



Tigard High School student receives all 137 Boy Scout merit badges

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"For someone like George to stay on course for many years is an impressive accomplishment"

TIGARD -- George Christensen needs two sashes to hold all of his Boy Scout honors.

Tonight, the 15-year-old Tigard High sophomore will receive his final five merit badges, the last of 137. That's every badge available to scouts, including four special badges available only for the Boy Scouts 2010 Centennial.

Each badge represents a new skill learned, a leap into an unfamiliar world or a fun adventure. Christensen keeps mementos in his bedroom: A hunk of steel he welded in a box, pottery in his drawer, a bag of golf clubs in the corner and a scuba mask on the nightstand.

Few scouts do what Christensen did. Boy Scouts of America does not track how many members receive all merit badges, but confirmed such cases are rare. An **unofficial website tracking these achievements** confirmed about 200 cases in the organization's 103-year history.

Christensen joined Troop 843 as a Cub Scout when he was 8. He achieved scouting's highest honor, Eagle Scout, at 13, with 88 merit badges. The average age to achieve that rank is 17. The minimum number of badges is 21.

"I'm in this for another five years. Now what do I do?" Christensen recalled thinking after becoming an Eagle Scout. He and his family had decided even before that to pursue all the badges.

Earning some of the badges, like lifesaving, was physically grueling. He didn't have to run into a burning building and save a baby, but Christensen did have to dive underwater and carry out a large brick the weight of a human body.

Others were time-intensive. Perfecting his ice-skating form involved at least nine months of practice. The fly-fishing badge required about 20 fishing trips before Christensen successfully snagged a trout.

Some badges seemed random. He cared for a Mary Woodward Elementary School class' bearded dragon for Reptile and Amphibian Study. He took trumpet classes in middle school to improve his bugling skills.

Each badge required learning about first aid and career opportunities. Even programming: Christensen had to learn how to combat eye strain and repetitive stress injuries.

And he learned as fun as scuba diving can be, he decided not to pursue it as a career because of all the training and expenses. Christensen is more attracted to science and engineering.

Christensen was exposed to new skills and fields many scouts don't experience, his scout leader said.

"The design was not to have scouts get them all," Vincent Ibarra, Troop 843's Scoutmaster, said of merit badges. "There's probably plenty of boys who thought in the beginning 'Oh I'm going to get as many as I can get.'

"But for someone like George to stay on course for many years is an impressive accomplishment."

At times Christensen became frustrated with all the research and work involved with getting all the badges.

"Sometimes I'd sneak downstairs to play my Wii," Christensen said. He's also fond of computer games; he was recently grounded for excessive use.

His mother, Liz, kept him motivated, especially when it came to the logistics of helping find counselors for the merit badges and driving him far distances for the outdoors-themed badges.

His four younger sisters occasionally joined in learning skills such as piano and ice-skating. His father, Darin, a lawyer, became an Eagle Scout at 14 with 21 merit badges.

While George Christensen can boast of having all the badges now, Boy Scouts of America continuously adds new badges. And Christensen can keep earning them until he is 18. Coming up in the next two years is a **slew of computer and technology related ones.**

When they come out, Christensen will be ready. Assuming he's not still grounded for playing too many computer games.

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