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2 Local scouts achieve highest honors

By Patricia Dillon, patricia.dillon@chron.com Published 12:27 pm, Saturday, April 21, 2018

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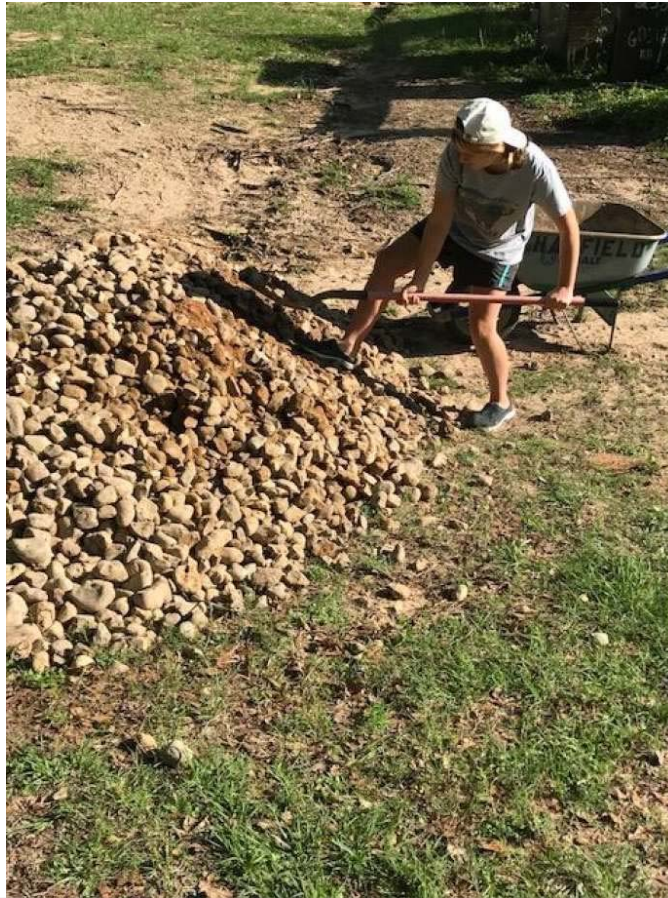


IMAGE 1 OF 7


Ava Hale, a 15-year-old Senior Girl Scout in Troop 11864, shovels rocks into place along the drainage pathway at her school as part of her flood mitigation Gold Award Project.

Ava Hale, a 15-year-old Senior Girl Scout in Troop 11864, recently completed her Gold Award Project. The Gold Award is the most prestigious honor a Girl Scout can receive.

Hale's project, 'Putting Flooding to Rest by Building a Dry Creek Bed,' was a flood mitigation effort to benefit her school, Cunae International in The Woodlands. Hale led her team of volunteers, students and parents of Cunae, as well as members of her Girl Scout troop, in building a dry creek river bed along the natural drainage path going to the main drain which empties into a detention pond.

"I decided to do (the flood mitigation project) after seeing my school had flooded time and time again. Originally I wanted to do something like rain gardens but we decided that would be ineffective and so I decided instead to try to get the water to move more toward the reservoir," Hale said. "We have a reservoir and a storm drain but the water doesn't get there and so we built a dry creek bed to lead the water towards the storm drain."

Hale led her team in clearing the path of sediment and debris, laying down 156 feet of landscaping material and then hauling and spreading 4 cubic yards of bullrock. She and her volunteers also planted native vegetation along the borders of the dry creek to prevent erosion and improve absorption of water through vapo-respiration.



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The week-long effort was completed during her spring break. Rather than going on vacation, Hale said she spent more than 80 hours improving her school's outdoor drainage system.

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"I honestly didn't mind (missing vacation). It was nice to get some work done and it felt good to be contributing to my school in a positive way and so it felt worthwhile," Hale said.

Hale and her mother documented water levels before work on the creekbed began. When completed, they returned after heavy rains to compare and found that there was no standing water, she said. Her project had been successful, and Hale earned the Gold Award.

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Eagle Scout confirmation

Rafe Kotalik, a member of Boy Scout Troop 1772, has earned all 137 possible merit badges. On Wednesday, April 18, he stood before the Eagle Scout Board of Reviews for his official confirmation, having the Eagle Scout honor approved.

Each year, only 4 to 6 percent of eligible Boy Scouts become an Eagle Scout. Not only has Kotalik joined this elite rank, he has done so at the young age of 12, placing him among the nation's youngest Eagle Scouts.

Kotalik's mother, Dawn, expressed how proud she is of Rafe.

"I'm super proud of him. This has been a hard road. There are a lot of boys that take a lot longer to accomplish what he did. He just really set his mind to it and it was a tough time in his life when he made the decision to really apply himself to scouts. He had just been diagnosed with dyslexia and was just really not feeling confident about himself," Dawn Kotalik explained. "Instead of doing tutoring we opted to put him in merit badges so he felt like he was getting something out of it, and it wasn't traditional tutoring after school. Once he started taking the classes he was like 'Wow, this is great' and just kept doing it."

Rafe said he originally joined Boy Scouts for the opportunities and because he wanted to be like his father.

"I thought it would open up doors for me and I really liked the idea of joining scouts (because) my dad was in it," he explained.

To become an Eagle Scout, Rafe had to complete a **long-term project**. He spent more than 60 hours putting together STEM-related lesson plans and tasks for students at Gerald D. Irons Sr. Junior High School after Hurricane Harvey.

"We were building STEM kits to give to Irons Junior High (School) because the teachers there were flood victims and we didn't want them to spend their money on supplies so we wanted to give supplies to them," Rafe said.

Upon receiving his confirmation, Rafe said he was glad his hard work had brought him closer to being like his dad.

"It feels actually pretty good because now I know my name's going to be up there with my dad," Rafe said.

Rafe's two older brothers, Noah and Jarrett, and best friend Gage Maddox, **whose house was flooded during Harvey**, also received their Eagle Scout confirmations on April 18. The four will appear before the Eagle Court of Honor, which is scheduled for 1 p.m. on May 20 at the Knights of Columbus Event Center in Conroe.

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