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FEATURED

## Hoss Johnson completes every available merit badge

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Boy Scout Hoss Johnson shows off his 138 merit badges in this early September photo. He is presently working on an Eagle Scout project which benefits Harper School, which involves the installation of a 40-foot flag pole and beautification around the campus.

Photo submitted by Brandon Johnson

**VALE** — Although the Associated Press reported in July 2021 a 43% plunge in membership in the Boy Scouts of America, 15-year-old Boy Scout Hoss Johnson remains firmly dedicated to scouting. In fact, he has completed every available merit badge ahead of earning his Eagle Scout ranking.

In a phone interview with the Argus on Sept. 16, Victor Noble, scoutmaster of Troop 453 in Vale, shared about him working toward this milestone.

“I’ve been scoutmaster four-and-a-half years ... and he’s quite a little go-getter. He works really hard,” said Noble. “He takes advantage of opportunities when they arise.”

One such opportunity arose during the COVID-19 lockdowns, in the form of being able to complete many badges from home.

“A lot of kids sat home from school and didn’t do a whole lot. When that happened a lot of the councils across the United States, since we couldn’t meet regularly, we shut down for about three months. So they started offering online and Zoom classes for merit badges.

He just kind of ate that up and his mom said he’d start early in the morning online, working on these merit badges. She’d have to make him do his school work,” he said.

Noble’s first interaction with Hoss came in 2018, around the time The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced it would cease its relationship with the Boy Scouts of America. Troop 453 has been operated out of Grace Lutheran Church since 2019, when Noble followed it there as a scoutmaster.

In a separate interview on Friday, Hoss said he got into scouting at age 7.

“I was into Cub Scouts; My mom put me in and I’ve been doing it ever since because I enjoyed it ... I told her I wanted to join.”

He said he decided to run the gamut on badges to build on his success in Cub Scouts.

“I earned every single pin that you could get and I also [wanted] to do that in Boy Scouts.”

“It could be expensive at times,” said Tiffany Johnson, Hoss’ mother. “The scuba diving merit badge, he had to go all the way to Boise and he had to take... underwater diving and he had to get scuba-certified and all that kind of stuff.”

Tiffany Johnson also noted a lot of travel was involved for many of the other badges.

“His scoutmaster was super helpful, too, by making lots of opportunities for him to earn his merit badges,” she added.

Hoss said his favorite badges included welding, as well as scuba diving and movie making. He has made movies about his dad’s work on the family farm, his grandfather and his FFA team in Harper.

Tiffany said one video won best of show at the Drexel Foundation’s movie making contest in 2021.

He noted the welding badge helped him learn how to fix damage to fencing and farm implements which is often caused by his family’s livestock.

In earning his bugling badge, Hoss got to work with Nat Flynn who was a counselor for that badge.

“We have no musical talent whatsoever, but he would come to our house every Friday and teach him how to bugle,” said Tiffany. “Because of that, he’s been able to ... play Taps at a funeral. Then he was able to participate with over 4300 other musicians around the country for the National Day of Remembrance in May of 2020 for Memorial Day. Everyone around the world played Taps at the same time. It was pretty awesome.”

The fishing badges, which he saved for last, were the most difficult for him.

“Having patience to be able to sit there and wait for the fish to come” was his challenge, he said.

As Noble noted, once Hoss set his heart to getting those badges, the fish came right to him as his father and younger brother watched.

“He told me he hated fishing; he went fishing, but he never caught anything,” said Noble. “He had to catch a fish with a fly rod [for his Fly Fishing badge] ... This was only a week [before]; On Labor Day I took him out to this pond in hopes that he could finish up that badge. As soon as he flicked that fly out there, as soon as it hit the water he had a fish.”

He said Hoss caught 10 fish before he handed off the rod to his brother that day.

“And then he told me, ‘Oh I love fishing!’”

As for completing merit badges through online means, Hoss said it’s not his favorite way to do so and that he prefers in-person interaction.

“It’s a lot harder online, because sometimes you wouldn’t get any internet for a little bit, so then you miss a whole bunch. Then you have to go back and ask them for it again,” he said.

“I would say not to do it that way, because it’s a lot less personable. And you don’t get the hands-on,” said Tiffany.

Noble describes Hoss as a top scout, who not only wears the uniform correctly and conducts himself well but encourages those in his troop to do the same.

He only needs his Eagle Scout project to earn his Eagle ranking.

Noble said Hoss' project includes putting up a 40-foot flagpole and painting trash containers for Harper School, where he attends as a freshman.

He is currently working with Joe Kinney at Kinney Industries in Ontario," said Brandon Johnson, Hoss' father, in an email Saturday.

Hoss cited Tiffany's support as his best inspiration. He follows in the footsteps of his father, as Brandon was a Boy Scout in his day.

"It's been inspiring to watch," said Tiffany of her experience with Hoss.

This is a huge accomplishment that I don't think people realize is so rare, especially Hoss," added Brandon.