

Eagle Scout title opens doors of opportunity

The young sailor — already a three-year veteran at age 20 — stood before a review board on his application for a college scholarship program leading to an officer's commission.

The seaman was newly posted to this base, so the board officers did not know him. The chairman focused on an indiscretion from early in the sailor's career, and would not let it go, grilling him about it time and again. While the other officers asked questions, the chairman studied the rest of the young man's record, then suddenly looked up.

"You're an Eagle Scout?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the sailor answered.

The chairman slammed the file closed and announced, "We're done. The application is approved."

Thus began the university education that would lead Mike McCulley to a career as a captain in the Navy, an astronaut and the president of Houston business United Space Alliance LLC.

Eagle Scout — the title that has been described as "a resume in itself" — has opened the doors of opportunity to hundreds of thousands of its recipients. High school boys who notoriously procrastinate about everything rush to finish their requirements in time to include it on college applications. Grown men with resumes full of adult accomplishments proudly list it.

Why should something done as a youth have such an impact on the American imagination?

Most importantly, it is the shared achievement of many American business and professional leaders, which they themselves acknowledge as an important part of their training.

President Gerald Ford, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, hotel magnate J. Willard Marriott Jr. and H. Ross Perot, all Eagles, have praised the trail to Eagle as an important part of their development.

As information entrepreneur and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg has said, "Whether you choose to become a teacher, a police



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officer, a doctor, or even the mayor of the greatest city in the world, your experiences as an Eagle Scout will prove invaluable."

Houston U.S. District Judge David Hittner says that his Eagle rank has followed his career, "all the way to the White House on my application for a federal bench."

These men value the work that led them to achieve the Eagle rank. It is not a task easily accomplished, and typically requires four to six years to complete. Only about 5 percent of Boy Scouts earn the Eagle award. Eleven-year-old boys are not known for long-term goal setting or deferred gratification, yet each year tens of thousands are inspired by the older Scouts in their troops to begin this long journey.

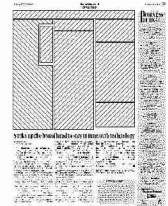
Although the requirements have varied over the century the Boy Scouts of America has offered the advancement program leading to Eagle, the basic idea has remained the same. A Scout begins with the basics, learning how to hike, camp, swim, cook, identify wild plants and animals, read a map, use a compass, make things with knife, axe and ropes, and give first aid.

This is all done in the company of six to 10 boys, usually of different ages, living and working together as a patrol. Here they learn that they are responsible not only for themselves but for their brother Scouts, in an outdoor setting which leaves little room for error and encourages that essential adult skill, planning.

After forgetting the sugar, a boy is more likely to check the ingredients for a cookie recipe before again disappointing the rest of the guys. A cold evening without a coat is a chilly reminder to go over the camping gear checklist in the Boy Scout Handbook before leaving home.

These experiences provide a boy with his first R&D opportunities and are strong teachers of a great American trait, ingenuity. Scouting is one of the few places in our culture where a child has a safe place to make mistakes, and learn from them. If you have no sugar, sweeten the cookies with some juice brought for breakfast. If you have no coat, learn how to warm yourself in layers of lighter clothing.

After mastering the basics, earning the Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class ranks, the Scout advances by completing merit badges, where he is introduced to 122 sub-



jects, as diverse as citizenship, atomic energy, lifesaving, medicine, music, athletics, collecting and archery. He also serves as a leader in his troop and works with community organizations. By now he has earned the Star and Life ranks as he completes 21 merit badges required for Eagle.

He calls on all these skills when he undertakes Scouting's graduate case study in good citizenship, the Eagle service project. The Scout works with a school, religious institution or other nonprofit to create something of lasting value — a bridge at a park, wheelchair ramps at a shelter, a collection of books for a neighborhood center.

The Scout consults with the leadership of the beneficiary organization, submits a written proposal to his Scoutmaster, raises money, gets materials donated, recruits volunteers, plans work days, supervises the project and reports on the results.

Earning the Eagle award is a man-sized job a boy can be proud of, and adults will respect. ■

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