

Burke Scouts Earn Rare Achievement in Park Programs



When it comes to scouting, Pablo and Gabriel Sejas-Fernandez have accomplished something few other Boy Scouts have ever accomplished in the program's 110-year history. In addition to earning scouting's highest honor, the Eagle Scout Award, Pablo, 17, and Gabriel, 16, have each earned all 137 merit badges that the Boy Scouts of America currently offers, including every merit badge offered through Fairfax County Park Authority scouting programs.

"It means a lot to look back and see how far we've come," Pablo said as he reflected on their collective experiences. "We backpacked along the Appalachian Trail, and we went canoeing, kayaking and camping. We even got to learn about auto mechanics and railroading, and I loved electronics."

"You learn life skills like respect, time management, communication and practical skills, like cooking" Gabriel said. "You learn how to be independent, which would be helpful to any kids."

Their scouting adventures began six years ago when a friend invited Pablo to a camp-out at Burke Lake Park. It was the first time the then 11-year-old had ever been camping.

"Fishing was really fun," Pablo said with a grin. "I caught like 10 fish that day, and it hooked me on scouting, and I made a lot of friends."

Gabriel took an interest in scouting, too. Within a year, the determined brothers set their incredible merit badge goal. Gabriel earned many of his badges at Hidden Oaks Nature Center, and ultimately chose that park for his Eagle Scout project.

"The counselors at Hidden Oaks were great, and I wanted to do something to give back to them," he said with appreciation. "I cleaned out invasive Japanese stilt grass along the newly paved trail and replaced it with native plants."

Pablo earned his Eagle Scout Award with a similar project in an Indian Springs neighborhood. Now, he and Gabriel are cheering on the youngest of the three siblings, Anthony, 11, who has already earned 25 merit badges and expects to earn his Eagle Scout award in three years.

"My big brothers are an inspiration to me," Anthony said as he reflected on the start of his merit badge journey at Hidden Oaks. "When I was doing the sustainability program, we looked under logs and I saw two salamanders and a beetle. We learned a lot on the trail."

The three brothers agree that scouting opens doors to opportunities that they otherwise wouldn't have experienced, and the skills they learned in the merit badge program helped inspire their future goals. Next year, Pablo will head to college to pursue a career in cyber security. Gabriel plans to forge into the field of herpetology, a vocation inspired by the Reptiles and Amphibians merit badge he earned at Hidden Oaks. After following in his brothers' scouting footsteps, Anthony plans to join the military.

"This Scouting program in Fairfax County parks has been such a blessing," said the boys' mother, Renne Fernandez. "I love it, and the pre-work is educational for them and it makes them show that they have done the work and that they are prepared."

It's a solid foundation that helps prepare Scouts for whatever life brings. Best of all, the opportunity is available just minutes from home in Fairfax County parks.

To find a Scouting program near you, turn to the Scouts section.

