

Deseret News

Maximum merit: Boy earns all 121 badges

S. Ogden Scout learns bugle for last award

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For the Deseret News

Published: January 15, 2009

SOUTH OGDEN — Perseverance and hard work paid off for Garrett Weeks, 16, who recently earned the last of the 121 merit badges offered by the Boy Scouts of America.

Only a handful of Scouts have ever accomplished such a goal, according to the Boy Scouts of America.

"Now when I face hard times and challenges, I know I can handle them because I've had the experience of other challenging things," Garrett said. "By setting goals and taking things a step at a time, I have been able to achieve many things."

Just to earn the bugling merit badge was a feat in itself. Garrett began on his own but found it challenging since he had never played a brass instrument. Then he had to find a bugling counselor and someone to teach him how to play the instrument.

After going through a stack of papers at the local Scout office, Garrett and his mother came across a bugling counselor who fortunately lived close by. She gave him lessons and guidance, and after several months of hour-long, weekly lessons, Garrett finished the requirements. To pass the merit badge off, a Scout must play a list of songs on the bugle and play the bugle for three months.

Earning all the merit badges has also given Garrett, a high school sophomore, confidence. When he worked to earn his rock climbing merit badge, he struggled and was scared at times. But once he did it, he had gained confidence in himself, he said.

He learned similar lessons in archery and waterskiing. "I had leaders who helped me all summer to master these skills," Garrett said. "I was successful because my parents helped me a lot and because of all the merit badge counselors who were willing to give their time."

"He had good leaders who took him on activities and spent several summers helping him pass off requirements in water sports, for example," said Lanette Weeks, Garrett's mother. "I really appreciate all the counselors who volunteered their time. We are really grateful and indebted to them."

David Pack, director of LDS Relationships with Boy Scouts of America, spoke at Garrett's award ceremony.

"The great thing about earning merit badges is the opportunities it gives these boys for learning new skills and for leadership, which will be especially important for their missions," Pack said. "Missions aren't easy, but Scouting helps these boys prepare for that."

Garrett started earning merit badges when he was 11 years old. He earned all the belt loops as a Cub Scout, so he thought it would be a good goal to do the same in Boy Scouts.

"At first I wasn't sure I could do it, but once I got to a certain point, I knew I could," Garrett said. "I had so many when I got my Eagle; I was about halfway, that I thought, 'why not do the rest?' "

This past summer, instead of having a summer job, Garrett was busy earning merit badges, and his parents agreed to pay him for his efforts.

"We decided it was worth it for the education he would get, and we knew it would keep him busy doing good things," Lanette said.

Fewer than 3 percent of Boy Scouts earn the 21 merit badges required for the Eagle Scout rank. "He eats up every merit badge like he's Pac Man," said Matt Weeks. But Garrett had an affinity for earning the awards, enough so that his father compared him to a classic arcade game.

Added Lanette: "Whenever you see Garrett you would see him with a merit badge book in hand. Any time he had any down time, like standing in line or waiting anywhere, he would pull a book out."

His favorite merit badge was space exploration, one he completed at a space camp in Huntsville, Ala. The hardest ones — and the last ones he completed — included white-water canoeing, where he had to pull himself into the canoe after capsizing.

"I like Scouting. It has taught me good morals," Garrett said. "It's lots of fun, and it's educational. If I'm ever in a situation where I need to recall this information, I'll be glad for Scouts. There are things I've learned that I would have never known about if it wasn't for Scouts. This has really helped me know what I want to be when I grow up."

Scouting is an important part of the Weeks family, members of the Pleasant Valley 4th Ward in the Pleasant Valley Ogden Utah Stake. Garrett is the oldest of four boys. His two brothers, Abe, 13, and Landon, 12, earned their Eagle Scout rank the night he was recognized for earning all 121 merit badges. His youngest brother, Addison, 10, is a Webelos, with mom Lanette as den leader. Dad Matt currently serves as Scoutmaster and was assistant Scoutmaster before that.

The Weekses have planned vacations around merit badges and made it a family event. All became involved as Garrett earned his merit badges. Garrett and his younger brothers have earned a total of 231 merit badges. "I've seen — just as the Scouting handbook says — that Scouting gives these boys valuable guidelines for life," Matt said. "It gives them direction and a strong foundation to build honest, meaningful lives. Really the most important recognition they receive is what they gain internally — confidence in new skills and participating in challenging adventures."

Garrett earned his Eagle rank at 14 and has since earned 9 palms as well as the Denali award for Varsity scouting. He hopes other boys will be motivated to do the same as he has. He was personally motivated to continue in his quest after reading about Parker Duncan of Bountiful, who earned all 121 merit badges in August 2007.

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