

The Future Is Calling. Who will be there to answer?

By Del Albright, BlueRibbon Coalition Ambassador



Activists in off-road recreation seem to be an aging group – no offense intended. Many of us are “gray hairs” and many are working so hard that “burnout” may cause some premature aging. I worry that not enough young folks are taking up the torch and carrying the flame. When the future calls, will we have folks there to answer?

I was enjoying the business of an annual convention recently of the Calif. Assoc. of 4WD Clubs when I noticed long-time activist Jim Bramham (featured in accompanying photo) sitting nearby with his grandson, Oscar (2 and 1/2 years old). I swung the camera towards Oscar and said, “Hello.” Upon hearing those familiar words, Oscar picked up his play calculator like it was a telephone and answered me back. Cute.

It struck me that Oscar (son of Ernie and Luana Hernandez) is our future – and the phone is ringing. His proud grandpa, Jim is showing Oscar the off-road world, for sure – but Jim and I are part of the, well, let’s just say, more experienced generation. We need young ones like Oscar to grow up with phone in hand, torch lit, and flame burning bright in our fights for access.

How do we ensure that happens? How do we get younger folks ready to answer that future call? I have some ideas to share.

First of all, I echo the wisdom of my friend and BlueRibbon partner, Adena Cook who recently wrote about getting kids outside – doing anything; just doing it outside. See her article on A Cause We Can All Rally Around here: <http://www.sharetrails.org/magazine/article.php?id=1702>

Secondly, all “old timers” need to be part of or involved in a kids program of some sort – even if that means merely contributing advice, time or money to such a program. No matter how you do it, find a way to include kids in what you love to do.

Third, let go the reins. Folks who have “been there and done that” need to step aside at strategic points and let others drive. Of course, we can offer advice, talk about the old days, show the mistakes we’ve made and even fess up to doing it wrong at some point in the past. But all this is done with the purpose in mind of making the future brighter.

Fourth, set the example and keep to the high ground. I firmly believe those who oppose motorized recreation are after the hearts and minds of our kids. I wrote about this a few years ago here:

<http://www.delalbright.com/articles/kids.htm>. We “older folks” need to show the younger crowd the common sense, respectable, and high ground way of recreating so as to keep our image clean. We can continue to do so many simple things like pack it out, stay the trail, and follow the rules.

The last thing we can do is to speak up when folks are not behaving or following the rules (no matter their age or experience). Please do not let your lack of action contribute to someone else bringing down our recreational opportunities. Show kids how we can set the example.

As we enjoy various events, club meetings and rides, ask yourself if there isn’t something you can do to ensure someone will be there when the phone rings in the future.

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The BlueRibbon Coalition is a national recreation group that champions responsible use of public lands and waters, and encourages individual environmental stewardship. It represents over 10,000 individual members and 1,200 organization and business members, for a combined total of over 600,000 recreationists nationwide. 1-800-258-3742. <http://www.sharetrails.org>