

"I just never stopped"

Chippewa Falls teen achieves Eagle Scout rank



REGEV NYSTROM
Leader-Telegram staff

CHIPPEWA FALLS — Cole Gilles of Chippewa Falls' Boy Scouts Troop 72 remembers the start of his journey to become an Eagle Scout.

"I started in Boy Scouts back when I was in first grade," said Gilles, now 16. "We went to an elementary school tour thing, and there was a stand for Cub Scouts, and my dad signed me up, and I just never stopped. I just kept going with it."

And kept going he did, even as the children who had first joined him gradually left the Scouts behind, one by one. He said that one thing that kept him engaged with the Scouts was the idea of becoming an Eagle Scout, a rank he will be honored with on Saturday, April 26.

"I saw this group of Eagle Scouts, and they were like explaining what it means and how they achieved it and everything, and I was like, that's so cool," he said. "I looked at my dad and said, 'I'm gonna get that one day.'"

On his journey, He progressed through the ranks, serving as bugler, patrol leader, quartermaster, and ultimately senior patrol leader — the highest position in the troop. As senior patrol leader, he spearheaded numerous campouts and initiated the troop's self-contained bike

trips across the state.

"One of the biggest trips we did actually in Scouts was we biked from Chippewa Falls all the way to Milwaukee," recalled Gilles, remembering that it wasn't at all a straight shot. "We carried all of our gear, all of our tents and food and cooking gear and everything like that, and clothes for the entire nine days, and it rained probably six of those nine days."

Gilles remembered the path being filled with mud and sand, even when maps they had on hand stated that they should be on blacktop. It got bad enough that the bikes needed to be washed in a lake en route, but despite desires to give up, his troop went on under his leadership.

"One of the biggest things I learned from that was just to keep pushing and keep moving forward because it was for sure worth it when we got there," he said. "I was like, 'Wow, you really did that.' And looking back, I am still amazed."

Gilles learned leadership, communication, time management and finance skills during his time in the Scouts. While that last skill may seem initially out-of-place, financial skills were in fact necessary in his build project for Eagle Scouts: constructing a footbridge in Chippewa Falls' Irvine Park.

"In order to get the funds to

build a project, you needed to go out in the community and fundraise," explained Gilles. "So what I did was, I went to Toyce Ford and Northwest Bank in Chippewa Falls, and I had to ask for donations and manage those funds."

From there, he was responsible for movement of funds and making sure they went to the necessary vendors after pricing materials. Once he did that, management and leadership came into play as he figured how to best maneuver the approximately 1,500 pounds of lumber for the construction of the footbridge.

"We promoted it to our troop as a good opportunity for community service hours, and so a lot of the younger scouts — like 11, 12 years old — were pretty eager to help out, and it didn't take that long," said Gilles. "It was a great lesson in seeing this huge thing actually getting done, with a lot of people helping."

Gilles was characterized by Troop 72's Scoutmaster, Tom Arneberg, as someone who displayed unwavering dedication and focus in his scouting endeavors.

"Cole just went in charging," said Arneberg. "I don't think he's ever missed a meeting or a camp-out, which as a scoutmaster I love. These younger kids really look up to him. To build a troop, it really depends on the dedication of the older scouts."

More Information

Cole Gilles' Eagle Scout Ceremony

When: Saturday, April 26, 2 p.m.

Where: Chippewa Valley Bible Church, 531 E. South Ave., Chippewa Falls.

More information: tinyurl.com/55z27cny.

Video about Cole's footbridge project can be seen at tinyurl.com/cole-bridge.

Cole Gilles, center, sits between his father Gary (right) and scoutmaster of Chippewa Falls' Boy Scouts Troop 72, Tom Arneberg.

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Arneberg referenced the aforementioned bike trip, during which Gilles not only completed the entire journey, but also carried 76 pounds altogether with his bike and equipment.

"They would always have to tell me to slow down because I was going too fast," said Gilles with a laugh. "Even with all that weight I was usually the one leading the pack."

Such focus has extended into athletics, where Gilles, once someone who never really ran, has become a number-one cross country in his school and lettered not only in cross country but also in track and swimming.

"Scouts has taught me dedication to a sport, and that putting in the work will definitely show results," said Gilles.

Gilles' father, Gary, said that he and Cole's mother were initially happy that there was something like Scouts that his son could enjoy, but with all that Cole has done to become an Eagle Scout, Gary said that he now feels immense pride in all that his son has achieved.

"I've always been proud of Cole. I've always encouraged him to try to do the best he can," said Gary. "I know how hard he worked through the process, and how much was involved. And I think, 'Wow, such an absolutely great experience for a young person to go through.'"