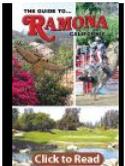


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Super-Achiever Sees The Sky Has No Limits

By Tracy Rolling - Ramona Home Journal • Thu, Nov 03, 2016



Ollie Shirley, center, receives a Certificate of Appreciation from the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department. He is pictured with Ranger Heidi Gutknecht and Richard Griebe. Photo Courtesy of the Shirley Family

What one person considers impossible, another sees as a sky without limits. Such is the case of Oliver "Ollie" Shirley IV, who has earned every Boy Scouts of America (BSA) merit badge available — and then some.

Shirley, a 17-year-old Eagle Scout in Troop 51, sponsored by Saint Martin of Tours Catholic Church in La Mesa, recently earned a total of 139 merit badges, three of which are now discontinued.

"This is a huge accomplishment," said his father, Oliver Shirley III, describing how merit badges are the study of a specific subject and offer a glimpse into a variety of careers, competences and life skills.

Twenty-one merit badges are required for a Scout to earn Eagle, the highest rank in the BSA program.

Over the course of his Scouting career, Ollie met with merit badge counselors, who are often professionals and tradespeople in any given subject. He has traveled throughout the county, attended workshops and even met with counselors from Ramona's Troop 768.

"Scouting has moved beyond camping and outdoor activities," said Trent McClure, Director of Field Services for BSA San Diego-Imperial Council. "We are focused on developing the whole character of young men."

Some of the merit badges Ollie earned were for robotics, engineering, cooking and "Citizenship In The Nation."

During the program's 106-year history, fewer than 350 Scouts across the nation have earned every merit badge.

But for Ollie, his persistence has paid off, and in more ways than one.

He was recently awarded the William T. Hornaday Award for his outstanding service in conservation.

"This is one of the rarest awards," said McClure, noting that these types of service projects are different from Eagle projects. "They require hundreds, sometimes even thousands of hours to complete."

Ollie applied the basic knowledge he learned from earning his bird study, woodworking, carpentry and drafting merit badges to construct and install 12 small bird nest boxes at Mission Trails Regional Park for his conservation and ecological project.

He spent two years monitoring and documenting the nests' activities, as he studied house wrens, ash-throated flycatchers, Bewick's wrens, tree swallows, Western bluebirds and house finches.

"The nests and information will be a great asset for the County of San Diego for years to come," said his father.

"During the past 80 years there have been less than 1,100 Hornaday recipients," said McClure. "That's out of the more than two-million Scouts today."

And if that's not enough, he's also a Thomas Edison Supernova Silver Award recipient.

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"This was awarded to him for his in-depth achievement in STEM-related activities (science, technology and mathematics)," said his father. "Ollie is the first, and so far only, Scout in the San Diego-Imperial Council to earn this award."

Additionally, Ollie earned all 20 Webelos activity badges and his Arrow of Light when he was in Cub Scout Pack 51. He was also elected by his peer Scouts to be a Brotherhood Member of the Order of the Arrow, a national program that only selects candidates who exemplify the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

"I first met Ollie Shirley as an 8-year-old Bear Scout," said Tom Ritz, who served as Troop 51's Scoutmaster. "It's been an honor to watch him grow from a child into the fine man he is today."

"As Ollie has proven by his achievements, there is nothing he can't do. Completion of all the merit badges is a rarity, especially with today's fast-paced life. He is currently a junior assistant Scoutmaster but has been a senior patrol leader in charge of over 50 youth. Scouting is about having fun learning life skills. If Ollie is known for anything, having fun is it. He is active and always with a quick and easy smile. He is respectful to his peers as well as adults. He has accomplished much, and I can't wait to see what the future will bring."

"I'm quite proud of Ollie for all of his accomplishments," said his father, adding that he, too, is an Eagle Scout (1972), along with two uncles and a cousin. This makes Ollie the fifth Eagle Scout in the Shirley family.

Ollie is a senior in the engineering academy at Patrick Henry High School. He plans to study engineering in college and use his keen passion for science, along with love of the outdoors, to pursue a limitless future.

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