

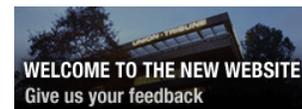
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Eagle Scout earns all 140 merit badges

Christopher Simmons of Escondido, 18, also honored for life-saving efforts during Cocos Fire



(/staff/pam-kragen/) By Pam Kragen (/staff/pam-kragen/) | 8:25 a.m. May 16, 2015



Escondido Boy Scout Christopher Simmons, who is an Eagle Scout and Assistant Scoutmaster, has earned all 140 merit badges. He is hoping to become a Navy doctor in the future. — John Gastaldo



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ESCONDIDO — Today, Eagle Scout Christopher Simmons was honored by family and troop members for the rare feat of earning all 140 merit badges offered by the Boy Scouts of America.

Although the Scouting organization doesn't track or merit badge recipients, an online record-keeping organization lists just five other U.S. scouts who have reached the 140 mark. Besides the badges, Simmons also last year earned the Scouts' coveted Honor Medal for his life- and home-saving efforts during the Cocos Fire last May.

The 18-year-old freshman at Palomar College said his drive to earn the badges started six years ago on a promise with his former scoutmaster. But it ended in tears in the fulfillment of a promise to his mom, who is battling stage 4 breast cancer.

“Knowing he dedicated his efforts to me and achieved Eagle Scout is an incredible feeling,” said his mother, Zoe Sanchez Richardson. “I get emotional and have even cried thinking about the man he’s become and his future.”

Simmons, who lives in Escondido with his mom and stepfather, Escondido police dispatcher Jerry Richardson, admits he made a lot of sacrifices over the years to earn all his badges, but he considers it time well spent.

“I wasn’t in it so much for the pleasure of earning the badges, but for learning the skills and knowledge associated with each badge,” he said. “With each one I earned, I became a bit of a master on that subject. It’s like experiencing what someone in that career would do and it opened so many doors to things I might never have known about.”

Born in Columbus, Ga., and raised in Oceanside, Simmons joined scouting as a Webelo Cub Scout.

“My mom was a single mom and she wanted me to have a positive male role model, so she asked me to join,” he said. “I really liked it because I met my friend, Jacob Baker, who grew up to be like my brother and is still my best friend 13 years later.”

When Simmons moved into Boy Scouts a few years later, his scoutmaster told the troop that any boy who could earn every merit badge would win \$100. Simmons and Baker decided to go for the prize, as well as Eagle Scout rank, to see who could get there first.

In his first year, Simmons earned just five badges with his troop members and slowly lost his motivation. Then when he was a freshman at Vista High School, he realized time was getting short to meet his goal. All badges must be earned before a scout’s 18th birthday, so he stepped up his pace.



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Earning every merit badge isn't easy. Each year, the Boy Scouts add new badges and retire others. In 1911, the first year badges were awarded, there were 57 covering a wide range of academic, skill and community service projects. According to the organization Merit Badge Knot, some 252 scouts have earned all the badges over the years, but Simmons said he's heard the number is more likely in the 2,000 range.

Some of the hardest badges to ear, Simmons said, were in personal management, communication, citizenship, animal science, nuclear science and architecture.

Midway through high school, where Simmons was running track, wrestling and playing football, his mother was diagnosed with cancer. The only thing she asked of him was to stay on track to earn his badges and Eagle Scout status because she thought it would help him stay focused and build leadership qualities. As his principal chauffeur and cheerleader, Richardson said she estimates he spent thousands of hours on weeknights and weekends working on the badges.

Merit badge counselor Karen Briley called Simmons' achievement extraordinary.



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“Most of the time, kids earn the bare minimum they need to become Eagle Scout, which is 21 badges,” Briley said. “What stood out about Chris was that he was so well organized and prepared, and he actually took the time to really learn about each subject.”

Briley said that when Simmons’ mom got sick, that lit an even bigger fire beneath him.

“Sometimes he’d worry about her and he wanted so much to do this for her,” she said. “But overall, he was one of the most happy-go-lucky kids I’ve ever met. He meets people and everybody loves him the second they meet him.”

In April 2014, Simmons earned his last badge for “inventing.” Then he started fundraising for the community service project required for Eagle Scout status, building a dual barbecue island for North County Solutions for Change in Vista.

Then the wildfires swept through North County and Simmons became a surprise hero.

With some curious friends, he hiked up into the hills behind Cal State San Marcos to take pictures of the flames with his phone. As the smoke thickened, his friends turned back but Simmons kept climbing. He found a man limping down the street and escorted him down the hill to a fire truck. Then we went back up and began using fire extinguishers and garden hoses to battle flames licking the yards of abandoned homes on Bloomfield Avenue. Although he cut his hands on glass and was sickened by smoke, he spent several hours protecting homes on the hillside.

One of the homes belonged to Todd Smith, who found a note from Simmons on his refrigerator when fire officials lifted the evacuation notice for his neighborhood. The note, marked with blood, was an apology for tracking mud on the carpet.

“He’s a real neat kid,” Smith told the U-T last year. “Some people sit back and watch, and other people run in. I am really impressed with him.”

Simmons’ heroics earned him news coverage, commendations and the Scouts’ Honor Medal. The publicity also helped him raise nearly \$10,000 in donations, plus \$5,000 in materials from KRC Rock, for the barbecue project.

With help from his fellow scouts, Simmons finished the project just in time to turn in his Eagle Scout paperwork on his 18th birthday last July.

Simmons is now playing football, as a punter, at Palomar and working toward his AA degree. He would like to join the Navy as an officer and hopes one day to become an anesthesiologist. He describes himself as a goal-oriented person who learned a lot about time management and himself in his quest to earn all the merit badges. Whenever he’s asked, he offers this advice to other scouts on the badge trek:

“Stay really motivated and make sure it’s a goal you really want because you’re going to give up a lot for it. Scouting becomes your life and you will have to make many sacrifices to make it work. But I don’t regret it 1 percent.”

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