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Merit badges? He's got every last one of them!

BY SARA CARDINE

Last week, Harold Kast earned a Boy Scout merit badge in game design. To achieve this, the 17-year-old junior assistant Scoutmaster of Troop 509 played and studied games and designed his own math-based card game.

In doing so, the La Cañada High School senior became one of 190 Boy Scouts nationwide to have earned every available merit badge, and one of only three youths in the 103-year his-

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swooping in to earn their Eagle rank the day before they turn 18, or doing the bare minimum to score as many patches as they can.

Kast's motivation, however, comes from someplace deeper. Each patch represents something he's learned, an experience he'll never forget. They are stops on his journey across an eclectic terrain of curiosity, practice and expertise.

Some of those stops were

Local Boy Scout earns all 135 offered; father says he's one in a million.

tory of the organization to have as many as 135, according to meritbadgeknot.com, which tracks, verifies and celebrates the achievements.

"It wasn't my dream to get every single merit badge," he says. "It just happened. I got to a high enough number and said, 'Let's keep going.'"

It's easy to mistake his story for that of someone who'd do anything to win, easy and enjoyable, like the merit badge he earned for theater, a personal passion. And the memories of some evoke a cringe, like the time he spent 22 months to earn his bugling patch. It required him to play 15 different bugle standards, compose his own and learn about the instrument, from its history to its cleaning and maintenance.

"I spent 18 months attempting five bugle calls," he says, indicating the patch on the completely covered sash of his uniform. "But I still tried my best, which I did for any and all

given that it's more common for a Scout to earn about 21 merit badges, the prerequisite amount for obtaining an Eagle Scout ranking. Kast made Eagle at 14.

Some high schoolers quit altogether when the workload of school and extracurricular activities begins to mount. Others might practice crafty dilettantism,

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of these."

On June 2, Kast turns 18 — the official end of a Boy Scout's tenure — but he's looking forward to spending the summer as a counselor at Camp Cherry Valley, a Scouting camp on Catalina Island. After that, he'll attend California State University, Fullerton, where he's been accepted into the honors program. Soon, the merit badges will be a page in his personal history book.

Martin Kast, Harold's father and Scoutmaster of Troop 509, chartered by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, has stood alongside



TIM BERGER Staff Photographer

Eagle Scout Harold Kast with a sash carrying the entire collection of 135 Boy Scout merit badges he has earned. Kast recently earned the Game Design merit badge, his 135th.

his son from the beginning. The pair went on "merit badge weekend" trips as far away as Vista, near San Diego, where they saw a display on the evolution of the tractor Harold still recalls with excitement. Building a natural enthusiasm for discovery is the main point of the merit badges, Martin Kast explains.

"This is an adventure, what you see here," he says as he picks up Harold's badge-laden sash from a table.

The Boy Scouts of America's National Council doesn't intend for Scouts to

obtain every merit badge and keeps no records on those who do, according to a spokeswoman. But there is a deeper logic and intention behind them.

"The merit badge itself is a simple embroidered patch, but the intangible end result of earning it is that the Scout gains self-confidence from overcoming obstacles to achieve a goal," the spokeswoman wrote in an email statement. "Earning merit badges allows Scouts to explore many fields, helps them round out their skills and perhaps introduces

them to subjects that will become lifelong interests and rewarding careers."

That just may be the case for Harold Kast, who credits most of what he knows to his being a Scout and is confident the skills he learned will serve him well.

As for Martin Kast, a father and Scoutmaster couldn't be prouder. There have been 110 million Scouts in the past century, he explains, and only 190 have earned every available merit badge.

"That's one in a million," he says. "Harold is one in a million."

LCHS Senior Earns 134 merit badges

Last month, local Eagle Scout Harold Kast completed the search and rescue merit badge, the last he could earn on a journey that began six years ago when he earned the geology merit badge.

To achieve Eagle rank, Scouts must earn 21 merit badges. In the 103-year history of the Boy Scouts of America, Kast is one of fewer than 200 scouts who earned every merit badge active at the time and one of a select group of only seven scouts who have earned 134 merit badges. The most challenging merit badge — bugling — took him two years to complete.

Kast is a member of Troop 509, chartered by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Kast, a senior at La Cañada

High School, is currently a junior assistant scoutmaster. This summer, he will again work at Camp Cherry Valley on Catalina Island, where he has been a merit badge instructor.

Along his scouting trail -- in which he was national youth leadership, leave no trace, wilderness first aid, lifeguard and powderhorn trained -- he also got the rarely awarded national medal for outdoor achievement, walked in the Rose Parade and led a crew on a 106-mile backpack trip in New Mexico. His merit badge counselors were experts in their professions and included scientists, doctors, lawyers, woodworkers, welders and artists.

Kast will attend college in the fall of 2013.



Harold Kast