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High Point Boy Scout earns all 137 merit badges

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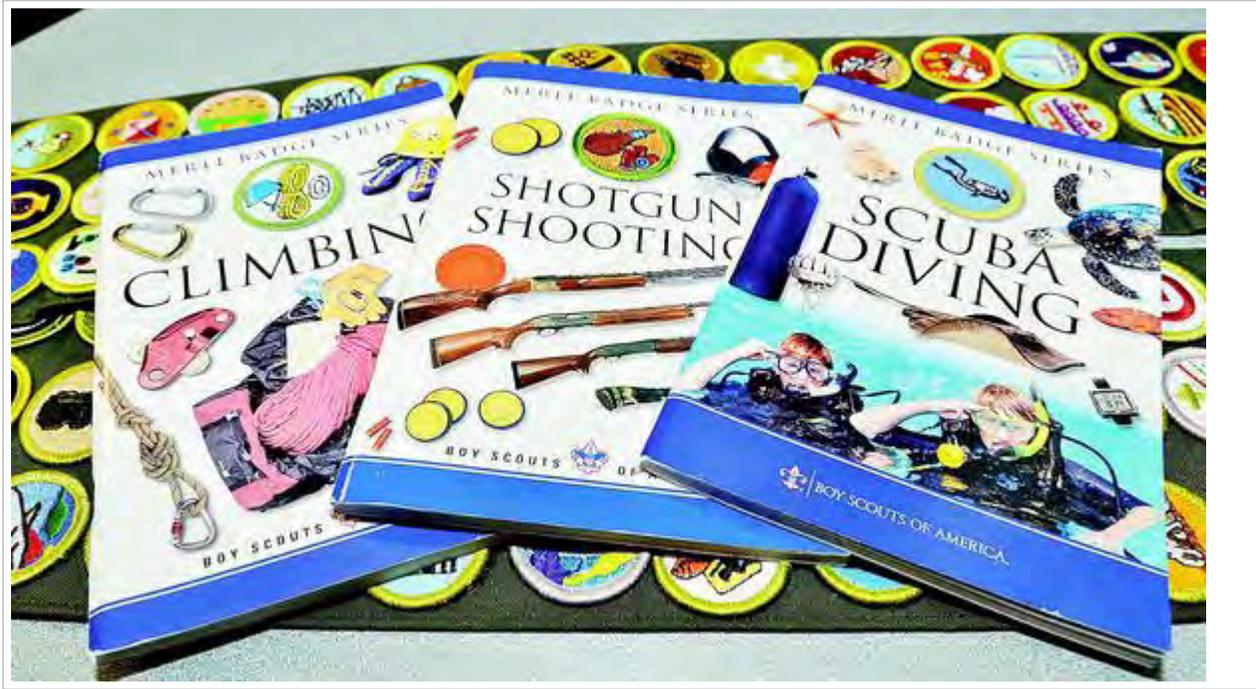
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[Jimmy Tomlin](#)



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Spencer Kearns, of Boy Scout Troop 42 in High Point, displays all 137 of his merit badges.



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HIGH POINT — Spencer Kearns has earned so many merit badges, he ought to get a merit badge for earning merit badges.

But there might not be anywhere to put it on his ceremonial Boy Scout sash.

The sash — which is actually two sashes sewn together to accommodate Spencer's, um, meritorious efforts — already has 137 merit badges on it. That's every merit badge the Boy Scouts of America has to offer, a rare feat that puts the High Point teenager in a very exclusive Scouting fraternity.

"I could not imagine how many hours he spent accomplishing this," says Spencer's scoutmaster, Marty Key, of Troop 42 at Covenant Church United Methodist. "It really speaks to his personal character and shows a tremendous amount of dedication."

To put the accomplishment in perspective, consider that only 21 merit badges are required to become an Eagle Scout — a rank that only 7 percent of Boy Scouts earned in 2012 — so Spencer has enough merit badges to have earned the Eagle distinction six times.

And still have 11 badges left over.

"I started out with me wanting to beat my father's record — he had 25 merit badges," Spencer says of his dad, Garry Kearns. "That didn't take too long to get, but then I knew of a guy from our troop who had gotten 55 merit badges, and I decided to get the record for my troop."

Once Spencer got the troop record, he says, he decided just to see how high he could set the bar for future Scouts in Troop 42.

“And once I got to, like, a hundred, I figured I should just try to get them all, so it kept going from there,” says Spencer, an 18-year-old senior at Wesleyan Christian Academy.

He earned the Eagle Scout rank in May 2012 and kept on earning badges, getting the final one this past August, about a month before he turned 18 and aged out of being eligible to earn any more badges.

Spencer’s merit badges, all of which are documented in official Scouting workbooks, range from some of the common badges required of Eagle Scouts — such as first aid, camping, family life and personal fitness — to more unusual badges, such as fingerprinting, bugling, chess, moviemaking and veterinary medicine.

The 137 merit badges also include four — carpentry, signaling, pathfinding and tracking — that could only be obtained in 2010, the year of the Boy Scouts’ centennial.

“They used to be merit badges, but they had stopped offering them,” explains Spencer’s mother, Dawn Kearns. “They brought them back just for that one year, because it was the 100th anniversary. Other Scouts won’t be able to get them now, but Spencer got them.”

His very first merit badge — as a 14-year-old new to the troop — was for cycling, which required him to complete a pair of 25-mile bike rides and a 50-miler. His toughest badge, he says, was for backpacking, which required hiking 30 miles over the course of five days while carrying a heavy backpack.

Spencer and his dad spent many a weekend going to what are known as “merit badge colleges,” which are basically workshops that provide Scouts the opportunity to earn about four or five merit badges at once. They attended merit badge colleges in six states — North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Virginia and Alabama — and Spencer went to three weeklong summer camps, where he earned additional merit badges.

“There were a lot of weekends I was in the car with my dad, but it was a good bonding experience — we got a lot closer hanging out pretty much every weekend,” Spencer recalls. “We put in a lot of miles, but it was definitely worth it.”

By the time he had earned all 137 merit badges, Spencer needed two sashes sewn together to display the badges, resulting in a single sash that’s nearly 8 feet long.

“Any time they have a formal Scouting night of some kind, he gets to wear his sash, and everybody stops him and oohs and aahs over it,” Dawn says. “He’s very proud of it, because he worked very hard and put in a lot of hours.”

It’s unclear exactly how many Boy Scouts have earned all of the merit badges like Spencer has, but MeritBadgeKnot.com — a website that attempts to track the achievement — has confirmed only 209 other Scouts in the 103-year history of Boy Scouts of America. Spencer is believed to be only the third Scout from North Carolina to achieve the milestone.

The creators of MeritBadgeKnot.com estimate that, on average, fewer than 18 Scouts a year earn all of the merit badges, a number that represents 0.0018 percent of all Scouts and about 0.036 percent of all Eagle Scouts.

“I’m one of a very select few that have ever gotten them all, so I’m really proud of that,” Spencer says. “And I’m glad I got to experience the different types of activities that all the merit badges brought. It’s been a great experience.”

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