

Grain Valley Boy Scout earns every merit badge

Boy Scouts play taps



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While growing up, 16-year-old Ryan Niederschulte always knew he would become an Eagle Scout. The Grain Valley high schooler got his name from his father's Scoutmaster, a lifelong family mentor and friend.

Ryan surprised even his father, however, when he announced that he "wanted to do more" after attaining the Eagle Scout rank at the age of 13. Specifically, he wanted to earn all 138 merit badges. (Since then, the computer badge has been eliminated, so now Scouts can only earn 137.)

Out of 2.3 million Boy Scouts, approximately 12 achieve this each year.

"I saw in newspapers and magazines that other Scouts had gotten all the merit badges," Ryan said. "It seemed like a great opportunity to learn new things."

Larry Niederschulte still remembers how he reacted when his son shared this goal. He warned him that it would be “way too much work.” Now, seven years after that initial conversation, both father and son would agree that they’ve put forth a lot of work – but that they’ve also experienced a lot of fun.

Larry contacted merit badge universities, accelerated programs where Scouts can earn up to six badges in one day, paid for his son to take various lessons and drove to different states.

“A lot of those merit badges are about \$500 each when you take all of that into account,” Larry said. “But it just gives access to so many opportunities. It’s been wonderful for my son and me.”

They’ve gone to Beaver Lake in Arkansas, where Ryan earned a scuba-diving badge, and to West Virginia to learn about architecture. Beyond the travel, the many different activities – including whitewater rafting, water skiing, and archery – have made the process enjoyable and worthwhile.

Oftentimes, it’s also proved unexpected and funny. For instance, the now-eliminated computers badge included a lesson on how to use floppy disks.

As for his favorite merit badge, Ryan quickly decides on horsemanship.

“I actually took that course twice,” he recounted. “I really enjoyed it, and I’ve loved horses since I was little.”

The hardest? That would be bugling, which took Ryan and two other Scouts from Grain Valley’s Troop 310 nearly a year to master. Nevertheless, Ryan and other scouts recently played taps at a Memorial Day event. Afterward, many veterans thanked them and complimented the performance.

Ryan says overcoming challenging tasks like these has taught him a central lesson: to not be afraid of trying new things.

Larry also described how he thinks Boy Scouts has taught his son. Namely, he thinks the program can empower Ryan in everyday situations.

“He might go on a senior camping trip, for instance. He has no idea how many things he’s going to be able to do without thinking about it. He’s going to set a fire, look for wood, set up a tent and tie a knot,” Larry detailed.

“A kid from the same class could pull out his tent from Wal-mart and not even know where to start.”

Despite the work and time that went into the process, Ryan summed it up as “a ton of fun.”

Yet as he looks down at his heavily decorated vest, he’s also compelled to think a little deeper – and more long-term.

“These merit badges will help me in the future,” Ryan said. “I know that for a fact.”