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## Orange resident and Eagle Scout earns all 138 possible merit badges including nuclear science, insect study and entrepreneurship



Eagle scout Arman Kingsland, 18, shows off his merit badge sash which holds 138 of his badges in Orange on Friday, January 19, 2018. The sash has badges on both sides. He earned all of the badges offered by the Boy Scouts of America, a feat

achieved by less than 270 people worldwide. (Photo by Paul Rodriguez, Orange County Register/SCNG)

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County Register

PUBLISHED: January 11, 2018 at 5:09 pm | UPDATED: January 25, 2018 at 3:53 pm

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When it came time to earn his place as an Eagle Scout, Arman Kingsland-Mengi of Orange saw the requisite merit badges as a chance to see how much he could accomplish – he surprised himself.

Achieving the highest rank of the Boy Scouts of America requires – among many other things – that scouts earn at least 21 merit badges, including 13 mandatory for the Eagle rank.

Kingsland said he knew he could do better – he recently earned his last badge, completing all 138 possible.

An average 700 Orange County scouts make Eagle each year, but in the last decade only 17 have earned every possible merit badge. Local scouts on average earn about 30 merit badges, according to the Orange County Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

Kingsland, 18, has spent nearly every weekend of the last two years earning badges. Along the way, he said he's been exposed to all kinds of new experiences and discovered a wealth of hidden talents.

"I got to water ski for the first time, wakeboard and all this fun stuff," Kingsland said. "For shotgun shooting, it was super fun and I was really good at it for some reason. I had never picked up a shotgun or anything, but when I was doing it, I would hit them super accurately.

"The merit badge counselor was really impressed and offered to sign me up for a shooting team."

The variety of badges brought with them myriad experiences – for his inventing badge, Kingsland created reflective bands for his dog Violet to wear at night. For the theater badge, he used YouTube makeup tutorials to transform himself into an old man.

Jeff Herrmann, president and scout executive of the Orange County Council, said merit badges serve many purposes. For starters, he said, they give scouts a taste of possible passions and hobbies they may not have considered, and also allow them to sample an array of fields where they might some day make a career.

Herrmann, 59 of Orange, said he discovered a love of model trains after earning his railroading badge decades ago.

For those who challenge themselves to earn every badge, Herrmann said, the rewards are rich.

“The idea of tackling an overwhelming goal that very few people would even attempt and then being successful at it is pretty significant,” Herrmann said. “I think there’s a fair amount of self-confidence there.

“Later on in life, when challenges come, they can think ‘Well, I tackled a problem that very few people have ever done before. Everyone told me I wouldn’t be able to do it, and by golly I did it. So whatever comes next, I’m up for it.’”

Merit badges include everything the scouts have to offer, from the traditional – first aid, citizenship and camping – to the more modern – nuclear science and space exploration.

For a few of the harder ones, Kingsland got lucky.

For example, a friend of his grandmother works for a honey company and keeps a beehive in her back yard, which allowed him to tackle the tricky insect study badge – one a lot of scouts shy away for lack of access, Kingsland said.

Once Kingsland had tapped all the opportunities he could find in Orange County, he cast his gaze farther to complete the remaining badges. Farm mechanics wasn’t too bad, just a jaunt out to the farms of Indio in Riverside County. For entrepreneurship, Kingsland flew to North Carolina for a mock business program only being offered by a scoutmaster there – a trip he was more than willing to make by the time he was neck-deep in his quest for every badge.

By car or by plane, Kingsland was always joined by his mother, Halle Kingsland. She said she never hesitated for a moment to make the time – it was a great bonding experience, and she was swelling with pride at how her boy was growing through the experience.

“At that point, when he was so many badges in, I would do whatever it took to help him achieve his goal,” Halle Kingsland said. “That’s what you do as a mom.”

Kingsland had typically been a shy boy, she said, but taking responsibility of his appointments, juggling his tasks and going so far and so consistently out of his comfort zone transformed him into a more confident and proactive person by the end of his quest.

“You could see it happen to him – as he was experiencing these things, you could see the influence it was having on his life,” she said.

It took Kingsland about two years to earn all of the badges – his last was secured with just two weeks to go before his Eagle Scout ceremony in December. Now a senior at El Modena High School, he also recently finished his required service project, painting four murals at the school.

Kingsland made a special point to earn his last merit badge – for geocaching – through his scoutmaster, Tim Dawson. Dawson said he recalls six years ago, when he met Kingsland, then a quiet, reserved scout who would at best nod yes or no to most questions.

“We’ve done a lot of things together over the years. I think I challenged him a lot, scouting challenge him a lot, and he grew up a lot during that time,” Dawson said. “The two biggest highlights from my experience as a scoutmaster were my son getting Eagle and Arman finishing all his merit badges. And I honestly didn’t care that he did them all – I was more proud of the fact that he had grown as a person.”



## **Jonathan Winslow**

Jonathan Winslow covers Orange and Villa Park. He has been with the Register since 2013, wearing many hats over the years.