

## CLEARING UP MISPERCEPTIONS ABOUT THE AFMS FRA PROGRAM

The Number 1 goal of the American Federation of Mineralogical Societies Future Rockhounds of America program is to reach out to as many kids as possible to fan whatever budding interest they may have in rocks, fossils, and lapidary arts. In messages I've received via email, in talking with folks at shows and annual Federation meetings, and via the grapevine, I've become aware of a number of misperceptions about the AFMS/FRA program, and some of these are standing in the way of our goal. I'd like to clear up several of the more common misperceptions I've heard and encourage you to actively enroll each and every child in each and every AFMS-affiliated club into FRA.

**Misperception 1: *To sign your juniors and pebble pups into FRA, you must have a whole group of kids, a youth leader, and a formal, structured youth program within your society.*** Not so! I constantly hear from folks that their society doesn't have enough kids to start the FRA program, or that their board of directors resists starting a youth group (that one always turns my head!). We want the program to be as inclusive as possible, and you don't need a big, formal group. If your society has just one child, sign that child up! We'll send an FRA Membership patch, and they'll have a stronger sense of belonging to the community of your club. You don't need to wait until you have a whole roomful of kids and a youth leader. Start the ball rolling with a single child!

**Misperception 2: *To be in FRA, you actively need to implement the Badge Program.*** Not so! The badge program was set up to provide a source of structured activities, but you don't need to use it at all to enroll kids into FRA. In working with kids in your society, you can use your own activities or commercial sets of activities (like the great packets developed by Diamond Dan or activities sold by Ward's or Edmund Scientifics), or simply have your kids participate in the regular workshops, shows, and field trips your club undertakes in its normal course of business. The Badge Program is simply meant to serve as one option among many to utilize with your kids.

**Misperception 3: *To use the FRA Badge Program, you need to set up a formal schedule and arrange group activities with all the kids in your club.*** Not so! A lot of folks tell me they'd like to use the program, but it's too hard to schedule times when all the kids can get together, especially between after-school soccer, band, baseball, etc. I encourage you to be as flexible as possible with the Badge Program. A number of the activities are a lot more fun if done within a group, but don't let the inability schedule a time get in the way. Allow for individual "independent study" and "home-schooling" for motivated juniors. The back-up pages in the Badge Manual were developed to give folks with minimal background what they need to guide kids through the activities, and these back-up pages can be shared with parents to work with their kids on their own at home. So give parents a copy of the manual and encourage them to sit down with their kids to pick out activities they'd like to do. All we need in order to send a child a badge is a responsible adult—a parent or designated club member—to sign off to indicate successful completion, and a badge will be on the way to mark that child's accomplishments with a colorful, tangible reward.

**Misperception 4: *To use the FRA Badge Program and award badges to your kids, you must follow the manual to the letter.*** Not so! When they've received the manual, some folks have said its size looks daunting, that the badge program seems designed for the "Eagle Scouts" among their junior members, and that some of the activities may be too involved for younger members. But as I note in the Introduction to the manual, you're encouraged to adjust the level of each activity to best match ages and abilities of your club's kids. You don't need to follow each activity exactly as laid out. *Modify*, where necessary *simplify*, but above all *utilize* the program! Feel completely free to make any activity as accessible as possible for the kids with whom you're working. The goal is to help kids have fun while learning, so if you see a different spin on a particular activity that'll work better with your kids, by all means, take that spin, and then let's reward the kids with badges.

**Misperception 5: *If a society doesn't have kids, they can't do anything with the FRA program.*** This seems self-evident, and I myself held this misperception—until a society in Texas showed me the way. They went to where the kids are! They used the FRA Fossils activities with local Girl and Boy Scouts, hoping it might attract kids to the club. My own club in California has a one-room museum, and we host school groups and go through a number of the badge activities. I have no problem with societies using the activities with school groups and other outside groups, so long as the badges themselves are reserved only for kids who are full-time club members. Instead of FRA badges, when my club hosts a school group, we award Rockhound Pins we've designed and purchased on our own.

**So my basic message?** Let's not make things complicated nor let misperceptions get in the way. Rather than looking for reasons *not* to enroll kids into FRA, let's follow the example of that club that went to where the kids are and got creative with a program that's been set up for every club within the AFMS, even those with just a single child! Don't have "enough" kids? Don't want to begin until you hold endless debates at board meetings about starting a juniors group? Don't know if you want to use the Badge Program? Don't know how to get started? Well, "don't" isn't exactly an inspiring word; in fact, it's a word often used to beat down the inner child within us all. Don't let "don't" get in the way of that key first step toward inspiring our children. I urge one and all to call me to sign up each and every child in each and every AFMS-affiliated club all across America. It's the first step toward bringing along the next generation of rockhounds while, as always, having fun!