

Ideas for Eagle Service Projects

BY ROBERT E. HOOD

THE EAGLE AWARD IS THE Ph.D. Of Scouting. Respected for his learning and perseverance, the Eagle Scout brings honor to us all. In the community at large, he has become a symbol of the kind of citizen Scouting builds.

An honor roll of distinguished Eagles would be too unwieldy for these pages, but names do spring instantly to mind: James Lovell, astronaut; President Gerald Ford; Governors Michael Dukakis (Massachusetts) and Bill Clements (Texas); movie maker Steven Spielberg; General Larry D. Welch, chief of staff, U.S. Air Force, and William D. Sessions, director of the F.B.I.

One should take care when making such an all-star list so as not to obscure the true nature of the Eagle Scout. He's not an entertainer basking in a spotlight and waiting for a standing ovation. Nor is he a robot with a special skill at grinding our merit badges. He doesn't represent pure skill, but rather reflects character. He is a leader.

The Eagle Scout service project is a key to his development. It demands the ability to conceive and carry out a community plan to help a local group, a school, a church, or some other worthy institution.

Typical service projects often involve conservation (the repairing of trails, planting trees), safety (involving bikes, for example), helping the handicapped, fixing toys for the underprivileged, restoring community landmarks, or service to the elderly.

Whatever the project, it must have true value and be approved by the youth's Scoutmaster and troop committee and be reviewed by the Scout district or council. It should require enough time and effort to challenge a Scout's capacity for leading and directing other boys.

The project sometimes is highly imaginative and fills a need new to the community. Take the example of Peter Chandler of Troop 309, Biddeford, Me.

Peter decided to fingerprint children under the age of 10, a strong contemporary project that met with instant acceptance by parents, teachers,

business people, the police, and the press. At a time when the disappearance of young people is prevalent, fingerprinting children is indeed an outstanding public service.

Peter received training in fingerprinting from the local police department which also supplied the necessary equipment. Then he set a date for the project with the manager of a local drugstore. He drafted a letter of explanation giving the location, time and date of the project. He met with the superintendent of schools who approved sending letters to the homes of students from kindergarten to grade four. Letters went to all the public and parochial schools.

After explaining the value of fingerprinting to members of Troop 309, Peter taught them its technique. Five Scouts volunteered to help fingerprint the children.

"Advertising also was a crucial aspect of my project," he explained later. "Two newspapers ran articles, as did the public service cable station." He also made posters for display in local stores.

Peter and his volunteers set up shop early one Saturday in November, 1989. They fingerprinted children from 9 A.M. until 3 P.M. "We fingerprinted at least 121 children," he reported. It averaged out to one child every three minutes.

"The line was so long," he said. "I'm sure we missed counting a few." His project was a big success and one that could be duplicated across the nation.

Obviously, service to the community takes many other forms, heartwarming in nature and deserving of recognition. The Eagle project of Brian Miller of Troop 588, Columbus, Ohio is deserving. His story began on a cold December morning when he was training to take over a paper route. At 4:45 A.M. he was riding his bike toward the house of a fellow Scout when he smelled smoke.

"I looked to the left and saw that the Sharon Woods Baptist Church was on fire. Flames were gushing from every window. Bushes and shrubbery were burning on the front lawn. In the parking lot across from the fire there was a Red Cross van handing out coffee and food to the firemen. Station WCMH was already on the scene getting ready to send a live shot back to the studio."

After finishing his paper route, Brian returned to the site of the fire and stayed most of the day. Even though he didn't belong to the church, he wanted to help in its rebuilding. So he made an appointment with the pastor to discuss what Scouts might do to help.

"We discussed how the Scouts could help in rebuilding the church," Brian said. "We finally decided that it would be best if the Scouts helped maintain a clean construction site. I was told that I could keep any unused wood to recycle in various ways."

Teams of Scouts under Brian's direction cleaned up the site, salvaging usable materials for recycling. They were able to provide handmade toys for the needy, materials for the local crafts program and plaques for orthopedic handicapped children. His project stretched out over 18 months and delayed his advancement to Eagle. But it was well worth the effort, for it showed how a boy could be a leader in a service program dominated by adults.

Another Scout used his talents as a designer and builder for a professional-looking project. Christopher M. Davis built a lakeside shelter at the Asbury Methodist Home for senior citizen in Gaithersburg, MD. Christopher, member of Troop 489, gave the shelter a concrete deck, handcrafted benches and planters, and a slatted roof. In appreciation for his and his crew's skill and hard work, he was honored at the shelter's dedication ceremony.

Billy H. Gluff, II, of Troop 613, Winter Park, Fla., worked in the field on conservation. His Eagle project was designed to help save the American kestrel, also known as the sparrow hawk. A budding industrialist, Billy planned to build 50 birdhouses and donate them to the Audubon Society in Maitland, Fla.

"My method," he wrote in his proposal, "will be the assembly line." He separated the Scouts into small groups - markers, cutters, finishers, assemblers, etc. The finished products were transported by van to the Audubon House in Maitland.

Afterward he said, "I contacted the person in charge of publicity in our troop and asked her to write a report on the project."

Now that's delegating.

Are you listening, Detroit?

In Hackettstown, N.J., William Thomas of Troop 154 embarked on a man-sized project. He noticed that the fire hydrants in Mansfield Township needed upgrading; about 100 of them required fresh paint. He also felt that an identifying stencil ought to be painted on the road near each hydrant.

Bill decided to lend a hand - well, a number of hands. He organized and supervised Troop 154, which soon was chipping and painting throughout the township. Local officials were mightily impressed with his efforts.

"Well done!" wrote the fire company, "As you know, the marking of fire hydrants on the road helps us find these water sources in an emergency during the winter when snow plows bury them. Also the maintenance on the plugs will not only better the appearance of the hydrants but will also ensure a working water source in the event we need one."

The executive director of the Hackettstown Municipal Utilities Authority wrote a letter of appreciation: "Your leadership skills were obvious upon noting the planning involved and the quality of the work which was performed by you and the other Scouts under your direction."

Sometimes a youngster demonstrated unusual, even superhuman strength of character or courage to become an Eagle. Two such examples follow.

David Ruch of Troop 485 of Westlake Village, Calif, chose an Eagle project in which he had to relive a terrifying experience. When he was five

years old a can of kerosene exploded, engulfing him and his sister in flames. His sister died and he was horribly burned and scarred. Since then he has undergone 10 separate operations to restore his upper body.

The average person would bury that experience deep within himself. David, with incredible force of character, has used it to help others. For his Eagle project, he visited elementary schools to present a program called "Fire Safety in the Home." The program included a movie in which David, at age 11, had been one of the narrators. He also demonstrated in person and with help of this Scouts, the Stop, Drop and Roll method which had saved his life as a five year old.

The program acquired an extra dimension when David threw it open to comments from the floor. Children asked probing questions about his disfigurement and its effect on him.

"Going through elementary school wasn't easy," he told one audience. "Kids made fun of me. I'm talking about anyone with a mark on his face, whether they're disabled or a little different. People stare and laugh and it hurts."

His young audience was deeply moved by his history of mental and physical anguish. His honesty when facing people and delivering the safety message was a message in itself. He went from school to school, reaching more than 1,800 pupils and impressing them with the needs for sane safety in the home.

A year or so later, a neighborhood fire destroyed several houses. A TV interviewer asked one young girl how her family escaped the fast moving flames. He answer: "A Boy Scout visited our school and taught us how to plan and get out of our house in case of fire."

Could there be a finer testimonial for David?

Another truly inspiring and heroic Eagle is Eugene Jeppson of Troop 204, Park Valley, Utah, who was born with myositis ossificans, a progressive, rare bone disease. Since birth, Eugene had gradually lost mobility, and each bruise he suffered turned into a calcified deposit. Most of the bones in his body have fused, and now it is impossible for him to

move his arms, turn his head, or bend over. He has a difficult time walking.

Eugene has met adversity head-on, with a will and spirit that astonish all who know him. Determined to become an Eagle, he earned the 21 badges with only two alternatives, for Swimming and Lifesaving. When the troop made a five mile hike up a mountain, he trudged along, much to everybody's admiration.

His Eagle project reflected a life-long desire to ride a bike. He spent many hours drafting plans for a bicycle rack for the children of the local elementary school. He and his Scout friends wanted them to have a safe spot to park their bikes.

He has always been very busy. A patrol leader, Varsity Scout Team captain, Explorer post president, he's also been active in his church organizations, serving as president and in other positions of leadership. He has earned all three religious awards given by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints - "Faith in God," "On My Honor," and "Duty to God."

In 1989 he graduated from high school named as the "Rare Bear," an honor given to the student who epitomizes school spirit as well as enthusiasm and concern for others. Later in the year Eugene was named Handicapped Scout of the Year by the Golden Spike District.

His awards surprise nobody, least of all Lane Palmer, his Explorer post Advisor. "If there's anything Eugene can do, he'll do it. Some of the things he can't do, he'll try anyway. He's not a quitter." "No, there's not a bit of quit in this Eagle. He's a perfect role model for aspiring Eagles - and for young people everywhere."

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