced and it actually helped us create a stronger unit. Five older Scouts in my brother’s troop approached the troop committee and asked to create a Venturing Crew. They were already a Venture Patrol and wanted to expand and allow girls to participate. The Scout Master advised the committee against it stating that it would draw the older boys away and the matter was voted down.

Those boys shopped around and found other Venturing aged youth who were from several different troops and male & female adults to provide the two-deep leadership and they formed an association to charter a crew. There was no charter partner, other than the parents. They had no permanent meeting place and all they knew was that they wanted to do the “High Adventure” part of the new Venturing program.

Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have to appeal to a wide range of youth from 11 (10.5) years of age to 18 years of age. To do this, a troop has to have a program that addresses the

needs of that wide of an age range. Typically, the members drop out as the challenge to the youth becomes less. Crew 2000 met the needs of the “older” Scouts, so they came to us.

The Scout Master was right to be worried about losing his boys, but some of those boys didn’t want to leave the troop entirely because they were still progressing toward Eagle Scout and they wanted to complete it within the troop. At our first official meeting, the youth decided to require a boy or girl to stay registered with their troop for at least a year after joining our crew. We also sent a uniformed representative to a troop committee meeting of each troop to ask how our crew could assist the troop with their program.

With one troop, we sent BSA certified lifeguards to the municipal pool to “Swim Check” the Boy Scouts prior to camp. This saved the troop a half a day when they arrived at camp.

With another troop, we provided Venturers to staff a “team building - leadership exercise” centered on a climbing apparatus.

The crew provided firearms safety training and conducted a rifle shoot for Boy Scouts qualifying for the USA Shooting Program.

We’ve helped a troop put on an “Olympics” program for Cub Scouts and we’re making plans to assist a district with an “Athletics” day for boys who want to earn that merit badge.

Some Scout Masters still grumble that Venturing is “stealing their Scouts”, but we ask them what guarantees they had that these youth wouldn’t be leaving anyways.

I personally see a need for a “Rover” program as described several times by Mr. Sills. Just as Boy Scouts tire of associating with the 11-12 year old Tenderfoot Scouts, Older Venturers who have earned their Ranger and Silver Awards look for new challenges. (I’m trying Sea Scouts). I suppose though that the Advisors would complain about the Rovers stealing their Venturers...

Lesson 9. Communications

Getting the word out has been the largest obstacle that I, as President of [crew], have faced.

Because our members are so spread (over 110 road miles at the furthest points within our council) and because they attend so many different schools, we don’t see each other very often except at our monthly activity or at our monthly meeting.

Portions of the crew naturally talk to each other when they participate in other activities such as at the White Stag JLT Leadership weekend meetings once a month, or at OA

functions, or at Round Tables (there are four districts in our council & we have crew members living in all four districts).

What we do is a combination of the following:

- **Telephone** - this is effective only to the point that you are able to reach someone. The hours when a Venturing aged youth is home and available to the phone are very limited and the call itself can be time consuming because you are tempted to chat. My mom says that it is also expensive.
- **Telephone Tree** - gets the word out unless there is a break in the tree. It also doesn't insure that confirmation gets back.
- **News Letter** - this gets the word out, but it is time consuming and difficult to get input from other members of the crew. You always run the risk of leaving something or someone out and offending them. Postage also gets expensive when you send one to each youth, each advisor & consultant and to the Commissioners and professional Scouters (D.E. & S.E.).
- **Post Cards** - Postage is less than newsletter, but so is space for information.
- **E-Mail** - Gets the word out but some don't have computers, some don't read their e-mail, some don't reply to e-mail and some can't be bothered.
- **Web Site** - We're working on it, but some of the same issues apply as above.
- **Flyers Home** - are passed out at meetings, but as they are at school and at Scout meetings, many are left on the table, on the ground, in the car, etc. and never get home.
- **Word of Mouth** - "The crew is going ____ and I'm going with them. Call Eric and get on the list. He has to know before Friday because they are filing the tour permit and buying the food". It sounds silly, but this has been the most effective, so far.

Suggestions would be greatly appreciated!

Lesson 10. Recruiting Adult Leaders

In many ways, recruiting adults is easier than recruiting youth into Venturing. Before you start shouting, let me explain.

The absolutely fabulous thing about Venturing is that we have the position of "Consultant". If you approach an adult in the right way, it is hard for her/him to say, "No" to being a "consultant".

Let's say that Trevor, Eric, Chris and Brian want to work on their Native American regalia for the OA ceremonies team. They go to a shop specializing in regalia and enlist the proprietor to help them put together authentic outfits. As the proprietor becomes more involved with the boys, he will probably start advising them about what is proper and

what isn't proper to wear when depicting certain tribes or what shouldn't be done when in costume. It is a simple matter to ask the proprietor to be a "consultant" to the crew on "Historic Reenactments".

All it takes is the Crew Advisor's and the Charter Organization's approval on a registration form. Our council doesn't charge Consultants a registration fee (the same for Merit Badge Counselors).

Sara, Debbi, Geoff and Liz asked their track coach to give them advice about training for a track event. She was easily converted to a crew consultant for "Sports Bronze".

The Camp Ranger may be asked for guidance on a conservation project. He was then targeted to be a consultant.

The Coast Guard Petty Officer that showed us his 44-foot rescue boat and his Commanding Officer have been registered as Consultants (Sea Scout Bronze).

The Skipper of the District's Sea Scout Ship is also registered as an Associate Advisor.

Chuck, the State Park Ranger, who talked to our crew about edible plants and seafood, is now a consultant for wilderness survival (Ranger Requirement).

Kathleen is an artist and the mother of two of our Venturers. She was a crew consultant for the Arts & Hobbies Bronze and has graduated to Associate Advisor.

Many adults are introduced to Venturing by [our crew] when we ask them for help. They are mostly receptive to "consulting" with other Venturers and when they see how much fun the Venturers have, they "Join Up".

Lesson 11. Meeting Agenda

All surnames and crew specifics, including locale, has been deleted from the following agenda.

I hadn't planned on writing about this so soon, but the crew has a meeting tonight and I am putting the agenda together for that. We have a formal meeting only once per month and at least one full-crew activity per month. We also have mini-meetings of committees or specialty groups that don't include the entire crew.

Here is tonight's Agenda

9/6/01 AGENDA

[Crew XYZ]

VP Debbi - Presiding

Opening (These are the newest members of the crew)	Pledge of Allegiance Venturing Oath	Sarah Terrance	(3 Min)
Introductions	New members and guests: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Skipper Wayne, Ship [], City A• Robin, President, Crew [], City B• Todd, District Executive, [] District	Jamie	(5 Min)
Consent Agenda Written reports are to be provided prior to the meeting to all attending. If there are no questions or clarifications, they will all be voted on in one vote and incorporated into the minutes.	Secretary's Report Treasurer's Report Charter Rep Communications President's Messages Advisor's Communications	Liz Chris Tom Jamie Mike Kathleen	(5 Min)
Activity Reports	White Stag JLT Staff <i>(Past Events)</i> National Jamboree Summer Camp - Pico Blanco Summer Camp - Oljato Scout Family Week End	Debbi, Liz Brian David Jamie Chris	(5 Min) (5 Min) (5 Min) (5 Min) (5 Min)
Break	Refreshments	All	(15 Min)
Activity Reports	Order of the Arrow <i>(Past Events-cont.)</i> Scuba Training	Trevor/Eric David/Chris	(5 Min) (5 Min)
Recognition	<i>Gold Award Presentations</i> Debbi (& Parents) Liz (& Parents) Brian (& Parents)	Jamie/Mike Todd	(5 Min)
Activity Committee Reports	California Caverns (Underground lake swim) <i>Planned Events</i> White Stag 2001 (Staff Opportunities) Sea Scout/[Crew] Sailing Soledad Prison Tour Wilderness Survival Week	Chris Debbi Wayne Mike Robin	(5 Min) (5 Min) (5 Min) (5 Min)
Advisor's Moment		Mike	(2 Min)
President's Message		Jamie	(5 Min)
Closing			
Silver Review	Chris' Silver Award	Award Committee	(20 Min)

As you can see, the meeting runs about 1.5 hours, with reviews and other non-agenda items after for those who need them. We rotate the facilitator role and everyone tries to stick to the scheduled times.

Lesson 12. Military Resources

Editor's Note: This article was written just after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC. Perhaps these attacks brought this topic to mind and prompted her to put her fingers-to-keyboard once again. In any case, let us keep her parting words in mind while we ponder once again how valuable the military forces can be to our programs.

Our crew has always had luck when interacting with the military and when using their resources. Maybe we are blessed to be in an area with a strong military presence or maybe we are just fortunate to have advisors who have been in the service.

We are situated in central California and we have bases for all of the military services near us. The Navy has the Naval Postgraduate School (mostly Navy and Marines) and the Fleet Numerical Center, the Army has the Defense Language Institute (with all four services) and the Ord Military Community (formerly Fort Ord). The Coast Guard has a Station in Monterey. The Reserves have Fort Hunter Liggett and Camp Roberts in South Monterey County. There are also recruiters from the services in three cities in our immediate area.



All of these services and installations have helped Venturing and Scouting in many ways.

Fort Hunter Liggett has hosted us on three occasions when we have used their ranges, rappelling tower, confidence course, land navigation courses and their obstacle course.

The Coast Guard has taken crewmembers on patrol on their 44-foot patrol boat.

Check rides are available to us on Air Force planes during non-tactical times and Para-Rescue Jumpers are willing to teach wilderness survival to us.

Army Rangers supervised a rappelling session for us and we played “Ultimate Capture the Flag” with Navy Seabees and Seals. Some Marines helped us set “Way Points” in our GPS units and an Alaska National Guard Warrant Officer taught us how to signal aircraft when lost in the wilderness.

Our service people are incredibly busy right now, but don't forget that they are a resource to your crew and a surprising number of them are former Scouts.

May God bless and keep our armed forces.

About the author.

Jamie Soetaert, is a 19 year-old sophomore physical therapy major at California State University, Sacramento. Following graduation, she plans to continue for her Masters Degree, specializing in Sports Medicine/Sports Training.

She's been involved in Exploring, Venturing and Sea Scouts since the age of 14. She has earned the Exploring G.O.L.D. Award, The Venturing Silver Award, the Ranger Award, the Venturing Leadership Award, and all three Congressional Awards (Bronze, Silver and Gold).

Jamie has served as a camp counselor at three BSA camps. An American Red Cross-certified Lifeguard, she was last employed (as a civilian) by the US Navy Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Other activities include rodeo (barrels, poles, and roping), cheerleading, soccer, softball, swimming and dance.