

## Scouting for All

What does “Scouting for All” really mean? If you ask Nolan T., he will tell you it means perseverance and inclusion. Even those with special needs can enjoy scouting.

Nolan joined scouting in first grade with all his friends. He was looking forward to fun times hanging out with friends, playing games, and doing activities after school. His earliest memory in Scouting was learning to fish as a Tiger. Through the years, Nolan worked on Eagle-required merit badges, attended summer camp at Owasippe, and had leadership roles. His most difficult merit badge was Athletics which replaced Swimming, Cycling, or Hiking merit badges since his motor skills from Cerebral Palsy hindered him from doing any of these badges on his own. He recalls participating in skit night at summer camp. His leadership role as the Troop Librarian gave him interaction with all the scouts of his troop. The feeling of inclusion and comradery was what he wanted to experience.



On his way to Eagle, there were bumps in the road. First was the paperwork. Getting replacement Eagle-required merit badges approved by the Advancement Committee. This took some time researching activities and having health care providers write letters about his abilities. Once the paperwork was approved, then it took time at Nolan’s pace to complete these approved merit badges. Other obstacles were making sure facilities were accessible, such as restrooms, and knowing what the hiking path looked like for his special needs on outings. Nolan, his parents, and his Troop 216 scoutmasters and assistant scoutmasters shared responsibility for coping with these obstacles.



All this research, hard work and sweat led to Nolan obtaining the rank of Eagle Scout. He viewed his Eagle project as the capstone of scouting. Nolan worked with Christ Church of Oak Brook to clean and sort food and supply donations into categories and then boxed the donations to distribute to four organizations: The Salvation Army/Christ Church Food Pantry in Oak Brook, By the Hand Club for Kids in Chicago, the Fresh Market Food Pantry at Breakthrough Urban Ministries in Chicago, and Inner City Impact in Chicago. During the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, this outreach led to 375 children and their families receiving emergency care packages, 800 meals supplemented and 600 families received paper products.

Nolan’s takeaways for life from Scouting are to use the core traits of the scout law as a basis for your outlook in life and to build your personality as well as perseverance. His message to all scouts including those with special needs is, “Scouting is a great foundation to build your character on, but don’t think you have to go fast. Take it at your own pace. Find something in it as your own thing. Be in it for you!”

