

Meet the Eagle Scout who was named 2019 Air Force Military Child of the Year



If someone presented an award for “earning the most awards,” Benji Rawald would probably earn that one, too.

He’s an Eagle Scout. He has earned every available merit badge and several BSA **STEM Nova awards**. He received the William T. Hornaday Silver Medal, **one of Scouting’s rarest honors** and an award that requires recipients to complete the equivalent of four Eagle Scout projects.

And just last month, the 17-year-old son of a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel accepted another remarkable honor.

Benji, a member of Scouts BSA Troop 280 of Del Rio, Texas (Texas Southwest Council) was named the **2019 Air Force Military Child of the Year**.

The prestigious award, presented by Operation Homefront for the past 11 years, was created to honor military families. After all, the men and women who serve in our armed forces don’t do it alone.

Their entire family serves right alongside them.



An Air Force family

Benji is the son of retired Air Force Lt. Col. Brett Rawald and Katherine Nielander. He was born in Florida and, as **he told the *Del Rio News-Herald***, “bounced around for three years in Europe at seven different military bases.”

After a stop at Spangdahlem Air Base in Germany, the family landed in southwest Texas. Benji is finishing his junior year of high school in Brackettville.

Further complicating matters is the fact that Benji lives in the city of Del Rio, which is 35 miles away from Brackettville. That means he and a few other military children travel 70 miles each day on a school bus.

Benji’s unusual bus schedule limits his extracurricular options, so he harnesses the power of Scouting to fulfill his passion for serving in his local community.

He teaches classes in first aid, wilderness survival and cybersafety to kids at the Laughlin Air Force Base’s youth center. He also tries to educate his fellow Scouts about his conservation efforts, including a countywide initiative to recycle plastic bags.

Since 2013, Benji has logged more than 5,000 service hours.



From left: Retired Brig. Gen. John I. Pray Jr., President and CEO of Operation Homefront; retired Maj. Gen. Lee Baxter, Board of Directors Chairman for Operation Homefront; Benjamin Rawald, Eagle Scout and 2019 Air Force Military Child of the Year; Lt. Gen. Brian Kelly of the U.S. Air Force; Lt. Gen. Daniel O'Donohue, Director of Joint Force Development.

A worthy honor

Six Military Child of the Year awards are presented each year — one for each branch of the armed forces in which a parent either serves or has served: Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard and the National Guard.

For 2019, there were more than 350 nominees. The half-dozen winners were selected for their educational, volunteer and extracurricular involvement — all while facing the challenges that military life can place on a family.

Benji and his fellow award recipients traveled to Washington, D.C., for the awards gala. Winners received \$10,000, a laptop computer, a signed guitar donated by Country Music Television and a seven-day Carnival cruise.

“I was definitely surprised,” Benji told the *Del Rio News-Herald*.

That Carnival cruise will have to wait, though. Benji is taking college classes this summer and has his eyes on attending the University of West Florida to earn two degrees — in computer hardware engineering and computer electrical engineering.

“I’d like to work as a computer engineer,” he told the newspaper. “I started watching videos on YouTube, and that appealed to me.”

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