



Scout snares all 120 merit badges in quest for Eagle honor

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Shortly after joining the Boy Scouts as a shy sixth-grader, David Schulze soaked in every word from a police officer who explained the science of catching bad guys.

The officer opened a kit and showed the class of boys how to dust for fingerprints, how to roll their ink-stained digits across blank cards, how each unique loop and swirl could be recorded and linked to a crime.

Then he showed them his gun and talked about the day his partner was killed in the line of duty.

"We got a slice of a cop's life, kind of what they go through," Schulze said. "That amazed me."

The fingerprinting lesson earned Schulze his first merit badge in the Boy Scouts of America, and he has spent the rest of his young life pursuing the 119 others offered through Scouting, an accomplishment that few ever reach.

Now a senior at Clark High School, Schulze has sifted for fossils in an archaeological dig, observed the migratory patterns of birds and studied how nuclear fusion works, all in a quest to earn every badge before he turns 18.

Schulze got his final badge, for studying insects, and finished a service project to become an Eagle Scout just before his 18th birthday in September.

Friends and family congratulated him Saturday at St. George Episcopal Church.

"He loved earning merit badges," Vicky Thomas, a retired Scoutmaster for Troop 66 in San Antonio, told a crowd of about 150 people.

"From the very beginning, David planned on earning every merit badge," Thomas said.

Merit badges are the Boy Scout's version of mini-internships for all kinds of hobbies and careers.

The staples include camping, first aid and swimming.

Others, such as coin collecting and basketry, fill a more unique niche.

Merit badges can involve a few hours of work or consume months of study.

It takes 21 badges to become an Eagle Scout, and only 4 percent of all Scouts in the country reach that highest rank.

Almost no one devotes the time to earn every single badge.

The National Council of the Boy Scouts doesn't keep an official tally of young men such as Schulze, but it says his achievement is rare.

"It's outstanding for someone to earn that number of merit badges because it's quite challenging and it's a lot of work," said Stephen Medicott, director of marketing for the National Council in Irving.

The number of badges fluctuates over the years, as some are dropped and others are added.

Now that it's over, Schulze is a little wistful for the days when he was earning merit badges at a lightning pace.

Maybe a new project, such as encouraging more boys to join the Scouts, will keep him busy.

"I guess I've always been an overachiever," Schulze said.

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