

The Miami Herald

April 30, 2006

BOY SCOUTS

Real troopers: Deaf Scouts take on camp competition

■ South Florida's only deaf Boy Scouts troop is competing in its third Spring Camporee challenge this weekend.

BY LAURA MORALES
lmorales@miamiherald.com

The Boy and Cub Scouts campsites at Carlos Arbolea Park were crowded and noisy Saturday, with packs of gabbing boys cooking and tying logs together with rope.

But it's a different story for the boys of Troop 726. These four guys gab with their hands.

They are the smallest and quietest troop at this year's Spring Camporee, a weekendlong Scouts competition, at 7025 W. Flagler St.

They can do nearly everything the other boys do. But they can't hear or speak.

"We are the only deaf troop in South Florida," Troop 726 Scoutmaster Peter Powell wrote in an e-mail. "Other troops have come to respect and understand our deafness."

The Scouts are spending the weekend competing for honors in fire building, outdoor cooking, knot-tying and orienteering skills (finding their way using a compass).

Powell, who lost his hearing as a baby and can manage some halt-

*TURN TO SCOUTS, 2B

Troop 726 competes silently at camp

*SCOUTS, FROM 1B

ing speech, said the troop won second place last year at the overnight camping event. "The boys went crazy, jumping up and down. We did not expect it," he said.

Powell was a Boy Scout at the Central Institute for the Deaf in St. Louis, where he was born. "It changed my life," he said. "I wanted to give something in return."

His wife Alina, a Girl Scoutmaster, suggested he form an all-deaf troop and introduced him to Rosie Moreno, whose 16-year-old son, Daniel, was born deaf. Moreno serves as the group's interpreter. Together, Powell and Moreno organized the troop in 2003.

Daniel said his favorite Camporee challenge is building the wooden "gateway" to their campsite, while Victor Montiel, also 16, said he enjoys preparing the food and cooking it outdoors.

Powell added that Scouting is a boon for a deaf child in a hearing world, with parents afraid to let go and give deaf kids some freedom. "They can get bored, which could cause low self-esteem."

Just to be able to take part in regular Scouting activities is a charge for the boys, all teenagers who are starting to get interested in girls, driving and future occupations.

When they get excited, their hands fly at breakneck speed, their facial expressions changing at the same pace while they mouth the



ALEXIA FODERE/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

QUIET TALK: Scoutmaster Peter Powell, left, communicates in sign language to Kevin Trinidad, 16, at Carlos Arbolea Campgrounds Saturday.

words they're trying to say.

Kevin Trinidad, 16, whipped hands and fingers to say: "I like learning to tie all the different kinds of knots, and the fun we have when we go camping."

Carlos Nuñez, 16, the shyest of the group, hides behind his tent, but before long joins his troopmates in rehearsing a skit, where they pretend to be sky divers jumping from a plane. He even cracks a few smiles.

The troop is now looking to raise funds, maybe find a sponsor, which will help them make it to their next event, a weeklong hike in the wilds of New Mexico.

"We're so small and new, we don't get the kinds of

sponsorships the bigger troops get," Moreno said.

Indeed, some of the other, older groups, which are much larger than Troop 726, have trailers emblazoned with the names of sponsoring churches.

"We'll figure it out somehow," Moreno said as the boys ran off to present their skit to the Scouts judges.

Powell said he and the boys accept themselves as they are and have no problem with it. "Elizabeth Kübler-Ross [author of the landmark book *On Death and Dying*] said it best. Learn to get in touch with the silence within yourself and know that everything in this life has a purpose."