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## LOCAL

# Earning all 137 merit badges, 16-year-old Sarasota Eagle Scout scales rare height

**Annalise Anderson** Sarasota Herald-Tribune

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SARASOTA – Owen Eakle, 16, has accomplished a rare feat unmatched by millions of other young men who have tried to achieve: Thanks to a novice rank in skills like archery, backpacking, and rock climbing, Owen has earned every merit badge offered by the Eagle Scouts.

Since the founding of the Boy Scouts of America in 1912 and participation of approximately 10 million scouts, Owen is one of fewer than 500 to earn all 137 merit badges. He is the third scout from the Southwest Florida Council and the first from the Two Rivers District to gain the honor.

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An excellent student, track athlete and viola player, Owen is “just like every other kid,” according to Paul Caragiulo, chairperson of the Two Rivers District committee. “He’s just motivated like no other person I’ve ever met.”

Owen joined the Scouts in the second grade and became an Eagle Scout on April 15, shortly before he conquered all 137 badges. To earn the Eagle rank, scouts must have at least 21 badges, develop a service project, participate in a Scoutmaster conference and be approved by the Eagle Scout review board.

What began as a fun way to socialize with friends turned into an exciting adventure for the Eakles when Owen committed himself to earning every badge at the start of the COVID-19 shutdown last year.

In pursuit of merit badges, the family took multiple road trips outside of Florida to help Owen learn skills like snow skiing, whitewater rafting, kayaking, metal working and land surveying. Jim Eakle, Owen's father, said that many memories were made on their missions.

## Watching Owen Eakle overcome obstacles

Suffice to say, not every skill was easy for Owen to grasp. Jim admits that there were moments when he and Owen's mother, Janice Eakle, wondered if a particularly challenging merit badge would end the streak.

According to Owen, skating was the toughest badge of them all. "I'm pretty tall and not very well balanced, so trying to teach myself how to skate over the summer wasn't really easy," Owen said.

For Jim, it's been a rewarding experience to watch his son overcome obstacles and show unwavering commitment.

"It's great for a parent. You hope that there's life lessons that he's picking up as he's going along that he'll use when he's out on his own someday," Jim said. "If nothing else, merit badges have taught him what things he likes to do and will keep doing in the future, and the other things he can write out of his book and never think about again."

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As for other scouts who are reluctant to pursue the challenge, Owen advises them to persevere.

"A lot of people slow down and don't do merit badges as much because they do one that's really hard – like plant science; that was exceedingly hard – and they'll think *oh, a hundred more of these are going to be this tough?*" Owen said. "But a lot of them are really fun and you learn a lot. You make a lot of memories doing them. So, I just say to go for it."

On June 9, Owen received official recognition from the Sarasota County Commission for his accomplishment. Commissioner Christian Ziegler presented the recognition, which was the first official recognition of the year.

"You have a bright future ahead of you," Ziegler said. "Just looking at your parents, they're pretty darn proud of you."

With every badge now on his sash, Owen doesn't plan on leaving the Scouts anytime soon. He hopes to pursue the National Outdoor Awards, which require a scout to prove their knowledge in high-level outdoor activities, such as hiking, camping and horseback riding.

"It doesn't really feel like I'm done with all the merit badges. I kind of feel like there's still more work I have to do," Owen said. "I'll see how much I can accomplish before I age out at 18."

Caragiulo is confident that Owen has a bright future ahead of him and eagerly awaits his future accomplishments.

"I have no doubt in my mind that he will have an impact on his community – how large that is remains to be seen – but he's going to have an impact," Caragiulo said. "He's just a remarkable kid."