

## SCOUT

## Payson teen youngest in the state to earn all merit badges



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- CORRESPONDENT

From a young age, Payson resident Don Page was determined to do what it took to accomplish any goal.

Don celebrated his 14th birthday on Wednesday and can now say he is the youngest boy to pass off all his merit badges in the state of Utah.

"I knew that Don was a scouter when he turned 10," said Cory Page, his father. "In Webelos Scouts he wanted to earn everything."

Merit badges give scouts the opportunity to learn about sports, crafts, future careers, science and trades. These badges can be earned at any time and don't require a rank advancement to be eligible.

His father said shortly after Don turned 11 years old, he went to his dad after studying the plethora of merit badges and said he wanted to earn the SCUBA Merit Badge.

After some research, his dad promised him that he would do it with him, but it would be the last merit badge that he earned.

From that time until now, Don has not stopped.

Don found most of the merit badge books at his public library.

According to his father, he would ride his bicycle down to the library where he had access to materials and he would spend a lot of time studying. He would then come home and tell his parents what he needed to do to finish the badge.

"I have no idea how many hours he has spent in his bedroom studying merit badge materials," said Cory Page. "It has been an exciting process to see his growth as a result."

Don was responsible for calling a counselor to have projects approved and to go to their homes to pass off the badge once everything was completed.

"He did this all on his own," said Melissa Page, Don's mother. "He has been so responsible and we are so proud of him and the growth this experience has given him."

Don has been to summer camps, merit badge pow wows, special programs at national parks, and has logged many miles of cycling, backpacking and hiking.

"It has been so much work but such an amazing experience," he said. "I set out to have all 137 merit badges passed off, and I did it and I am so proud."

It just so happens that the Boy Scouts of America released two new merit badges this summer that delayed Don's progress toward his goal.

"He is such a determined kid, and if he sets his mind to something he will do it," said Melissa Page.

"There has been a lot of negative publicity for the scouting program recently," said Cory Page. "But it is important to realize that this is the exception, not the rule."

Most of Don's merit badges took between two and three weeks to pass off, but some took up to three months, depending on the specific requirements. His hardest badge to earn was Public Health Merit Badge.

"I dragged my feet a little with this one because I didn't really enjoy it," Don Page said. "I sure was glad when I was done with it."

The most physically challenging badge to earn, he said, was Backpacking, which required him to carry a heavy load for long distances.

"Some of it was straight up hill," he said. "At the time I didn't know if I would make it, but I did."

Don said his favorite -- and most memorable -- merit badge was Climbing Merit Badge. He and several other scouts went to the Quarry in Provo to pass it off.

"I went twice. The first time we learned to tie knots and do basic climbing," he said. "Our second visit we were able to free climb and climb any of the walls that we chose."

Don said more boys need to give scouting a try. He said he is glad he has spent so much time on his goal.

He said now that he is done with all the merit badges, he will have more free time to spend with his friends.

"They tease me, yet they are always there to help me out when I need help," he said. "For my Eagle Scout project I made rice bags for patients at Mountain View Hospital. It was so fun to sit around my table with all my friends and stuff rice into the bags. We made 600 of them."

Don said his leaders have been a big influence on him and he is so grateful to them for all their support and encouragement.

"Without the support of them, it would have been hard to reach this goal," he said. "My parents have helped me so much and it has been fun having my dad there through the whole thing."

Cory Page has served as Scoutmaster for the last six years and has been able to work side by side with his son to support and encourage him.

"When the scouting program is taken to heart by the young men, it helps to develop leadership and commitment to a cause greater than one's self," Cory Page said. "It teaches good fundamental skills that allow a young man to become a better citizen, husband, father and mentor to other young men."

Don's parents said he is better because of what he has learned. He has made friendships that will last a lifetime, and has had experiences that most young men will not ever have. To them, Don is what the scouting program strives for.

"It has been a joy to experience most of this with him and to witness the joy that can come as you work towards a goal," Melissa Page said.