

Eagle Scout earns every merit badge

San Diegan Patrick Barnsley joins just 201 other scouts in history to achieve the honor

By Pam Kragen (</staff/pam-kragen/>) 6:51 p.m. June 20, 2013



(</photos/2013/jun/20/1042575/>)

Eagle Scout Patrick Barnsley, 17, wears the sash bearing 135 merit badges on a walk through Mataguay Scout Camp in Santa Ysabel. Barnsley has earned all of merit badges offered by Boy Scouts of America, a feat achieved by only 201 scouts in history. — *Charlie Neuman*

When Patrick Barnsley was born in 1995, he set the family record by tipping the scales at a bouncing 9 pounds, 10 ounces. The overachieving Eagle Scout from Scripps Ranch has been trying to top other charts ever since.

Two weeks from today, Barnsley will turn 18 and cap off his career in the Boy Scouts having earned every possible merit badge. It's a rare achievement that only 201 Scouts can claim in the history of Scouting, according to Troy Pugh, a Washington-based scoutmaster and administrator of the meritbadgeknot.com website, which tracks and confirms merit badge honors. And because the number of badges has grown over the years, Barnsley's total of 135 is held by only 11 other Scouts. Although the Boy Scouts of America National Council in Texas doesn't keep such statistics, an official there called Barnsley's badge count "a rare achievement."

Barnsley says he was born competitive, and relishes any opportunity to make his mark. The recent Scripps Ranch High grad earned the badges while he was also playing jazz saxophone in the school band, starring in school musicals, wrestling for the varsity team, taking AP classes and working summers at the Mataguay Scout Camp in Santa Ysabel.

"Every second I had I was working on something and I never slept," Barnsley said Wednesday. "I like achieving things and that means a lot more to me than sitting around playing Farmville."

Ron Lawrence, scoutmaster for Troop 648 in Rancho Peñasquitos, said the ebullient Barnsley is an inspiration to his fellow scouts.

"I'm really proud of him for being such a good role model for the troop," Lawrence said. "Boys may see me as a fossil, an old fart, but when they look at Patrick, they see a god. They see a kid walking on clouds."

No obstacle too high

Barnsley's father, Bill, said he discovered his youngest child's competitive streak when the boy insisted on going to grade school early every day to run the track with other kids (timing his laps to chart his improvement). And when the father volunteered to be pack leader for his son's Cub Scout troop, then-5-year-old Patrick appointed himself "co-leader."

"We ran the pack together," the younger Barnsley recalled. "I had a natural instinct for leadership and I loved feeding off the energy of an audience."

When he moved up to Boy Scouts at age 10, the fledgling Scout donned his green sash, adorned with his first merit badge. He was

crestfallen when a scoutmaster told him to take it off — he wasn't allowed to wear the sash until he'd earned at least three badges.

"I was so upset. That just made me more determined that I was going to earn as many badges as I could," Patrick Barnsley said.

By age 13, he'd earned 21 merit badges, certifying him as an Eagle Scout, and by the time he got to high school, he'd earned about 60.

He decided to take a two-year break to focus on sports, music and theater (he plans to become an actor someday). Then, last summer, when he realized he needed only five more badges to earn a coveted Eagle Palm award, he decided to earn as many badges as he could before he turned 18.

Karl Shelton, camping director for the Boy Scouts' San Diego-Imperial Council, said it's very difficult for a Scout to earn every badge available, because new badges are being added all the time. In San Diego County, three highly competitive brothers — Alex, Taylor and Bryce Kunz — achieved the feat during their years of scouting. (Alex earned 129 badges by 2010, Taylor topped out at 122 in 2008 and Bryce earned 121 by 2006.)

'Mr. Merit Badge Guy'

Earning a merit badge — where the Scout has to prove his facility with a life skill — is no easy feat. Lawrence, the scoutmaster, said each badge involves writing a detailed term paper and then completing a task or achieving a goal under the supervision of a counselor. There are badges for plumbing, farm mechanics, gardening, archery, kayaking, home repair, inventing, skating, stamp collecting and much more. Barnsley said he sees a value in each one.

"I view each merit badge as a chance to learn a skill set that I can use later in life, so there's never really been a moment wasted," he said.

Barnsley said he's particularly proud of his 42nd badge, nuclear science, because it taught him a valuable lesson that had nothing to do with protons and neutrons.

"I hadn't done the work and I didn't memorize the terms. When I went to the meeting with the counselor a month later, he kicked my butt about it up and down," Barnsley said, adding that the counselor gave him one day to learn what he needed to earn the badge. After pulling an all-nighter, the determined Scout mastered the material. "It taught me the importance of merit badges and that I was never going to be caught unprepared again," he said.

His new bugling badge was surprisingly tough to earn (considering he's played sax for nine years) because the mouth position for playing a horn is nothing like that used for a woodwind. And some of the toughest badges were those that required expensive gear or training. He had to spend nearly \$400 of his savings earning his white-water rafting and backpacking badges, and an additional \$500 this year to get certified in scuba diving (his final badge).

"I don't come from a rich family ... But I spent the money I earned at camp to earn the badges because it was important to me."

Four years ago, Lawrence invited Barnsley to work at the Mataguay camp, where thousands of scouts come each summer with a goal of earning badges. Barnsley's skills at public speaking and his strategy for earning badges helped him rise quickly through the ranks. This summer, he's Outback Director, overseeing eight different camp divisions. Barnsley's nickname among the campers is "Mr. Merit Badge Guy."

"The kids love him and they all want to be like him," Lawrence said. "He's a great kid, has a lot of enthusiasm and he's a model of leading by example. I see kids all the time where I wonder where they'll go in life, but when I see Patrick, I just say 'get out of the way, because this kid is going someplace.'"

Broadway dreams

Although business owners frequently hand Barnsley their cards along with job offers, he has his sights set on a stage or film career. He started out as the only boy in an all-girl dance chorus in his freshman year and ended up playing most of the lead roles in his high school's musicals. His former drama teacher Greg Oberle said what little Barnsley may lack in performance skills, he makes up for in his drive to succeed.

"Patrick has three middle names and two of them are confidence. He has no embarrassment factor and I've never seen a student more interested in learning how he can improve himself after every rehearsal or performance," Oberle said, adding that while Barnsley often played comically pompous characters, he was always humble offstage. "He is one of the five or six most determined people I've taught in 23 years. He wants it and he can take rejection. That kid works."

Barnsley will begin pursuing a degree in musical theater at Rider University in New Jersey this fall. He knows the odds are stacked against him in the notoriously competitive acting world, but he's undeterred.

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“Many people have told me if you want this, you have to burn the ship,” Barnsley said. “An actor came and spoke to our class once and said that none of us would probably ever make it. But I went up to him afterward and I said, ‘I am going to be a successful actor and I will be seeing you on the stage.’”

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