

Reaching the highest rank

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David, Jacob, Jeremy and Jeffrey Koeller each achieved the rank of Eagle Scout within seven months of each other.

By JAYETTE BOLINSKI
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It takes 21 merit badges and a lot of hard work to become an Eagle Scout. But four Jackson, Mo., brothers, all of whom were conferred as Eagle scouts Sunday, have 450 merit badges among them - an accomplishment they sport with pride on the green sashes that cross the chests of their tan scout uniforms.

David, Jacob, Jeremy and Jeffrey Koeller, all of Troop 11 in Jackson, each achieved the rank of Eagle Scout within seven months of each other in 2000. David, 17, achieved Eagle Scout May 4; Jacob, 18, Oct. 5; Jeremy, 17, Nov. 2; and Jeffrey, 17, Dec. 5.

"It takes so much work, at first it seems impossible," David said of accumulating so many merit badges. "With everybody else's support, it becomes easy to grasp the idea of how to do it."

About 75 scouts, troop leaders, merit badge counselors, family members and friends gathered at the New McKendree Methodist Church in Jackson Sunday to watch as the Koeller brothers formally were inducted as Eagle Scouts during a special Court of Honor ceremony. Twelve Eagle scouts were in the audience.

David, Jacob, Jeremy and Jeffrey belong to a family of scouts. Their six siblings are or have been members of the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, and their parents, Stan and Marty Koeller, both were scouts when they were younger.

The boys, who attend Jackson High School, are part of a blended family, which accounts for their close ages.

Gone all over Midwest

Becoming an Eagle Scout is rigorous process that few achieve. To have four brothers achieve the rank within the



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The Koeller family had four of its sons, from left, Jacob, Jeffrey, Jeremy and David, achieve the rank of Eagle Scout Sunday at New McKendree Methodist Church in Jackson, Mo.

same year is rare indeed.

Even more remarkable is that the brothers are about six badges each away from acquiring every merit badge offered by the Boy Scouts of America. "The brothers even have one badge -- snow sports -- that the organization no longer offers.

Jacob said their quests for merit badges have taken them all over the Midwest, and they received guidance from merit badge counselors from all walks of life.

"It's important because we can go almost anywhere and somebody is going to recognize us because of the merit badges," he said.

The four have camped, cooked, carved, skied, cycled, hiked, swam, backpacked, bugled, fished, gardened, rowed, rafted, mastered first aid, demonstrated good citizenship, become informed consumers and learned about everything from pets to plants to pottery -- all in their quest to become Eagle Scouts.

The brothers agree that the knowledge they acquired about so many subjects will give them a leg up in preparing for adulthood.

Jeffrey, who is a twin to brother Jeremy, said working toward the Eagle Scout rank has boosted his self-esteem.

"I've gotten more mature," he said. "And I'm more informed on different skills I

can use in daily life. I have more leadership ability to help others out, not just scouts."

Troop 11 scout master Jim Shipman said that, nationally, only about 2 percent of Boy Scouts ever achieve the Eagle Scout rank. But 95 percent of the boys in 73-year-old Troop 11 become Eagle scouts.

An explanation for the high number escapes Shipman.

"It's just a good troop," he said.

Marty Koeller, the boys' mother, said she knows other parents who are surprised by their adult children's lack of knowledge about everyday tasks, such as registering to vote, pumping gas and cooking. She said her children, by being involved in scouting, already know more about the world than many other youngsters their ages.

"My boys got a merit badge that deals with all these things," she said. "They will be able to deal with anything life throws their way."

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