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BOY SCOUT SUPERSTAR

Manatee teenager earns all 121 merit badges

Thomas Hall joins a small group that has all 121

By [Frank Gluck](#)

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BRADENTON -- Thomas Hall didn't initially set out to become a Boy Scout merit badge superstar.



But while other scouting high-achievers around him were satisfied by earning a mere few dozen merit badges, the 18-year-old Bradenton high school student just kept ticking them off.

Then, about a year ago, Hall realized he had 105 and was within striking distance of earning all 121 merit badges, a feat few have ever achieved.

"I just kept getting all my merit badges and I figured, 'I'm pretty close, I might as well go for it,'" Hall said.

To reach the 121-badge summit, Hall took a trip to Oregon to snowboard (for the Snow Sports Badge), bicycled more than 150 miles around Manatee County (for the Cycling Badge), and had to clean out a sink or toilet trap (for the Plumbing Badge).

Hall's journey began in May 1999 when he earned his Disability Awareness Badge, and wrapped up on Oct. 29 of this year when he cast a line in a Manatee pond to earn his Fly Fishing Badge. As a result, Hall is now in rarified air among Scouts.

About 900,000 boys are active in scouting nationally, according to the Boy Scouts of America. More than 110 million boys have been affiliated with the organization since it was incorporated in 1910.

But fewer than 100 Scouts have ever earned the maximum number of badges in the organization's near-century of existence, according to Scout experts. Hall's feat may be a first for Southwest Florida.

"It's extremely rare," said B.J. Maynard, a unit commissioner for the Scouts' Manatee County District and a 35-year veteran of the organization.

The Manatee district will honor Hall during its annual awards banquet Jan. 25.

Scouting is something of a family tradition in the Hall household.

Hall's father, Don, is the scoutmaster for his son's Troop 8 in Bradenton. Thomas Hall's two older brothers also were in Scouts. All three earned the rank of Eagle Scout.

That accounts for his twice-yearly trips to Boy Scout camp, where participants can easily earn multiple badges for such outdoors skills as camping, fishing and rock climbing.

"It's a program that really focuses on character development and citizenship development, which I think is important," Hall's father said. "And it uses the outdoors as a method for doing this."

The idea behind merit badges is simple: character comes from learning something new to achieve a goal. The number and types of merit badges have changed through the years, but always have covered diverse subject matter.

Now Hall can hold his own in conversations ranging from coin collecting to nuclear science.

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More than 110 million boys have been in the Boy Scouts since it began in 1910, but fewer than 100 Scouts have ever earned the maximum number of badges. Thomas Hall's feat may be a first for Southwest Florida. [Order photo](#)

STAFF PHOTO / DAN WAGNER

HOW TO EARN A MERIT BADGE

A Scout can pick any subject included in the list of 121 merit badges. From there, a scoutmaster will provide a list of merit badge "counselors." These counselors -- typically former Scouts -- help Scouts meet requirements before signing off on badges.

EXCERPTS OF REQUIREMENTS

Each badge has a long list of goals; here are some of the requirements for

each.

He has molded fiberglass, which was harder than it sounds, Hall said. He has learned how to manage his personal finances, which he labeled a yawner.

Nuclear Science: "Tell the meaning of the following: ALARA, alpha particle, atom, background radiation, beta particle, contamination, curie and becquerel, gamma ray, half-life, ionization, quark, isotope, neutron, nuclear energy, nuclear reactor, particle accelerator, rad and gray, radiation, radioactivity, radon, rem and sievert, and X-ray."

For his veterinary medicine badge he observed a veterinarian neuter a dog, not a pleasant experience at all, he noted.

Hall, who will graduate this spring from Bayshore High School, said he is proud of his accomplishment. But he talks more of the trips and experiences scouting has provided.

There was the 12-day canoe trip to Canada. He spent two weeks backpacking in New Mexico. And he spent a week sailing to the Florida Keys.

Hall plans to attend Manatee Community College in the fall. The badges have given him a broad range of information about possible careers, but he still does not know what he would like to pursue as a field.

Snow Sports (snowboarding):

"Demonstrate your ability to ride in varied conditions, including changes in pitch, snow conditions and moguls. Maintain your balance and ability to turn."

In the shorter term, he has signed up to be an assistant scoutmaster. But his days with the organization are coming to an end, he said.

"I've done about as much as you can do in the Scouts," he said. "I'm going to try to work on my SAT scores right now."

Coin Collecting: "Collect from circulation a set of currently circulating U.S. coins. Include one coin of each denomination (cent, nickel, dime, quarter, half-dollar, Susan B. Anthony or Sacagawea dollar). For each coin, locate the mint marks, if any, and the designer's initials, if any."

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