

An Antidote for Digital Addiction

<https://mindmatters.ai/podcast/ep238>

Robert J Marks:

Welcome to Mind Matters News. I'm your bucolic host, Robert J. Marks. Kent, do you know what bucolic means? I didn't before yesterday.

Kent Marks:

No, I'm wondering. I'm afraid to ask.

Robert J Marks:

It means enjoying the outdoors, enjoying the country life.

Kent Marks:

Okay.

Robert J Marks:

If you're bucolic, you enjoy the outdoors, you enjoy the country, rural setting, a slow life person. So that's what bucolic means. I like to learn a new word every day. So by the way, you just heard of him. We're talking to Kent Marks about Trail Life. Kent is one of the founding fathers of Trail Life. Trail Life gets young boys away from digital addiction and towards digital wellness. Kent, welcome.

Kent Marks:

Ah, good to see you. Bob.

Robert J Marks:

Tell us about Trail Life. Tell us about the founding of it. We went last time through the Boy Scouts and your disillusion with the Boy Scouts rename scouts, BSA. And your wife asked you, "What are you going to do about it?" And the answer was Trail Life. So tell us about the founding of Trail Life here.

Kent Marks:

Sure. So anyway, in 2013 after the BSA had their vote, many volunteer leaders in the Boy Scouts and one Boy Scout executive turned their resignations in and we were all part of a thing called LinkedIn. And we were on LinkedIn talking about, what are we going to do if that vote changes? That happens? And it happened.

Robert J Marks:

This was the vote, by the way, to let in gays in the Boy Scout?

Kent Marks:

Yeah.

Robert J Marks:

Professing gays. Okay.

Kent Marks:

Right. So when that happened, we were on LinkedIn, it was just probably a couple hundred of us. And we started talking about different things that we could do. And there was this one man, his name is John Steinberger. John works for the Florida Family Council in Florida in Orlando, Florida. And the place he worked for gave him a year. Now, I don't know if I have this correct, but a year to go do something different, to make a difference. John was one of the folks, was protesting at the vote of the BSA in Irvine, Texas. And John also was instrumental in putting these men together and creating a new organization. And we did a lot of things in three months. From May of 2013, we started planning and talking about this new organization, a Christian's organization. We didn't have a name yet. We actually put some surveys out to folks that were interested.

And the name Trail Life was unveiled at a national convention, inaugural convention in Nashville, Tennessee, September 6th, 2013, over 1400 men and some women, wives like my wife came, were at that convention and we unveiled the name Trail Life and prepared for a 2014 January 1st launch. And a lot of work took place during that time. A lot of preparation, a lot of planning, a lot of general direction, guidance, procedures, just as basically starting a new organization. But we had the ability to glean on what we knew worked at the Boy Scouts and what did not work. And we implemented those things that worked and brought in a Christian worldview and a Christian outdoor venture program is what we've created. It teaches biblical moral values. And that was the basis. And the basis was to bring Christ into this organization. We're not overly churchy or religious, but focusing on outdoor adventure and character and developing leaders and raising godly young men.

And that was really the purpose. And it's launched on January 1st, 2014 with over 500 troops and 90% of those were Boy Scout troops that were doing Trail Life type of things when they were Boy Scouts. And including my troop. My troop folded, but my troop is like a Trail Life troop, way before Trail Life was even thought of. But there were 500 troops, 512 I believe we started off with. And that was it. We started out strong. And I got to tell you, we created a lot of stuff and made some things up along the way to get going, but folks, volunteers and families and churches and charter organizations really, really took a hold of this new idea and it's just doing wonderful things today, Bob.

Robert J Marks:

So are you doing stuff with Trail Life that the Boy Scouts used to do? Last time we talked, we talked about getting outdoors, going camping, bonding with your fathers and your mentors, doing great things outdoors, getting you away from the humdrum of life, getting modern kids away from cell phone addictions and such. I believe that's what Trail Life does. Describe some of your activities that you do.

Kent Marks:

Well, yeah, that's exactly it. Like I said, we've learned a lot from the leaders of BSA, but it's been 10 years. Most of our leaders were not in Boy Scouts or leaders came from the BSA. So we are way beyond that now. But in the early days, we used a lot of the outdoor emphasis, the backpacking, the camping, the canoeing, the shooting sports. That's the other thing. In Trail Life, we emphasize shooting sports, in BSA, you're not even allowed to use a squirt gun.

Robert J Marks:

Are you serious? Really?

Kent Marks:

Yeah, it is. And even, there's Nerf Darts, you're not allowed to use those or anything just for fun. You're not allowed to participate in any shooting activities. But in Trail Life, we've embraced it as part of raising up a young man to become a Christian, God-fearing adult. And there's a lot of emphasis on our troops are church owned. They're not owned by Trail Life. Each church is called a chartered organization and they have their own bylaws that cannot water down the Trail Life rules, but they can add to it. So we have a lot of different churches out there with different denominations that are part of Trail Life. And the main focus is that to become a charter organization, you have to believe in the Trinity, Father of the Son and the Holy Spirit. And if they align, that can be a charter troop in Trail Life. But getting these boys outdoors, it's the most important thing to see his creation, and we can utilize that in so many ways to let them enjoy outdoor skills and adventure, knowing the Lord is behind everything.

Robert J Marks:

I got to ask you, Kent, during these outings, do you allow the kids to have cell phones? I'm just thinking that maybe you want to get them away from cell phones.

Kent Marks:

Again, that's one of those things, that's the individual troop policy. Some troops don't allow it. Others do. Others you can take the cell phone as a tool instead of as a nuisance. You can use it as a tool. Most leaders do carry their cell phones for emergency and for that type of thing.

Robert J Marks:

Of course, yes.

Kent Marks:

But I would say most of the troops do not allow the cell phones on camp outs and outings. I'm not involved with any particular troop. I'm called a regional team leader. I'm a volunteer leader for troops in seven states. So my job is a finger on the pulse to see what's happening out there, see what works, what's not working, are we using cell phones or not? And what's the advantage and what's the disadvantage? That's my role. So I'm hearing that most of the troops do not allow cell phones.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. You mentioned shooting sports. When you and I grew up, our grandfather, we have the same grandfather, paternal grandfather, in his house, you used to come in the front door and they used to have rifles and shotguns leaned up against the wall there in the entryway.

Kent Marks:

Loaded.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah. Yeah. And they were loaded. They were ready to go and it was never a big deal. I think that a lot of people that are against firearms have never experienced firearms. They come up with all these myths that don't explain about what firearms do and how to train a kid to take care of them. Sure. I'm certain that you do in Trail Life when you emphasize the shooting sports.

Kent Marks:

Sure. It teaches character, it teaches responsibility. It matures a young man up where he knows he is got to be responsible. It's not taught as a weapon so much as a tool. It's a great binding experience with fathers and sons. There's so many benefits to shooting sports and it's a sport in itself. There's a lot of competition. Shooting competitions are a lot of fun, right down to setting the targets up and father's going against their son. See if you can get closer to 50 points. There's real joy in competition for sure, but it builds character. It builds responsibility in these young men, which a lot of cases, they have no place in their lives where they have an opportunity to learn about responsibility.

Robert J Marks:

I remember a lot of great experiences I had with my father in terms of shooting. We had a powder gun where you had to put the ball in and you had to put powder in. And he taught me how to do that. So I was down in-

Kent Marks:

It's a muzzle-loader, right?

Robert J Marks:

... West Virginia. What's that?

Kent Marks:

Muzzle loader, wasn't it? Yeah.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah. A muzzle-loader. There you go. That's the word I was looking for. And so I went in and I stuck the ball in, the cloth in and got the powder in and everything and got the little spark that ignites the powder. And my dad and his dad were sitting there just laughing. They were smirking under their breath. I'm like... Well, it turns out it was already loaded. And I put a second load in it.

Kent Marks:

Oh, no.

Robert J Marks:

And that thing, it went off and it just about ripped my hand off and they just laughed. They thought that was the funniest thing in the world. But when my dad finally got to the point where he thought I was responsible enough, he gave me a 22 rifle and he said, "Son, you always assumed that it's loaded. You never pointed at anything alive unless you want to kill it. Always know where the bullet's going. You don't want to shoot towards the house or anything."

Kent Marks:

Absolutely.

Robert J Marks:

And then he said, "Go have fun." I think I was about 15 at the time or something like that. And that's the way the people in rural areas are trained. And another thing, Kent, that boys want to shoot stuff. My wife went through a period where our son, Joshua, was a little boy and she didn't want him to have guns. So he was going around the house and he was going pow, pow and Monica. My wife said, "Josh, you can't do that," and boys just have a propensity for shooting. And he said, "Oh mom, don't worry. It's not a gun. It's a flamethrower." So he had gained the whole system and I think boys just naturally want to shoot things. So it's great that Trail Life does that and teaches the responsibility for the handling of firearms.

Kent Marks:

Well, if you remember, it was a family tradition. Every year during deer season, we'd all gather and have deer drives, and we were very responsible with our guns. And I remember my father let me take his 30-06 the first time ever. And my dad settled with something less because he wanted his son to have a man's gun. And I got to tell you, Bob, when I shot that thing, I felt it for like three days. That has some good kick.

Robert J Marks:

My son, Jeremiah, when we finally trusted him with a shotgun, he went up and he shot the thing. And as he was shooting it, he came in that night and his shoulder was just black and blue, but he loved shooting it so much that next day he tied a pillow to his arm and put the shotgun up next to the pillow so he could shoot it some more. And he had just a blast doing it.

Kent Marks:

He didn't realize that a 20 gauge does not have the kick of a 12 gauge.

Robert J Marks:

Okay. I don't remember what the gauge was, but it was a shotgun and shotguns kick. And it just amazed me that the extent he went through to make sure he could still continue to shoot that gun, he just loved it so much. Okay, new topic. The Scout's BSA, formerly the Boy Scouts of America is paying a two and a half billion, two and a half billion fine to settle claims by... Oh, this takes my breath away. 80,000 former scouts who say they were abused by their leaders, 80,000 former scouts. One of the things that Trail Life needs to do, and I know that you've done it, is make sure that Trail Life doesn't repeat the problems that scouts BSA are using. What are you doing to assure that this doesn't repeat itself in Trail Life?

Kent Marks:

Absolutely. That's a good question, Bob. Again, we've learned a lot from the BSA. Unfortunately, our insurance reflects that claim. We have high premiums because it's youth organization. But in Trail Life, we vet our leaders. First of all, our leaders have to sign a statement of faith and they have to get a recommendation from a minister or a pastor or their priest. And then they have to go through a process. They pay their own background check, they fill out all this information, including a social security number. They get a criminal background check. Then once that passes, then they have to take a online child youth protection training. It's about a three-hour training process. And then you take a test. If you don't pass the test, you don't become a leader. And then of course, we vet them out in trail itself. And we actually do call on references.

However, not everyone, people can still get through and not be those studious citizens of our country. And we have not experienced that yet. However, when we do have situations or issues, if there are in a

troop, we have a process where the troop fills out a form and they file it immediately and it's sent to a legal department. Legal department deals with it. And we have learned from the Boy Scouts the valuable lesson.

And I will tell you fortunately, I did not see any of that when I was a leader. So I'm sure it was kept under key when I was a leader in Boy Scouts. But in Trail Life, that is one of my jobs, is to hear of anything that goes on. And it's not happened. Not happened yet because of vetting process, we are actually vetting the best of the best Christian volunteers out there. And I remind you, Boy Scouts, they did not have to be a Christian volunteer. They just had to be a volunteer. They could have a DUI and we wouldn't know. In Trail Life, if you have any felony at any time of your life, they do not accept you as a leader in Trail Life.

Robert J Marks:

Wow. That's amazing.

Kent Marks:

It is actually somewhat difficult to find leaders because there's not that many Christian men out there ready to volunteer, in the level that our volunteers are giving. And we're so blessed for the ones that are, and they are really, really good men.

Robert J Marks:

One of the things Brian Krouse, I mentioned to you, he was a guy that brought up Trail Life to me. He's a guy that moved from Seattle area to Tennessee to get away from the progressive state of Washington. And he took this test and he said he was amazed. There's certain rules that you have to abide by. I think that one of them is you never send a mentor and a boy out alone. And so there's guidelines of that sort. Could you go through a few of those? I thought that was pretty impressive.

Kent Marks:

Yeah. We really emphasized importance of something called too deep leadership. At any time, at all times, an adult leader has to be with another adult if there's a one-on-one type of things coming up. In other words, if a trail man, we call boys from five to 18 year olds, we call them trail men, not trail boys. And if there's a trail man that's by himself, there's always got to be two adults. Even to the point where there's things you don't think about like in a troop meeting. Say somebody needs to go to the restroom, you just go down to the church hall and you go to the men's restroom and all of a sudden, you're in their one-on-one with a trail man.

That is a no-no. We highly emphasize that at any time wherever you're going, you're always with another adult. And it's true with the trail men as well. We do a three deep with boys. If they camp in a tent, there's always three in a tent, not two. And anytime when they travel, they hike, they walk, they go get something, there's always at least three. And this is highly emphasized at all levels of Trail Life. So yes, we recognize that as very important.

Robert J Marks:

Wow. Brian told me that and I was impressed because this is where the bad things are going to happen if you do have a bad apple in the barrel.

Kent Marks:

Right. Right.

Robert J Marks:

That's when things are going to happen. The interesting things about the BSA, I should say, Scouts BSA, since they've renamed themselves, is they claim to be theistic. I think last time we talked, you mentioned about the pledge, which which starts, on my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God. So yeah, there is the profession of a God there and my country and obey the Scout law to help other people at all times, to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight. There's also the scout, I forget what they call it. It's where they say the scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverend, that still is engaged in my mind after all of these years after having required to memorize that as a boy scout.

It's interesting. There is this idea of God in what I just read, there's this idea of reverence. And as you mentioned, the pledge ends with the idea of morally straight. Morally straight means something different than it did in 2010 when the Boy Scouts were formed. It means something different than when we were boy scouts, instead of an ever-changing fluid interpretation of what character means. And that's what the scouts BSA have done. They go with the social flow. It's malleable morality. Trail Life's foundation is built on a rock. And you've mentioned that rock. Could you elaborate on that a little bit?

Kent Marks:

Yeah. We have a thing called core values in Trail Life. And I think there's 14 of them. We add one here or there. Actually, there's 16 now. We had something called the six essential concepts of a Christian worldview. And in the worldview, Christian worldview that we adhere to is truth creation, human dignity, the importance of family, stewardship to our world and providence, the sovereign of all history. We don't ignore any of that, but we also have a thing called core values. And the core values is, I'm going to read a couple of them here if we could, we're Christ-centered, we're church owned and operated, outdoor focused. But back to the Christ centered, we're a Christian outdoor program that emphasizes and teaches those biblical moral values. This is the important part. It's pertains to the Christian worldview is present throughout our entire program.

Well, I mentioned we are church owned and operated. We are outdoor focused, using the outdoors as a grandness of God's creation and reflecting his creation. We are important with the safety as we talked about the too deep. We have have a health and safety guide that we follow that cannot be changed as all. We teach our young men and our leaders to be courageous. We need our men to have spines of steel, Bob.

In today's society, our Christians are being attacked in all directions. And we are truly, I believe we're one of the last bastion of an opportunity for raising young men to be godly leaders and godly husbands. And with that, we've got a lot of attacking coming from all directions. We are male-centered and adult... Our leadership for male, we don't have women training up these young men. Moms have a very important role in a boy's life. But to raise a young man to become a godly young man, he has to have an influence of a male model and mentor.

Robert J Marks:

Yes.

Kent Marks:

The mothers have their place, absolutely, but at some point these young men need to see what a man is all about. If I may step aside for a second, we have a president, Herbert Hoover. He said, there are two

jobs for American boys today. One is being a boy, the other is growing up to be a man. And that's no truer. Both jobs are important. Both are packed with excitement, great undertakings and high adventure, boldness and independence. The courage to take these chances, these must not be suppressed, but they must be directed to constructed joy. This is from Herbert Hoover. We need to understand that male leadership and male mentorship is the most important thing in Trail Life. These boys have to have men to raise them up. We are volunteer driven. And when I say that, I think there's maybe staff of 30 that's paid professionals. And there's probably 17, 18,000 volunteers in Trail Life. So the staff supports the volunteers. So there's a lot of things I can go with. But basically, our core values is our guide to Trail Life.

Robert J Marks:

Well, Trail Life is unapologetically Christian. You told me a parable one time about carrot cake and I like that. Could you relate the parable about the carrot cake and how that relates to Trail Life?

Kent Marks:

Well, I will tell you this. First of all, my first job ever was at a GC Murphy restaurant and I was a busboy and dishwasher. And it so happened that Mrs. Alderson, the owner, would make everything from scratch. And she loved her carrot cakes and she'd have that out there, big silver tray with a big glass lid. And when there was one carrot cake left, for some reason nobody bought it. So she would always bring that back to me. And I love carrot cake because I always got to enjoy her carrot cake, but she wanted to put a new cake in there so she could sell it all except for the last piece. Well, carrot cake is like this in Trail Life. We want to teach our young man about Christ, we want to teach them about the Bible. We want to teach them about Bible verses and stories in the Bible and to go deep into that.

But in today's world, it's like "Here, young man, here's a carrot," and they're just going to push it away because it's just a carrot. However, if we can take that carrot and we can shred it up and we can package it up in something that they will accept, we can bring those stories, we can bring those verses, we can bring those parables, we can bring those life changes from knowing Christ and knowing the difference between good and evil. We can do that when we shred that carrot up in little pieces and those boys will accept it.

So for example, we could actually say, "We're going to go on a camp out and we're just going to sit and we're going to read the Bible." Now the boys are not going to be excited about that, but we can go on a camp out and we can teach you how to chop a tree branch and make firewood and cut boards and cut logs. And you use it and sharpen a knife and sharpen an ax. And then we can just say, "Hey, by the way, that reminds me of a Bible verses Proverbs 27:17. 'As iron sharpens iron, so does one man sharpen another.'" And that's the carrot cake. And that's how we bring the message without them pushing off because they're enjoying and they seeing oh, there's a connection here. I get it. So that's probably my easiest best example of the Proverbs 27:17.

Robert J Marks:

I think the parable about carrot cake is really cool. One of the big questions that it's the bottom line. Have you seen boys' lives changed by Trail Life?

Kent Marks:

I have. I have I've seen many times. Actually, I've seen family's lives change because of Trail Life. When we first started Trail Life, we were like, "We got to do this for the boy. We got this and that for the boy?"

We got to raise that boy up." But we didn't realize the effect it had on moms and dads and brothers and sisters that are too old or too young yet.

Robert J Marks:

Really?

Kent Marks:

We recognize that there's an impact with the family. Bob, I remember a pastor at a church here in Ohio. I was talking to him just three or four years into Trail Life. He goes, "Kent, since we started Trail Life, I can count at least 22 new families in my church." Not 22 new boys, but 22 families. And that was like, whoa. We're having an impact on families, not just the boys. And it's a great thing. I've seen fathers and sons baptized together, Bob.

Robert J Marks:

Wow.

Kent Marks:

I've seen young men that will stand up in front of a crowd and they will do a church service because they wanted to give it a try. I've seen young men sit down with a younger boy, leading by example. He's a mentor and taking time out to help that young man with his life's troubles. I've seen so many different... I've seen boys that have learned the Heimlich maneuver that have actually saved their father or saved a person in a restaurant or saved their younger brother from choking on a hotdog. I've seen men's lives change because they've changed other men's lives. There's so many examples. We have our highest achievement Trail Life it's called the Freedom Rangeman. It's actually a little harder than the Eagle Scout, but this is the highest award in Trail Life.

But I've seen young men that were shy and afraid to speak up, become young men that are Freedom Rangemen and they're now leaders and going out in the world and making a difference. I've seen these guys that are now leaders in the past 10 years. There's so many stories, Bob, there's so many exciting things just to witness. The Lord is having an impact on so many lives across this country. The other thing I've seen lives change by Trail of Life is men. We have a thing called leaders' decaf, at the end of a camp out or end of a big event, it's minimally the men come together and they sit in a circle. They don't stand back or not dictated to. They're all equal. And when men are sitting amongst other men, they open up because these men, they're leaders of their family. They're the breadwinners.

They're the ones that tickle on all the burdens and all the stress and all the trouble and they have no one to vent to. And when they gather with other men in Trail Life at an event where it's just men, they open up and they share their problems and then others reach out and help them out. And it's still rewarding to see this.

Robert J Marks:

It's like an accountability group.

Kent Marks:

It really is. And it wasn't planned that way. It just happened. But when we have men leaders that are helping each other out, it's amazing what they do with these boys and raise these young men. So yeah, a

lot of lives have changed because of Trail Life and there are boys of yet be born that are going to be changed because of some of the things these men are doing today. So it's very rewarding, Bob.

Robert J Marks:

That's exciting. So how's the program going? Give me some numbers. What are some of the numbers associated with Trail Life?

Kent Marks:

Talk about fluid, these numbers that's never the same in one day. We are the only youth organization that has growth in the country.

Robert J Marks:

Really?

Kent Marks:

For example, last year during August and September each week we had, I think it was 1,501 week registered. They were staying about 14, 1500 each week of new people registering in Trail Life. Now, it doesn't seem like much across the country, but we are probably about a month away of having over 50,000 members. We have surpassed 1,000 troops. We never thought we'd see that this quick. We have volunteers that are stepping up in area roles. We have over 500 area volunteers. And again, we're hiring more staff because as we grow, Trail Life is a business as well. You've got the business side things. But we're handling retention officers, we've got membership people, we have more people to do vetting. There's a lot involved. There's a lot of growth in Trail Life. And I'm more amazed at we're pushing 50,000 members this quick. That's the big number for me.

Robert J Marks:

That is amazing. I also understand that you have troops in all 50 states right now?

Kent Marks:

Right. And we have, in all 50 states and not just one here or there. Alaska has like 15 troops. That's amazing.

Robert J Marks:

Hawaii. Hawaii.

Kent Marks:

Yeah. Hawaii has one troop. That's the only state with one troop, but Alaska, I was amazed, at 15 troops in Alaska. That's awesome. But we have people reaching from Canada. We have people from Puerto Rico, from England, from Bermuda, have reached out. They want to start Trail Life. And we're not there yet.

Robert J Marks:

Now Trail Life's. Your website is Trail Life USA. Right? Right. So have you branded yourself to be exclusively within the USA or do you think-

Kent Marks:

Well, we started off as Trail Life USA and actually we now call ourselves Trail Life, I don't foresee reaching out beyond other countries yet. It has a lot to do with insurance, government rules, a lot of those nuances that we have no control over. So insurance is a big thing as well.

Robert J Marks:

Of course. Yes. The big wager, the big gambling ball.

Kent Marks:

It is. We have military bases across the country, across the world that love to have Trail Life. And we're trying to figure out those, navigate those waters because it's in a different country, but it's actually American soil where these bases are located. A lot of our leaders, a lot of our Trail Life folks are in the military and they get transferred and moved around a lot. They're so upset when they have to leave their troop and whatnot. And so they want to start troops in a military base. And I can foresee that coming in the near future, but it's all progress.

Robert J Marks:

Yep, it is. The obvious question is, is there any plans to provide any separate program for girls or well, or are we being premature?

Kent Marks:

No. Actually, girls, there's a Christian Girls program that was on board 20 years before Trail Life started. It's called American Heritage Girls.

Robert J Marks:

Oh.

Kent Marks:

They also have over a thousand troops. And their bases in Cincinnati, Ohio. American Heritage Girls, often we partner with Trail Life. We're great partners because brothers have sisters and sisters have brothers and parents want to take them to the same troop meeting on the same night. And they have different programs for girls and boys in the same church. So many of our Trail Life troops also have American heritage. It's called AHG, American Heritage Girls. So yeah, there's a vibrant program out there for girls. It's very similar to boys, but they do their thing and we do our thing. Because boys are created different than girls, Bob. Completely, Completely.

Robert J Marks:

Oh. Okay, let's-

Kent Marks:

Doesn't work when you mix them up.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah. Yeah. That's a controversial thing to say today. But man, I agree with you. Kent, how does one find out more about information about Trail Life? If you want to find a nearby troop, or maybe even start one, what do you do?

Kent Marks:

We have a website called traillifeusa.com. And you go to this website, it shows you, you can read about the core values, the Christian worldview. You can look at the map. It says, Find a troop or click on the link for start a troop. We have a lot of troops started, not by the pastors. We love it when the pastors want to start a troop, by the way. But it's usually a parishioner of a church. It's a member of a church that would like to get a Trail Life troop started. And they go to this site and they can see how it started and see what to do. And just click on that link and fill in some information. And what we have is, for example, if you want to start a troop in your church, you fill out the start a troop form. And we have volunteers called Point Men and Point Men have their area teams. And each area in the country, we have probably over 200 areas right now where if you click on, this is where I live, some volunteer is design designated for that area in the country.

And they will reach out within 24 to 48 hours and say, "Hey, I'm here to help you. If you would like to start a troop, let's talk." So there's a lot of support out there. And if you don't want to start a troop or you know there's a troop nearby, you just go to the map. It says find a troop. And if you want your boy to be in a Trail Life troop, look for the closest troop where you live and click on that. It'll give you contact information to reach out to that troop. And that troop will get your information and reach out to you, usually within a week. It's a great site to find out about Trail Life and to pull some literature information to offer to your church.

Robert J Marks:

That is really exciting stuff. The impact of social media has just been terrible. Teenage suicides are up, depression rates are up. I think a third of all girls involved in social media have body image problems. And that's terrible. These are the symptoms of digital addiction. And digital wellness corresponds to getting these people out of TikTok and Snapchat and other social media and maybe out in the woods and talk to people. Talk to people their own age, talk to fathers and mentors. Even if somebody doesn't have a father, there's going to be mentors. And the beautiful thing about Trail Life that I like is the background checks that you guys do, so you can feel safe sending your kids there, knowing that all of these policies are in line.

Kent Marks:

Bob, we have a program, we're just starting here in my area. My region's called the Nehemiah man. If you remember Nehemiah, he was the one that helped go rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. And if you remember, they were building with one hand and fighting off the enemy with the other because folks did not want that wall built. And that's what we call Nehemiah men because almost 33% of boys in Trail Life troops do not have a father or a father that's involved with them in the Trail Life and in their lives. There are a lot of single moms that are bringing their sons to Trail Life because they want to be around men. They want to be that male influence.

And we call these men and they step up and I'll pat you on the back and say, "Good job, and talk to you and be a mentor." We call that a Nehemiah man. In other words, he is building that young man up and he's holding that sword or holding that shield and fighting off society and the evils that are attacking that young man. And we've got quite a few of those fathers out there right now that are stepping up

and say, "Yeah, I'll, I'll be that guy." I remember the Catholic organization had a Big Brothers and Big Sisters. It's similar to that.

Robert J Marks:

Yeah.

Kent Marks:

So a man will take on to be a mentor to a young man that's fatherless.

Robert J Marks:

Oh, that's pretty exciting, Kent. I tell you, I'm just pumped about Trail Life and all the work you and other people have done with Trail Life. Look, we've been talking to Kent Marks He's the founder and president of the Marks Building Company in the Cleveland, Ohio area. And you have a website, don't you? For your building company?

Kent Marks:

Yeah. My son runs the business now, so he-

Robert J Marks:

Oh, does he?

Kent Marks:

Yeah, he's got a site called, marksbuilding.com.

Robert J Marks:

Marksbuilding.com. Okay. And we're going to put links to Trail Life and other links in the podcast notes. So again, we've been talking to Kent. Kent is also an Eagle Scout, former Boy Scout leader and a founding father of an incredible organization called Trail Life. Thank you for listening. Until next time, be of good cheer.

Announcer:

This has been Mind Matters News with your host Robert J. Marks. Explore more at mindmatters.ai. That's mindmatters.ai. Mind Matters News is directed and edited by Austin Egbert. The opinions expressed on this program are solely those of the speakers. Mind Matters News is produced and copyrighted by the Walter Bradley Center for Natural and Artificial Intelligence at Discovery Institute.