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Scout earns 135 merit badges

May 3, 2013
Tribune Chronicle | TribToday.com

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By BOB COUPLAND

Tribune Chronicle

CORTLAND - Before he turns 18 in a few days, Cortland resident Robert McKay is set to earn his 135th merit badge, which earns him a place in the record books as one of fewer than 200 scouts in Boy Scout history to achieve the feat.

McKay, an Eagle Scout and a member of Boy Scout Troop 4050, which is with the Arrowhead District of the Greater Western Reserve Council, was honored this week at the eighth annual Arrowhead District's Friends of Scouting breakfast held at Leo's in Howland.

He displayed the 133 badges he had earned so far, with the last two set to be finalized shortly. He has been involved in scouting for nine years and began earning every available merit badge starting at age 12 in sixth grade.

Boy Scouts could earn four vintage merit badges during scouting's centennial year in 2010, which helped McKay make the 135 number possible.

"It feels great to earn this honor. It's helped me choose my future career, helped me plan better what I want, what I want to do after school, with my grades and everything," McKay said.

Once a Scout reaches age 18, he is no longer eligible for merit badges.

To earn the merit badges, McKay he had to complete a variety of tasks in fields such as scuba diving, environmental science, canoeing, hiking, biking, space exploration and astronomy. He has learned to snowboard, canoe, kayak, run motor boats, rowboats, sailboats, shoot shotguns and rifles, archery, water ski, rock climb, fly fish and scuba dive.

Some badges took longer to earn, a few more than a year. He said he's especially proud of the backpacking badge, which he took a while and involved many backpacking trips with other scouts and scout masters.

McKay, who is a Lakeview High School junior and a member of the National Honor Society, is the son of Trumbull County Common Pleas Judge W. Wyatt and Andrea McKay. He said he plans to continue with scouting as a merit badge counselor or scout master.

McKay said he credits his father, Cub Master Jim Jastatt and Scout Master Steve Brown for their inspiration, encouragement and support while he was in scouting.

"They have all inspired me and supported me while I was earning the merit badges," he said.

Wyatt McKay said of his son, "He will be on the record books for quite a while with 135 merit badges."

He said there are some websites that keep track of merit badges, but the Boy Scouts don't have actual statistics. McKay said one website indicated the most merit badges ever accumulated by a single Boy

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Scout in history of scouting was 142, followed by 134 by four individual scouts.

"We are sure that no one else locally has earned that many merit badges," he said.

Wyatt McKay was the keynote speaker at the "Scouting Prepared for Life" event. He said he accompanied his son on many of his merit badge activities which involved camping and canoeing throughout the United States and Canada.

Also the breakfast event, John Robinson, a former Scoutmaster of Troop 25, received the Distinguished Scout Award and the Trumbull 100 with the Outstanding Community Service Award.

"Our fundraising breakfast is a wonderful tradition and a celebration of scouting's impact on our local district. Annual attendees include area businesses and community leaders as well as individuals and families involved in our local Scouting programs" said David Rider, this year's committee chairman.

The Arrowhead District of the Council serves families in a portion of eastern Portage County and Trumbull County, except Hubbard.

bcoupland@tribtoday.com

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