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Be Prepared: Boy Scout Earns Every Merit Badge

BY LAURA DOUGLASS Features Editor

Jun 23, 2023



Eagle Scout James Williamson with Assistant Scoutmaster Jonathan Black, Scoutmaster Michael Bassett and Assistant Scoutmaster Johnny Williamson, all of Troop 800, at the Mulieres Military monument in Aberdeen

TED FITZGERALD/The Pilot

Attaining the rank of Eagle Scout is a rare achievement. For James Williamson, that was a high point but not his only goal in Scouting. Earlier this month, he earned the scuba diving merit badge — the last skill he'd not yet completed — becoming one of only around 500 young men, and now young women, to earn every single merit badge.

“Scuba diving was definitely one of my favorites,” says James, “It was a lot of fun and thrilling. It was also a harder one to accomplish because you have to get (PADI Open Water Diver) certified.”

A rising sophomore at Sandhills Classical Christian School, Williamson joined Cub Scouts in first grade and is a member of Troop 800 in Aberdeen. He earned his Eagle award in 2021, by creating a granite monument located next to American Legion Post 72, in downtown Aberdeen, that honors women who have served in the military. Its inscription: “In honor of all the women who have served our country with pride to preserve our liberty and freedom...” including Williamson’s mother, grandmother and aunts. His father is also a military veteran.

Not surprisingly, Williamson hopes to attend West Point or another notable university, such as The Citadel or William and Mary, where he could participate in the Army ROTC program. He is leaning toward a degree path in strategic leadership and planning, “and world affairs,” he says.

Williamson currently serves as senior patrol leader of Troop 800, where fulfilling his longtime goal has not gone unnoticed by the younger Scouts. Several have already made known they also plan to earn every merit badge.

Some of Williamson’s personal merit badge favorites include fly fishing, which he earned on a trip to Yellowstone with his family; Whitewater, earned on a trip to Boone; backpacking earned in tandem with a 50-miler patch in the Uwharries; and welding, completed during a Boy Scout camp week. He typically worked on more than one merit badge at a time, all year long.

His very first: disability awareness, in honor of his younger sister, Ivy, who suffers from lissencephaly.

“I love Ivy. She’s been there for everything,” he says. “My grandmother also pushed me on and encouraged me, and helped me finish the gardening merit badge.”

His mother, Holly, also serves as an assistant scoutmaster with Troop 800. The family is a frequent sight each fall outside area grocery stores, selling popcorn to raise funds — James is Troop 800’s top seller.

“He has been one of our number one kids. Out of all the years of our troop, he has earned the most merit badges. We are proud of him,” says Scoutmaster Michael Bassett. “Earning merit badges is a lot of work. You’ve got to want it.”

Assistant Scoutmaster Jonathan Black sees a bright future ahead for Williamson. “As hard as James has worked here, he will continue to work hard and set high goals, and achieve them.”

Assistant Scoutmaster Johnny Williamson (no relation) agrees. “James is well rounded. He puts God first, family next and then country. That I give him credit for — 100 percent. When he started Scouting, he made his Lord his savior and he’s never left.”

“His leaders are unquestionably the greatest group. They have been such great male role models and I think that (James) would not have gone as far as he did without them,” said Holly.

Williamson is also appreciative of community members and local businesses that also helped James over the past few years, such as Black Tire lending a hand when he earned the automotive maintenance merit badge, Estes Trucking for the truck transportation merit badge, Matthew Callahan for helping with the surveying badge, Aberdeen Police for the fingerprint merit badge, and 1911 for the graphic arts merit badge.

In addition to Scouting, Williamson earned the President’s Volunteer Service Award (100 hours), volunteered with the Vass Food Bank and Wreaths Across America, and was presented with the Billy Michal Student Leadership Award in 2022.

“I believe that Scouting is a great organization for children. It gets them to be in nature, to be outside, and offers so many opportunities,” James says. “I’ve met so many great people and had such great experiences.”

Contact Laura Douglass at (910) 693-2475 or laura@thepilot.com.



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