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## 18-year-old Boy Scout holds every current merit badge

By Hunter Schwarz

January 6th, 2012 @ 6:23pm


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CENTERVILLE — Not every Boy Scout puts in the work to earn their Eagle Scout award, but even fewer can say they earned every merit badge.

John Bills, 18, of Centerville, is one of the few. He comes from a family of Eagle Scouts, and his collection of merit badges — 129 — is larger than the combined total of his father, grandfather and five uncles.

“This wasn’t the goal in the first place,” he said.

Bills earned his Eagle Scout badge when he was 13 years old, an achievement that requires only 21 merit badges. Because he was eligible to participate in Scouting until he was 18, however, he decided to continue earning and learning.

“I had so much fun that I kept going,” he said.

Although the Boy Scouts of America does not keep a record of Scouts who earn every current merit badge, the organization said it is a very small

percentage.

“Approximately 200 Scouts earn in excess of 100 merit badges annually,” said Renée Fairrer, public relations manager for the Boy Scouts of America.

Journalism was Bills’ first merit badge, which he earned when he began Scouting. He earned his final one on the day before his birthday.

Bills credits his father, Scout leaders and the many merit badge counselors for his achievement.

**“None of this was even possible without my dad. You need someone who can support you. I had a ton of great leaders.”**

— John Bills

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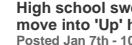
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"None of this was even possible without my dad," Bills said. "You need someone who can support you. I had a ton of great leaders."

La Mar Bangerter, Bills' scoutmaster when he was 13, remembered how self-motivated the young Scout was.

"He would go out and do it on his own," he said. "He was very much a leader among the other boys."

Some merit badges were easier than others, Bills said. The nature and forestry merit badges, for example, didn't require as much effort as personal management and personal fitness, merit badges that take three months to track progress. Others gave Bills the chance to learn new skills like bugling and Morse code.

Bills' goal became more challenging when the Boy Scouts of America added four "historic" merit badges — pathfinding, tracking, signalling and carpentry — to celebrate its 100th anniversary. These merit badges were only available for a year.

"We already had a cramped schedule," he said. "It was a really hectic last year."

His pursuits took him on more than 200 miles of hiking, the set of a Hollywood movie and to a federal court.

During a trip to the Utah Humane Society, Bills and his father decided to take a dog, Jake, home. A few days later, Jake's barking woke them up in the night, leading them to discover that Bills' grandfather had locked himself out on a cold February night. Bills credits his new dog for saving his grandfather's life.

Experiences like that became common as Bills completed the more than 2,250 requirements to earn all his merit badges. His father, Chris Bills, said opportunities would appear conveniently and strangers were often excited to help like a semitruck driver who helped with the truck transportation merit badge.

"It was miraculous at first, but then it became the norm," his father said.

Discipline, patience and goal setting are among the skills Bills gained from Scouting, and he said he will cherish the memories he made.

"It's the experiences I'll take with me," Bills said. "We've had so many once-in-a-lifetime experiences."

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