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Greenville teen in rare company among Boy Scouts with 140th merit badge

Trent Tetzlaff, USA TODAY NETWORK-Wisconsin Published 6:10 p.m. CT May 21, 2018 | Updated 6:57 p.m. CT May 21, 2018



(Photo: Courtesy of Bluescape Canyon Photography)

GREENVILLE - A 17-year-old Hortonville High School senior has etched his name into the history books of Boy Scouts of America.

Bailey Rose earned his 140th and final merit badge on Monday, a feat fewer than 400 scouts can say they have achieved in the 108 years of the national scouting group.

Merit badges are awards earned by scouts after completing activities for a chosen subject of study. Badge topics range from canoeing to engineering to climbing. There are a total of 140 in play.

In 2010, at 11 years old, Rose crossed over from Cub Scouts to the Boy Scout ranks while living in Stanwood, Washington. According to Rose, it was during this crossover when he realized he wanted to attempt the challenge.

"During the crossover, Steve Anders, one of the leaders, made a challenge to all of the scouts," Rose said. "He announced to all of the scouts crossing over, 'if you get all of the merit badges, I will pay you one dollar for each one you earn.'"

That piqued his interest.

"Little kid me, of course, seeing that there are 140 merit badges, I'm thinking, 'I could buy a lot of stuff with that money, like, I could even buy a house,'" he said. "After he said that, I remember looking at my dad in the audience and mouthing, 'I want to do that.'"

So Rose set out to accomplish his goal.

He earned his first five merit badges in 2010 at a winter camp in Mobile, Alabama, where his family was temporarily located for business. Come 2011, his family relocated to Greenville, where he joined Troop 77.

Since moving to Greenville, Rose said he completed merit badges in Minnesota, Illinois, Idaho, Oregon and a number of Wisconsin locations. He completed 39 of the badges in 2012.

Rose said he faced multiple challenges during the process, which would have been tricky to endure without support from friends and family.

"It took a lot of support. Anyone who gets merit badges knows there are a lot of counselors and people you need to work with — and you need to get around," he said. "My father was a big help, driving me to and from places on weekends, and it really was just a lot of cramming in merit badges whenever I had time."

Rose earned 138 regular merit badges, one special 2010 100th anniversary merit badge and a "very rare experimental merit badge for a grand total of 140 merit badges, and that's as far as anyone can go," Jack Ekins, strategic partnerships director of the Bay Lakes Council, said in a released statement.

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A group from Bay Lakes Council gathered Monday at Faith Community United Methodist Church in Greenville to mark the milestone.

Rose's father, Brian Rose, doubles as his son's scoutmaster. He said Bailey's journey has not only helped him grow but has inspired others around him as well.

"Bailey's quest has helped open opportunities to our troop that we may not have taken otherwise," Brian Rose said. "Many of my scouts have taken merit badges that were outside of our troop and sometimes even in other cities or states."

Bailey Rose will take what he has learned as a scout with him this fall as he begins his freshman year at the University of Alabama. He said his work earning a programming merit badge introduced him to his choice of study, electrical and computer engineering.

In March, Bailey Rose was able to meet with Anders and show him his full sash of merit badges. Brian Rose said It was at this moment that Anders immediately remembered his promise, and said, "I guess I owe you some money."

In true scout's honor, Bailey Rose said he happily declined the offer.

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