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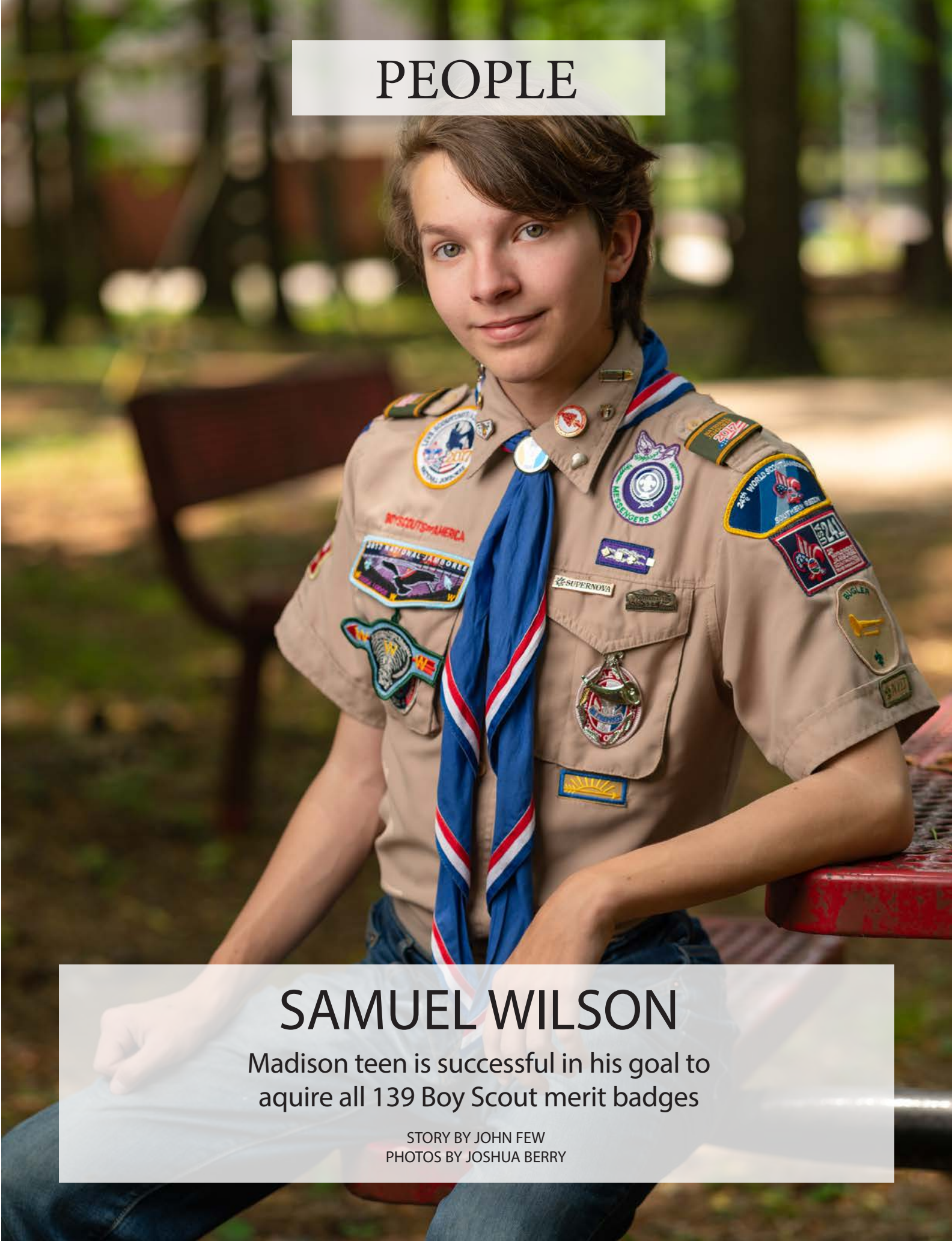
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A RARE FEAT

Samuel Wilson is successful in his goal to aquire all 139 Boy Scout merit badges

PEOPLE



SAMUEL WILSON

Madison teen is successful in his goal to
acquire all 139 Boy Scout merit badges

STORY BY JOHN FEW
PHOTOS BY JOSHUA BERRY



Samuel Wilson has been a Madison Boy Scout with Troop 83.

Anyone who was ever a Boy Scout will tell you that earning the rank of Eagle is the highest achievement possible. But when a young Madison teen accomplished that feat at the age of fourteen, he decided to set his personal bar even higher.

Samuel Wilson, now eighteen-years-old, has accomplished a feat so rare in scouting that only a handful of Boy Scouts have ever reached it. He has earned all 139 merit badges offered by the Boy Scouts of America, completing the requirements just before his 18th birthday.

“Just to understand exactly how rare that is, about one out of every four scouts will attain the rank of Eagle -- that equals to about 1,500 scouts each year,” Samuel said. “There have only been around 500 scouts who have achieved this goal since the Boy Scouts were founded in 1910.”

The drive to earn all the badges began when Samuel was an eleven-year-old Webelo Scout, the last classification a Cub Scout achieves before becoming a Boy Scout. “He had earned all of the badges available to Webelos at that time,” said his mother, Nicky. “He was very quick to say, he could go on to earn all the Boy Scout badges too -- and he did.”

For his Eagle Scout project, Samuel did a lot of work at Ashley Park.

“The drainage ditch was too small after 30 years of growth,” his mother said. “He noticed the park was having an erosion problem because the ditch would overflow. He met with the city engineer and then the city surveyor and the ditch was widened and 200 tons of rock was brought in to line the ditch. He also repainted the swing sets and put new boards on two of the benches that had lost numerous boards.”

That was in 2018. This summer plans to repaint the benches.

“Earning my Eagle Scout was a major goal of mine, and I learned that getting all the badges was actually achievable, even though it is very difficult to do,” Samuel said. The positive attitude to try anything at least once, and sometimes over and over again until he achieves his goal, has been the driving factor in Samuel’s accomplishment.

Merit badges are the basis for teaching young boys a variety of skills, such as backpacking, bugling, wilderness camping and welding.

When asked which badges were the most memorable to earn, Samuel said, “Most badges have a story. There are



For his Eagle Scout project, Samuel renovated Ashley Park at the age of only 13 years old, completing it at age 14.

some, like fingerprinting where you can earn that badge in about half an hour. Other badges did not require a lot of hands-on effort, mostly about what you learn." Then, there are others that at times seemed to push Samuel's limits and brought several new adventures into his life.

The bicycling merit badge was one of the most memorable one to earn, Samuel said. "I did not know how to bike until that time. I knew if I was going to earn that badge, I had to learn how. Immediately, deciding to earn that badge was a challenge."

One of the requirements facing Samuel in earning this badge was that had to complete a 50-mile bike ride in under eight hours. "I thought, wow, I have a lot of work to do," he said. "It was difficult, but I got there. In fact, my dad and I had such an adventure with it that we have continued to do 'half century' (50-mile) bike rides as a hobby. It was so much fun the first time, and we learned a lot from it, so we continued doing it."

Samuel says his main hobbies are automotive maintenance and model railroading. He developed a love for the hobby when he earned his first Boy Scout badge, the Model Railroad Merit Badge. Since then, he has been working on a model train layout at his grandfather's house in Tennessee.

Samuel has kept the badges in order on his sashes as he has earned them.

"If you want to learn how do something without getting

your feet too wet into it, the merit badges are a fantastic way to do that," Samuel said. "If you want to learn pottery, there is a pottery badge."

Some of the skills he learned earning the badges, Samuel says he will certainly develop further on in the future. "Welding was something I had a lot of fun learning," he said. "I want to get my own welder just because I enjoyed it so much, and there is a lot I can do with it in relation to automotive maintenance."

Some new skills Samuel may not be so eager to continue as he moves forward in life.

"You do not have to master each skill, but you have to try it and be able to meet the requirements," he said. "With the bugling badge, you had to learn how to bugle and how to play ten calls. I did that. Did I play them very well? Maybe not."

Reaching his goal, Samuel wrapped it up just in time. "I finished my last one the day before I aged out, just because it was such a time crunch to get everything done," he explained. "Some people want to earn them all, but they just do not have the time or can't get around to all of them."

Samuel said he would go to "Merit Badge University" summer camps, where they offer scouts the environment to earn multiple badges while there. "I would sometimes double up on summer camps just to get in as many as I could," he added. "I would earn two or three badges a

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One of Samuel's favorite hobbies is automotive maintenance, which the Boy Scouts have a merit badge for too.

weekend, three or four times every summer and every fall. If I had not done that, I do not think there would have been a way for me to earn all of them."

The Wilsons put a lot of time, and miles, into helping Samuel have the opportunity to earn more badges. "We have gone as far as Ohio to attend some merit badge universities," Samuel said.

Samuel's next big challenge will be starting college at Austin Peay in Clarksville, TN, where he will major in communications. He graduated from Excalibur Christian School in May.

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