

Attendance doubles for Scouts' Merit Badge Fair



By: Ed Cicenas / For the Clinton Journal - Updated: 1 year ago

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Courtesy of Edvydas Cicenas

Morgan Donovan is recognized during the opening ceremony as not only having traveled the furthest distance, more than 2000 miles, but as holding the most merit badges of any Boy Scout in the room.

Just one more to go.

Morgan Donovan of Wildomar, Calif., started on a huge journey when he joined Boy Scouts nearly six years ago. He decided to earn every merit badge Boy Scouts of America had to offer, all 138.

He arrived in Clinton, needing three and left with just one undone.

His pursuit has taken him to many places, even one as far away from his home as Clinton this past weekend. He and his mother, Heather Donovan, took about nine hours to travel from their home town near San Diego to Exelon's Clinton Power Station, covering more than 2,000 miles in his quest.

He polished off a drafting merit badge in the morning and all that was left was a very specialized metal-crafting badge.

Metal-crafting, or as it more commonly known, blacksmithing harkens back to yesteryear when specialized craftsmen worked with forges and tongs. Terry Husted of Clinton is one such expert. The former Troop 142 Committee Chair and Scout leader was tickled to be the second-to-last counselor for Donovan.

"He's very driven, very motivated to get his merit badges," said Husted. Donovan created a wall hook with a special twist on the anvil using square tapers after learning safety and elementary skills from Husted.

This puts him at magic number 137 — just one more to go. His last adventure puts him deep in the waters of the Pacific, where he will work on his scuba diving merit badge later this year.

He has until November to achieve his goal, when he turns 18 and can no longer be a Boy Scout. The actual diving requirement should be met in October with classes in September.

Troop 142 leaders scrambled to reach any of several scuba merit badge counselors in the area to help him, with the thought he could actually finish his quest in Illinois. But no luck in reaching any of the scuba counselors on a Saturday late afternoon.

That many merit badges cover so many areas of life — just to name a few that he has completed, nuclear science, wilderness first aid, fingerprinting, swimming, veterinary medicine, canoeing, citizenship, and dog care (his first one). This list goes on for quite a while.

“My favorite badge was small-boat sailing,” said Donovan. Small-boat sailing has the Scout and a buddy learning how to safely sail a small craft, learning navigation and care of the small boat. His least favorite had him creating a collection. And the toughest was cycling, which includes multiple long distance rides with distances of 50 miles.

The quest for merit badges helped Donovan in choosing nursing as a career he wants after finishing high school.

“All those badges are brief, but created a huge impact on what I want to do in life,” said Donovan.

A few merit badges have been retired since he started and some added, including at least one he had to redo with very different requirements. In addition to his accomplishment with his merit badges, he also achieved Eagle Scout status this past May.

This year's Merit Badge Fair, hosted and held at Exelon, enters the 30th year of helping Boy Scouts earn badges. Scoutmaster Don Husted of Clinton Troop 142 informed a huge crowd of nearly 500 scouts, leaders, parents, counselor and others at the gathering they had exceeded 4500 merit badges earned since the year 2,000.

Exelon's help has made the annual fair an affordable event for Scouts and their troops. This year was the largest gathering known since the about 2000 — doubling last year's attendance alone.

Plus, Exelon's employees offer to counsel several specialized merit badges including one in nuclear science.

Scouts from all over Illinois, plus Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin and Missouri attended. The one day event even has a special treat for Scouts. Exelon allows them to camp at the site usually reserved for Exelon employees and their families on Clinton Lake the night before and after the fair.

The hospitality of the folks in Clinton, both in scouting and at Exelon was so inspiring that Heather hopes she and Morgan can return next year to help with the event as one of the merit badge counselors.

“We loved the 1142 event! May come back next year and teach a class or help out,” said Heather Donovan.

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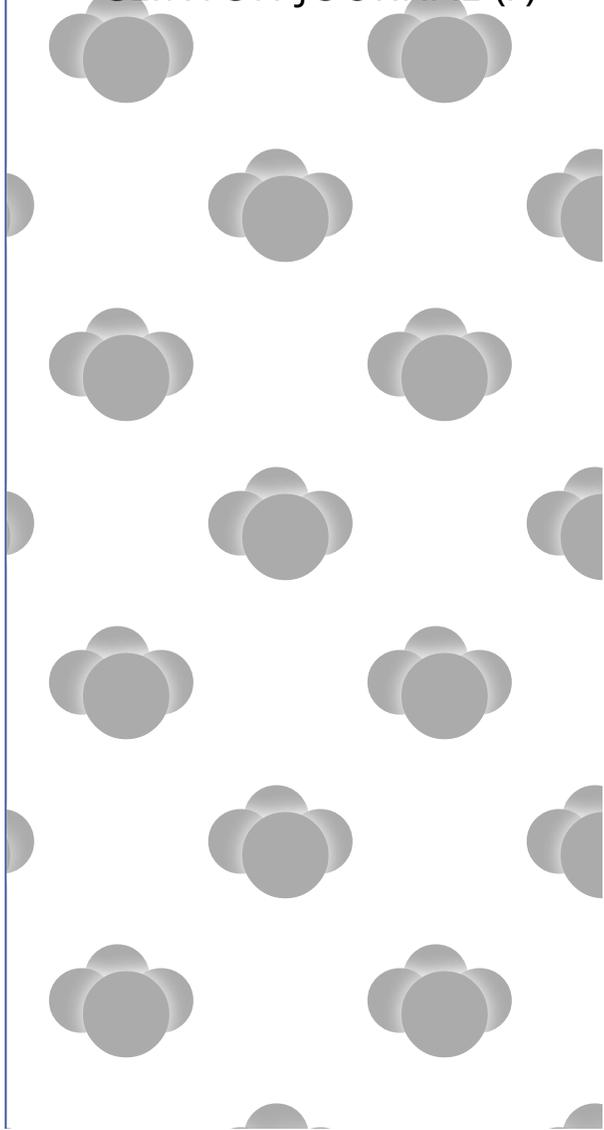




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