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Senior David Meggs and his fellow Boy Scouts work together to put up a communications board at Kitty Hawk Elementary School, where Meggs poses (right) with the final product of his Eagle Scout project. The communications boards will help students for years to come.

# Meggs' Eagle Scout project helps elementary students take flight

By Maggie McNinch  
Editor-in-Chief

Out of the 2.7 million youths who participate in the Boy Scouts of America, fewer than 4 percent earn the coveted and prestigious rank of Eagle Scout. This accomplishment was made even more special for senior David Meggs because of other challenges he had to overcome.

Meggs has been in Boy Scouts for nearly 10 years. Scouts wanting to reach Eagle must demonstrate proficiency in leadership, service and outdoor skills, as well as partake in a community project.

"It's been fun and it's also been kind of exhausting," he said.

With the immense amount of hard work and dedication an aspiring Eagle Scout must put forth, this comes as no surprise. But for those who know Meggs best, there was never a doubt he could do it.

"I kind of always knew it would happen," said senior Michael Pearson, a fellow Eagle Scout and troop member. "He and I joined pretty much right around the same time and even with his disabilities, he's always been an active person in Scouts and has always been the kind of Scout that would reach Eagle. So it wasn't a surprise at all and I was very proud of him and very glad he made it to that because he definitely deserved it."

David's mom, Sally, echoed similar thoughts: "David doesn't talk a lot, but he takes it all in and he's super smart, so when he makes up his mind to do something, he'll do it. He's persevered since the time he was little and has always done everything just like everybody else. I'm really proud of him for that because he so could use the autism card if he wanted to, but he doesn't."

While Meggs had the support of his fellow Scouts and friends, he also had the motivation of following in the footsteps of his family.

"My granddad was an Eagle Scout and my dad was an Eagle Scout, so I will be a third-generation Eagle Scout," Meggs said.

David's father, Phillip, is the Scoutmaster of David's troop. After going through the journey of earning Eagle himself, he is knowledgeable of the process and able to help others do the same.

"The whole thing about Scouting is that it's not



always the coolest kid or the star athletes, they're just the kid that's smart, engaged, adventurous and wanting to do things," Phillip said. "David had the challenge of having to deal with communication issues, so that's why this project was so important to him."

David's idea for his project was inspired by UNC-Chapel Hill, where the college is implementing sign boards to teach students with complex communication needs to communicate symbolically with a variety of people.

"I'm autistic and my mom had said that Kitty Hawk Elementary School had done so much for me, so I decided to give back by making them communication boards for kids who also have disabilities like autism and Down syndrome," David said.

Common Eagle Scout projects include clearing trails, building birdhouses or running a book drive. These can take a little bit of planning and a weekend of work.

"David's project took a year of planning and months of research," Phillip said. "He had to get in touch with Chapel Hill and meet with the school and all the EC teachers. As a Scoutmaster, I talk about how important it is to make your Eagle project something you can be proud of, and he put in the work."

While Kitty Hawk has had communications boards in the classrooms for several years now, they have never been put outside. The teachers realized that the students were doing great in the classroom, but that there was a dropoff in communication when they went to the playground. David worked with a graphics store to produce multiple stainless steel vinyl wrap signs that will stay at the elementary school for many generations of students.

"David's outside boards are making it flow much better and the other kids recognize and point and share, so that's a really cool thing," Phillip said.

While David is helping younger students learn to communicate better, he continues to develop his own skills further. OCS Program teacher James Ainslie works with David at First Flight and is able to see first-hand the effect this project has had on him.

"He still struggles with his communication, so I think this has been something that he's been able to establish for himself, and it's something that he can talk about with others and kind of connect with people on that level," Ainslie said.

Through hard work and perseverance, David has been able to help others with their own difficulties and establish something that will impact future generations of students, all while working toward his own goal of becoming an Eagle Scout.

"It is such a joyous occasion when I see one of my Scouts get Eagle," Phillip said. "Once you get Eagle Scout, you're an Eagle Scout for the rest of your life. It's the greatest thing I think I can give to kids to help them out and that's why I've been passionate about it for years. But when it's your own kid that gets Eagle Scout, the biggest man can't hold back the tears on that."

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