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After earning 137 merit badges, Eagle Scout ready for his Court of Honor

David Etling of Crystal Lake is also receiving a Life Saving Award later this month

By Dennis Anderson

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On his way to becoming an Eagle Scout, David Etling of Crystal Lake earned 137 merit badges, the most a Boy Scout could get at the time he attained scouting's highest rank. (Dennis Anderson)

David Etling has a competitive drive few young people could match.

That happens when you are the youngest of four brothers growing up in a family with seven children. Also consider his three older brothers are all Eagle Scouts, the highest rank attainable in the Boy Scouts of America. So, Etling, 20, of Crystal Lake was destined to also become an Eagle Scout.

But the competition doesn't stop there.

His brothers earned a combined total of 133 Boy Scouts merit badges in their quest for Eagle. Giovanni Etling, a former Marine and now sergeant with the McHenry County Sheriff's Office, earned 67 merit badges, and Connor Etling, owner of an electrical services company, and Alexander Etling, a chef at Northwestern Medicine, each had 33 merit badges.

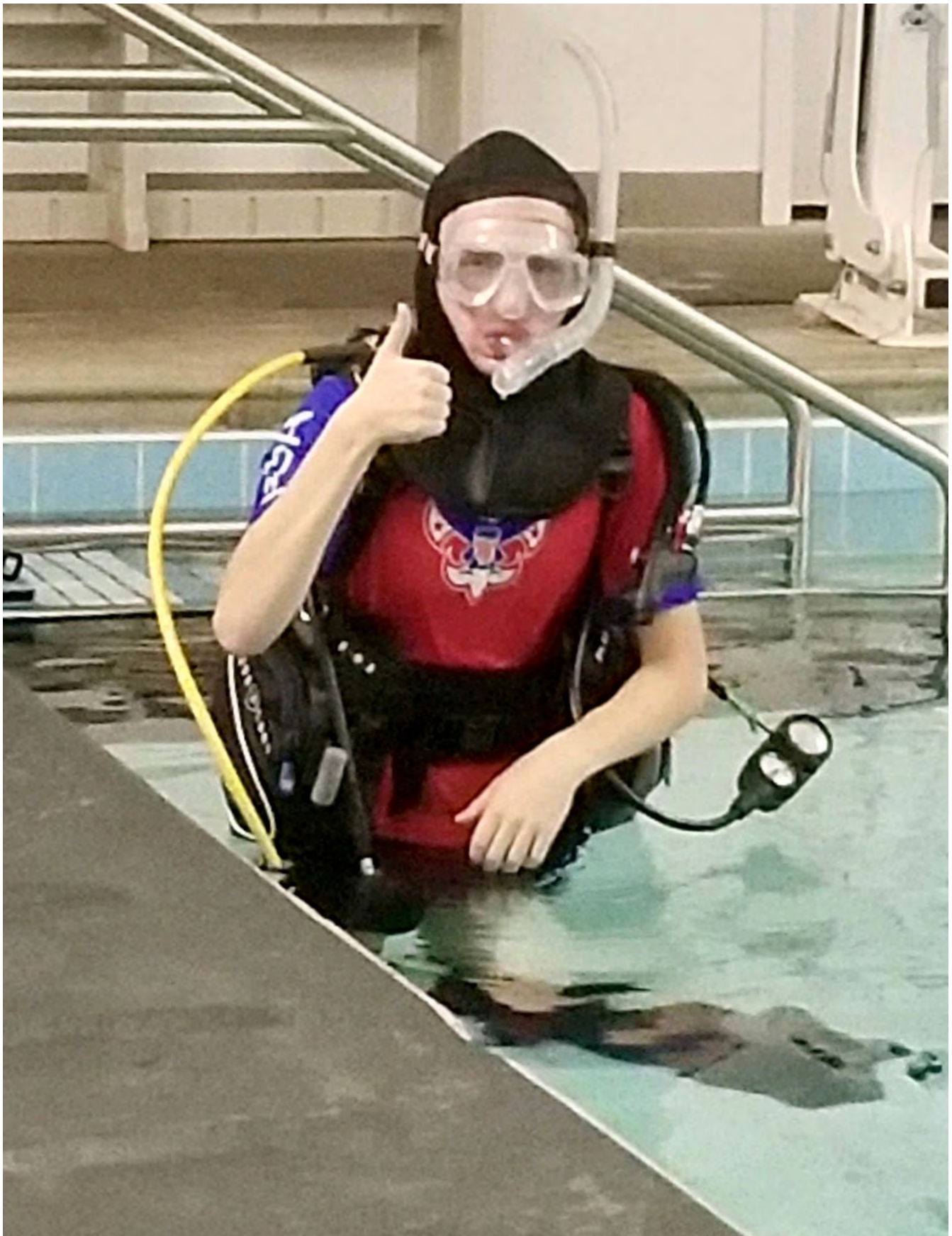
What did their little brother do? He collected 137 merit badges, four more than his brothers, combined. That was the highest number of badges a Scout could achieve when David Etling became an Eagle in 2020. The Boy Scouts now have a total of 138 merit badges.

"Call it sibling rivalry," Etling said. "I wanted more badges than all of them combined."

Etling's Court of Honor Eagle rank ceremony will be July 29 at the First United Methodist Church in Crystal Lake. He will also receive one of two of Heroism Awards he has received for saving a life. Twice he saved the life of his father, David Sr., by performing CPR. His father has since died of a heart attack, at age 69, in 2021. His father was a project manager for the U.S. Treasury Department for 47 years.

Less than 1% of all those who register as Scouts reach the Eagle rank. His first badge was Fingerprinting. His last was Bugling, which required him to learn the instrument, which took four months.

Scouts need to accumulate at least 21 merit badges before earning the Eagle rank. Of those 21 badges, 14 must come from a list of Eagle-required merit badges.



Eagle Scout David Etling said his Scuba Diving merit badge was the hardest and most costly of his 137 Boy Scouts of America badges he's received because it required special equipment and paying for scuba trainers. (Photo Provided by David Etling)

Etling's sash that holds his badges is about four times the normal size and had to be specially made. When wearing it he has to stand a certain way, usually with his right hand on his hip, in order to be comfortable.

Etling said Scuba Diving was the hardest and most costly of the badges because it required special equipment and paying for trainers, while Whitewater Rafting was the most challenging and required tipping the boat over and saving a volunteer with a lifesaver.

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His favorite badge is Citizenship in the Nation, one in a series of three Citizenship badges. “It’s about being patriotic and an involved member of society,” he said. It’s also led him to get involved in local politics as a precinct committeeman in Nunda Township.

All badges need to be reviewed and supervised by a BSA-certified counselor. And finding Scout counselors for all 137 badges was a challenge.

“All the badges have a story,” Etling said. “And I’ve done things I never thought I would. And I’ve met many interesting people along the way.”



Eagle Scout David Etling and his father David Etling Sr., in this photos from about 2016. Etling twice saved his father's life using CPR. Etling will receive a Heroism Award on July 29, 2023. David Sr. died in 2021 after a 47-year career as a project manager for the U.S. Treasury Department. (Photo Provided by David

Etling)

Etling joined the Boy Scouts in 2016 and reached Eagle in 4½ years.

“It was awesome to see someone achieve so much,” said Jim McGregor, Troop 158 scoutmaster. “He’s a special young adult.”

Etling’s Eagle Scout project, the final act to demonstrate leadership while completing work that benefits the community, was to build a cat shelter at the McHenry County Animal Control and Adoption Center. His team included six volunteers, which is a small number for an Eagle project, but he was limited because of the pandemic.

“It was awesome to see someone achieve so much. He’s a special young adult.”

— Jim McGregor, Troop 158 scoutmaster

Scouting’s origins are in England, his mother Cindy’s home country. She was a Girl Guide growing up in England. She came to America in 1979 to be a nanny and never left. She got her children involved in Scouting because, “I wanted them to have something from my heritage. I wanted them to experience something that my brothers and I had when we were young.”

Today, Etling wants to give back to scouting and become a registered counselor for all the badges he’s received.

“I’ve done them all, so now I should be able to teach them all,” he said.

He’s studying finance at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

“Finance is something I can excel in and something that’s needed in society, and there are a lot of growth opportunities,” Etling said.

Looking toward the future, Etling wonders if he will pass along his competitive drive.

“If I have children, I’d like them to be involved in scouting, but maybe I won’t make them get 137 badges.”

• *Dennis Anderson, vice president of news operations for Shaw Media and editor of the Northwest Herald, lives in Crystal Lake. He’s looking to share news about you and your neighbors and special events and happenings. Share your Community Exchange news with him at danderson@shawmedia.com.*

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