Belfair Eagle Scout Is Most Meritorious

By Maks Goldenshteyn

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BELFAIR — Unofficially, Belfair's David Gentry is one in a million.

While that might or might not be literally true, he's still in pretty rare company.

The 18-year-old Eagle Scout added the final merit badge to his 129-piece collection earlier this month. He has now earned every merit badge there is.

It's a feat not often seen by the Boy Scouts of America, which doesn't keep an official tally of the achievement.

"It's highly, highly unusual," BSA spokeswoman Renee Fairrer said.

On Thursday night, Gentry is being recognized for his work at a public Court of Honor ceremony at Port Orchard's First Christian Church.

Gentry, who is home-schooled, says he got the idea five years ago from friend and fellow Scout Jordon Martinez. They had planned to earn every badge together, but Martinez got sidetracked along the way.

"He got too involved with cars and girls," Gentry said of his friend, who still fulfilled the 21-badge requirement for becoming an Eagle Scout, the highest possible rank in Scouting.

Scouts earn badges for learning new skills, exploring professions, expanding their knowledge base and achieving physical fitness goals.

Some badges took Gentry a day to earn. Others, like becoming a certified scuba diver and learning to play the bugle, took months of work and came with a sizable price tag for his parents.

Gentry earned his final merit badge, for inventing, by building a contraption that uses hand-warmers to heat a tent.

He credits his mom for keeping him on track and for chauffeuring him around, and his father, a marathon runner, for passing down a strong work ethic.

"I'm very goal-oriented. My dad is, too. We work really hard and relax really hard," Gentry said.

David's mother, Julie Gentry, said she's glad her soft-spoken son got to interact with people he may not have otherwise met as a home-schooled student.

His father, Paul Gentry, calls the achievement "unbelievable."

"I looked at it and thought, 'Wow, I don't know if he's going to do this,'" he said. "I watched him go 60 feet underwater while scuba diving. I'm above the water going, 'Please come up. Please be OK.' I had total confidence in him, but I knew it was going to be hard to pull off."

While the BSA doesn't keep track of how many Scouts have earned every available merit badge, Fairrer estimates that 200 Scouts out of a possible million do it every year.

Troy Pugh, who operates Meritbadgeknot.com, a website devoted to honoring the special class of Scouts, believes that number to be much lower.

He estimates that in the entire 100-year history of the Boy Scouts, the total is closer to 300 or 400. Pugh, who became a member of the exclusive club 20 years ago, says he has confirmed only 129 cases in which a Scout has earned every available badge.

But regardless of how Gentry's achievement is framed, Pugh says the practical benefits will prove to be enormous.

"You can imagine comparing (David) to a scout that does the minimal effort," said Pugh, who was born in Bremerton and now works as a financial adviser in the eastern Washington town of Ephrata. "If you were to stack up these two scouts, giving them a specific task to accomplish, chances are the one that will figure it out will be the one who got all the merit badges. It's basic life experience that scouts grow from."

"I would venture to say that at the end of 129 merit badges, he's probably the most well-rounded kid in his community," Fairrer said.

Gentry, who graduates in June, isn't sure which colleges he'll apply to or what he'll study, but he said he's thinking about becoming a doctor.

Younger brother Elisha, 16, already has his sibling in his cross hairs. He currently has 86 badges and hopes to eventually reach 130 — one more than his brother, because the Scouts are adding a new badge.