

Boy Scouts Reach the Highest Rank of Eagle

By Mary Beth Weisner

Baseball, hot dogs, apple pie and Chevrolet is what most of us think of when we think of quintessential Americana. Perhaps we should add Scouting to that mix. Everyone I know has a brother, cousin or friend who was a Cub Scout or Boy Scout. Mention the Girl Scouts and inevitably, the conversations shifts to the ever-famous Thin Mint Cookies. Although most of us can remember cheering on a family member as they marched in a Memorial Day Parade or purchasing those delicious Girl Scout Cookies, some of us don't personally know an individual who has achieved the Boy Scouts highest rank of Eagle.

This weekend, Troop 94 in Armonk ushered in eleven new Eagle Scouts with all the pomp and circumstance that one might only witness at a swearing in or graduation. St. Francis Hall, the gymnasium at the Church of St. Patrick on Cox Avenue, was transformed into a sea of red, white and blue. Approximately 250 family, friends and invited dignitaries attended to celebrate this tremendous accomplishment. Troop 94's newest Eagle Scouts are Pedro Batalla III, Julian D. Weisner, Paul J. Baumann, Michael J. Partelow, Joseph Mandel, Robert J. LeDone III, Leonard N. Baratta, Arjun A. Patel, Michael C. Baris, John H. Wellington and Brandon S. Rosenblum.

The Boy Scouts have had a presence here in Armonk for decades. In the 1950's and 1960's, Troop 2 was the active Boy Scout Troop in town. However, 50 years ago, many of the boys here in town left Scouting at the age of 14 to join the Civil Air Patrol. Who can blame them for jumping at the opportunities presented by a town airport? Troop 2 eventually disbanded and Troop 94 was formed. Today, boys remain in Scouting to attain the rank of Eagle.

Troop 94 has had tremendous success producing Eagle Scouts. With the addition of these eleven boys, the total number of Eagle Scouts for Troop 94 stands at an even 50. The percentages vary depending upon which way surveys are tallied but the general consensus is that less than 5% of all boys who get involved in Scouting progress through the ranks to eventually become Eagle Scouts. For eleven scouts, of approximately 45 currently enrolled, to make it to Eagle in one year is 24%, which far exceeds the National average.

In order to attain the rank of Eagle, a Scout must earn 21 merit badges, 11 of which are mandatory. Citizenship of the Community, Nation and World, Environmental Science, First Aid or Personal Management and Personal Fitness are some of the required eleven badges. Personal Management and Personal Fitness each require the boys to keep a three month log of activities...since continuity is often not the first attribute you might think of when you think of a teenage boys, you may begin to understand what sets an Eagle Scout apart from they rest of the boys who are involved in Scouting.

The culminating aspect of achieving Eagle is the individual service project, better known

to each boy as “My Eagle Project”. What exactly is an Eagle Project? It is a leadership project that must be approved by the Boy Scout Council. The Scout needs to design, plan and oversee the execution of their project. However; it gets tricky, the boys cannot perform any of the labor needed to complete their Eagle Project themselves. They must recruit volunteers to do the work. While completing an Eagle Project, one learns how to motivate, gather and delegate work to others. Again, it is not an easy task for teenagers to embrace. All Eagle requirements must be completed prior to the boys turning 18. If the requirements are not complete, he will have missed the opportunity to become an Eagle.

Some might think Scouting is square, un-cool or even for those without a social life. *Au contraire...* Troop 94’s eleven new Eagle Scouts are active vital contributors to our community. Here are some of the activities these boys have participated in, and positions they’ve held, while at Byram Hills High School: Jazz Band, Captain of the Byram Hills State Championship Soccer team, recipient of the Louis Armstrong Jazz Award, baseball and lacrosse players, members of the Theater Department and crew head, Peer Leaders, honor students and musicians that play with the BHHS band at numerous Memorial Day celebrations.

The mutual respect and camaraderie these young men share for one another was evident. Many have been in Scouting together since 1st grade. These boys are like brothers. Even though they do not travel in the same social circles at school, there is a fraternity-like bond that has kept these boys together.

Many dignitaries were present at the ceremony. Congresswoman Nita Lowey commended the boys for their accomplishments. Legislator John Nonna presented each boy with a proclamation. Each boy was officially awarded a specific day in June, naming a day in June 2010 as their very own Westchester County Day. Nonna joked that although each boy now has a “Day” in the county of Westchester, that doesn’t give him the right to speed while driving. Nonna did a wonderful job recognizing the young man’s accomplishments and individually thanked them for their Eagle project. He teased, “Troop 94 is responsible for rebuilding half of Westchester County.” What these young men have accomplished is monumental, especially while listening to Nonna list all eleven projects back to back. Nonna collectively thanked the boys for saving the taxpayers’ tax dollars. Here are a few of the projects these young men completed all for the betterment of our community.

- A kiosk was built at Rockefeller State Park.
- Shelters were enhanced for Adopt a Dog.
- Benches were built at Westmoreland Sanctuary,
- An Organic Garden was built.
- Paths were cleared and installed at our local town parks.
- Bird Houses were built
- The Cemetery at St. Stephen’s Episcopal Church was inventoried while the gravestones were reconditioned and cleaned.
- The Baptismal tank at the Gospel Assembly Church in Ossining was repaired and

refurbished

Town Supervisor, Bill Weaver gave the boys a proclamation and mentioned that he has known many of these boys, their parents and, in some cases, their grandparents. New York State Assemblyman Robert Castelli was also in attendance and he too awarded the boys with a certificate of achievement. Separately, the dignitaries mentioned how much they enjoy participating in an Eagle Ceremony. Collectively, they addressed these young men as the leaders of tomorrow.

Rich Baris, the current Scoutmaster of Troop 94 presented each Eagle Scout with a commemorative centennial coin minted by the US Mint which recognizes the 100 Year Anniversary of the Boy Scouts. Boy Scouts were originally brought to the United States from England in 1910.

The first Eagle Scout was Arthur Rose Eldred of Troop 1. Troop 1 was the first Boy Scout Troop in the United States and it was located in Rockville Centre, N.Y. Eldred achieved Eagle in August of 1912. He was awarded the actual badge on Labor Day 1912. The delay was due to the fact that the dies for the Boy Scout emblem had not been completed. Eldred was later credited with saving a fellow scout from drowning. He was awarded the BSA Honor Metal by Chief Seton.

None of these boys would have made it all these years without the dedication and support of the community. I am not alone in wondering why Armonk's Troop 94 is so successful at turning out Eagle Scouts. Many of us feel it is due to the participation of two men in particular who have graciously given their personal time in support of Scouting here in town: Harry Tompkins, Scoutmaster 1986 - 2009 and Mike Maron, Assistant Scoutmaster 1994 - 2009. These two men have volunteered and mentored many scouts. "Mike and Harry were a perfect compliment to each other," Julian Weisner stated, "Mr. Maron was always there at all the Campouts with his chili and laid back attitude while Mr. Tompkins was there to help me stay on task and navigate the system."

I asked Harry Tompkins why he felt Troop 94 has had such a great success with Eagle Scouts. His response was, "I fully believe it is because we live in a community that encourages achievement and commitment. Our scout families are the engines that create Eagle Scouts." Harry continued, "...without the Eagle 'Can Do' spirits of the moms and dads, we would have far fewer Eagle Scouts in our Troop."

I asked 17-year old John Wellington, better known as Jack, if he ever thought he'd become an Eagle Scout? "I never thought too much about becoming an Eagle Scout. I was in Boy Scouts because it was fun. But when I became a Life Scout, it was time to start thinking about Eagle."

After all the awards were given out, the boys spoke about what Scouting has meant to them. Paul Baumann, one of the older Scouts, spoke first. Paul commented on the bond he had made with his fellow Scouts, "I love these guys." Many of the boys reflected upon their camp experiences. Peter Batalla thanked the fathers who chaperoned the

camping trips. These fathers made camping fun. “On the first camping trip, we didn’t have enough food, basically the next campsite over fed us for the weekend. From that point on, we had the BEST FOOD...” said Batalla. “When we went camping, we had ribs, whole turkeys, steaks...just meat.”

All of these boys possess a drive and determination that certainly facilitated them achieving Eagle, but the community support was crucial in their successes. Although both the Maron and Tompkins families have sons who attained Eagle, they’ve remained a part of the supporting team for many years thereafter. Tompkins remarks that when it comes to Scouting, “Sandy was my partner in running the Troop (just as Mike and Kris Maron were) for my entire tenure”. Both Sandy and Kris were involved in scouting prior to their respective husbands; both were Cub Scout Den Mothers. Sandy was responsible for keeping all of Troop 94’s bookkeeping in order, getting the boys their merit badges and she and Kris shared the responsibility of hostess for too many Honor Courts to mention! The Tompkins and Marons have had a wonderful partnership that all of Armonk has benefited from.

All three of the Scoutmasters have sons who achieved Eagle. Andrew Tompkins, 2002, John Maron in 2008 and Michael Baris is one of these last eleven boys. The eleven Scouts honored all of the scoutmasters, Baris, Tompkins and Maron, with plaques for their years of service. Each plaque listed the boys that each Scoutmaster had helped achieve Eagle. Mr. Tompkins plaque listed 31 young men, Maron’s plaque listed 24 and Baris’s plaque listed these 11 boys. Sandy Tompkins and Kris Maron were given bouquets of fresh flowers as well as a perennial plant that will continue to bloom year after year to remind them of all those that they have helped.

Most of us reading this will have a niece, nephew, son, daughter or neighbor who might ask for help with a Scouting project. Help them, as this is a small way we can all help out. Congratulations to all of Troop 94’s newest Eagles!