

Friends Charlie Torbert and David Young have 274 merit badges between them.



# BADGES OF HONOR

Longwood Scout earns every single merit badge

by Kevin Fritz

When David James Young of Longwood sees an opportunity to learn something new, he grabs on and doesn't let go. As an Eagle Scout in Troop 849-Altamonte Springs, those learning opportunities come in the form of Scouting's iconic merit badges. And at age 15, David became one of only 450 Scouts worldwide since 1911 who have earned all 137 of the badges. That puts David in the top 0.1% of all Eagle Scouts – already exclusive company – who are only required to earn 21 badges to achieve the rank of Eagle. David decided he wanted them all.

"It's just a lot of fun learning new things," he says. "Where else can you learn to scuba dive or weld? I think it's really cool."

David began his merit badge odyssey when he was 11 years old, netting an average of 34 badges a year, or about three every month. Besides an innate drive to succeed, he had the extra incentive of matching his friend Charlie Torbert, a fellow Scout who took the same journey, earning badge number 137 last year (we profiled Charlie in the September/October 2019 issue of *Altamonte-Wekiva Springs Life*). David earned his 137th badge this fall by backpacking 15 miles on the Florida Trail outside of Paisley near Camp La-No-Che, a premier Boy Scout outpost.

"HE IS FEARLESS. HE IS SO COMFORTABLE EVEN UNDERWATER. HE WILL TRY ANYTHING." – Dad David Young

From learning to water ski and operating an ATV to coin collecting and pontoon sailing, David has experienced more of life's offerings in the past four years than many others will ever accomplish in their lifetimes.

It all started with scuba diving, the merit badge that got the ball rolling. His dad, also named David Young, took him to the Atlanta Aquarium, where young David earned that badge along with a certificate in Whale Shark Diving. However, never one to rest on his laurels, David became a PADI certified Open Water Diver that same year by diving in Blue Springs and DeLeon Springs state parks.

"David loves scuba diving," says his dad. "He was the first in his troop to earn that badge, and it was his hardest."

"It is weird at first," young David adds about diving, "because you are not supposed to breathe under there."

The first badge David earned was for scuba diving at the Atlanta Aquarium when he was only 11.





But I love it. I like trying things that are really fun."

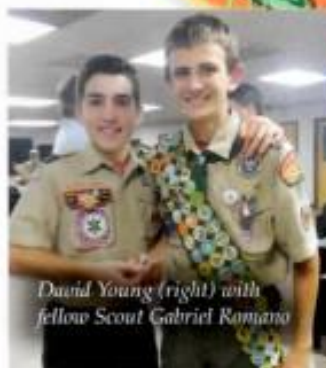
Not only has he earned the maximum 137 merit badges, David finds the time and energy to claim extra patches outside of the merit-badge realm. He has earned Scout awards in the Mile Swim, Board Sailing, Kayaking, Snorkeling, and Stand Up Paddle Boarding. He holds the Scout Strong Presidential Active Lifestyle Award, the World Conservation Award, the Paul Bunyan Woodsman Award, as well as the National Outdoor Achievement Awards for aquatics, camping, hiking, riding, and conservation.

"David wears me out," his father admits. "He is fearless. He is so comfortable even underwater. He will try anything."

## MORE 'THAN SCOUTING

Nonetheless, there is more to David's life than earning patches and badges. Like most boys his age, he is eager to get his driver's license. He enjoys playing with Chloe, his Lab-shepherd rescue dog. He is a member of the Lyman High School Golf Team and learned to surf just for fun. Plus, he volunteers to teach karate and self-defense to younger kids.

Moreover, David holds junior black belts in Tae Kwon Do and in Seido (Japanese Karate). Impressed by the young man, renowned martial arts master Tadashi Nakamura invited David



*David Young (right) with fellow Scout Gabriel Romano*



*Fellow Scouts in David Young's Troop 849 celebrate his remarkable achievement – earning all 137 of Scouting's famous merit badges.*

to New York City to earn his adult black belt, an offer young David is a bit apprehensive to take.

"I don't want to get punched by that dude," he laughs. "He breaks stones with his hands."

A Lyman High School 10th grader, David does not just shine at physical activities but with his mind, as well. Currently excelling as an engineering student, David would like to one day have a career in the robotic field or coding. In fact, David has been competing academically as long as he can remember. In fourth grade, he was a finalist in Odyssey of The Mind, an international educational competition.

"I am extremely proud of him," David's dad says, adding that his wife and David's mom, Melissa, is undergoing treatment for stage-IV breast cancer, which returned after five years in remission. "It hasn't been easy, but David has been amazing through all of this."