

## **ADVANCEMENT AT TROOP 28**

### **I. Overview**

Scouts advance through seven “ranks,” culminating with the rank of Eagle. The six ranks preceding Eagle are, in ascending order: (1) Scout; (2) Tenderfoot; (3) Second Class; (4) First Class; (5) Star; and (6) Life. Specific requirements must be satisfied for each rank. Scouts also earn subject-specific “merit badges”, each of which has its own unique requirements. Some merit badges are narrowly focused, and can be earned with minimal effort. An example is “Fingerprinting.” Other merit badges are much more demanding, and require a substantial commitment of time and study. Examples of these are First Aid, Lifesaving, and Camping.

For the ranks of Scout through First Class, merit badges are not among the advancement requirements, although they can be earned by Scouts while advancing to First Class. Beginning with the rank of Star, earning merit badges becomes a major element of the rank requirements. A Scout must earn a total of twenty-one merit badges (including those earned for the Star and Life ranks) to attain the Eagle rank. Ten of those may be selected by the Scout from a menu of over one hundred available merit badges. The remainder are prescribed “Eagle-required” merit badges. These are all relatively demanding.

The First Class rank is an important plateau. A First Class Scout must demonstrate competence in outdoor skills (e.g., camping, cooking, knots and lashings, and navigation with map and compass), a working knowledge of basic first aid, and an appreciation of the special safety requirements for a wide range of Scouting activities, including swimming, boating, the use of open fires and camp stoves, and the use of camping tools (e.g., knife, axe, and saw). The First Class rank is a prerequisite for some Scouting opportunities, such as the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. First Class Scouts should be self-sufficient on any troop campout or other outing, and ready to begin assuming leadership roles.

The remaining three ranks after First Class primarily require:(1) merit badges (some “Eagle-required” and some elective), (2) service in troop leadership positions, and (3) community service. For these advanced ranks, the Scout has wider latitude to tailor his Scouting experience to his own special talents and interests.

The “pace” of advancement will be addressed later. We cannot overemphasize, however, that advancement should never be viewed as a competition. Unlike the military, in Scouting rank has no “privileges.” Although there is often a loose correlation between rank and leadership positions, no Scout takes “orders” from another Scout solely because the latter has attained a more advanced rank. A Star Scout who reliably participates in most of the troop’s activities and who has demonstrated the desire and aptitude to lead may be selected for a leadership position over a Life Scout who has become less active, even though the latter has attained a higher rank.

Advancement in Scouting emphasizes setting and achieving *personal goals*, not attempting to “beat” one’s peers. The quality of the advancement process is more important than the pace. Through advancement, a Scout learns to set his own goals, to take personal responsibility for achieving those goals, to interact effectively with adults and older Scouts, to help and lead others, and to value the lasting satisfaction of a job well done or a skill thoroughly mastered over any empty and fleeting rush that may be derived from outracing his peers to a rank by cutting corners. Scouting should be a comfortable refuge where boys can have fun, learn, and grow at their own pace.

## **II. Mechanics Of The Process**

### **A. Rank Advancement**

Each rank advancement has four elements: (1) satisfying the specific requirements for the rank; (2) a Scoutmaster Conference; (3) a Board of Review; and (4) a Court of Honor.

#### *Satisfying Specific Rank Requirements*

The specific requirements for each rank are listed in the Boy Scout Handbook. Satisfying these requirements involves three distinct steps. First, the Scout must acquire the necessary knowledge or master the necessary skill. Second, he must demonstrate to a qualified individual that he has acquired the knowledge or mastered the skill. This step is commonly referred to as “passing off” the requirement. Third, the “passing off” must be properly recorded.

Anyone, including parents, can help a Scout acquire the required knowledge or master the necessary skill. Generally, however, requirements must be “passed off” by one of the troop’s trained adult leaders other than the Scout’s own parent. For the ranks Scout and Tenderfoot, rank requirements may also be “passed off” by the Patrol Leader of the New Scout Patrol, the Senior Patrol Leader, or an Assistant Senior Patrol Leader (but these Scouts should not “pass off” their siblings). A Scout’s parent or sibling may not “pass off” a requirement except in very limited circumstances. One recognized exception occurs when a trained adult leader teaches a skill to, and “passes off,” a group of Scouts that happens to include his own son. He may “pass off” his son as part of the group. Even then, it is best to have another trained adult leader present for the “passing off” step. This also applies to siblings. There are other exceptional situations when someone other than a qualified Scout or a trained adult leader may “pass off” a requirement. For example, the D.A.R.E. programs at many schools may satisfy Second Class Requirement No. 8a.: “participate in a school, community, or troop program on the dangers of using drugs, alcohol, and tobacco ... “ However, for a number of reasons, the “passing off” of requirements should occur almost exclusively through the troop or sanctioned BSA activities, such as Summer Camp. Scouts should clear any external “passing off” of requirements, *in advance*, with the troop’s Advancement Chairman (Bruce Barze) or our Scoutmaster (Allen Sydnor). A Scout who comes to Mr. Barze or Mr. Sydnor *after* attending a non-BSA summer camp and asks to be “passed off” on a

requirement like Second Class Requirement No. 1.b. (“Using a compass and a map together, take a five mile hike ...”) merely by reporting something to the effect of: “We went on a long hike; our camp counselor had a map and we looked at it during the hike” is likely to be disappointed.

The third step, *i.e.* record keeping, is essential but often overlooked. The “passing off” of a requirement must be recorded *twice*. First, the Scout must have the individual who passed him off initial and date the box beside the requirement in the Scout’s Boy Scout Handbook. Second, *after* the requirement has been initialed in the Scout’s Handbook, the Scout must present his book to the Advancement Chairman for the satisfaction of the requirement to be entered into the troop’s computerized advancement records.

A Scout should ask the person who passes him off to initial the requirement *at the time the skill or knowledge is demonstrated, or at least by the time of the next regular Scout meeting*. Leaders are placed in a difficult position when a request to initial a “pass off” is preceded by words to the effect of: “Remember on that campout six months ago when I did so and so?” Also, a request that the “pass off” be initialed should come from the Scout, not his parent. Parents should particularly avoid asking anyone to initial a requirement based on a statement like: “Would you initial this for Johnny; I watched him do it this weekend.” Parents and Scouts should understand that denials of belated requests for initialing of a “pass off” or a “pass off” based on a parent’s witnessing his or her son’s demonstration of the skill have nothing to do with integrity or credibility of the Scout or his parent. Rather, they are intended to promote institutional consistency and to teach Scouts the importance of learning and following an organization’s rules.

Generally, specific rank requirements need not be satisfied in any particular order. For example, a Scout can satisfy a First Class rank requirement even though he has not yet attained the Second Class rank (which precedes First Class). An exception is the requirement of service in troop leadership positions for the ranks of Star, Life, and Eagle. For the Star rank, a Scout must serve in a troop leadership position for four months *after* he has attained the rank of First Class; for the Life rank, a Scout must serve in a troop leadership position for six months *after* he has attained the rank of Star; and for the Eagle rank, a Scout must serve in a troop leadership position for six months *after* he has attained the rank of Life.

Our Advancement Chairman periodically prints out an “Individual Progress Report” for each Scout. These invaluable reports identify every rank requirement the Scout has satisfied, all merit badges earned, and every campout, hike, and other troop activity in which the Scout has participated. Individual Progress Reports are distributed at Monday night meetings. It is each Scout’s responsibility to obtain his Individual Progress Report, review it carefully, and report to the Advancement Chairman any perceived mistakes or omissions.

### Scoutmaster Conference

After satisfying the requirements for a rank advancement, a Scout should ask Allen Sydnor for a Scoutmaster Conference. The purpose of the Scoutmaster Conference is not to “retest” the Scout on his substantive knowledge of the rank requirements, although Allen may ask some questions to satisfy himself that the Scout has retained a basic understanding of the more important requirements. Rather, the primary purposes of the Scoutmaster Conference are to give Allen an opportunity to get to know the Scout better, to assess the quality of his Scouting experience and whether it is meeting the Scout’s expectations, to discuss the Scout’s goals and his progress toward attaining them, and to assess the Scout’s progress towards developing and using his leadership abilities. For the Scoutmaster Conference, a Scout must have each rank requirement properly initialed and dated *in his Handbook* (a copy of his printed Individual Advancement report is insufficient). He must also be in his full “Class A” uniform. A Scoutmaster Conference can be scheduled (by the Scout) with Allen as soon as the Scout is ready. Scouts should not wait until a Court of Honor (explained below) is only a week or two away.

### Board of Review

After the Scoutmaster Conference, the Scout is ready for a Board of Review. Boards of Review are conducted frequently. A Board of Review (except for the rank of Eagle) is conducted by three of the troop’s adult leaders (members of the Troop Committee) who have not been directly involved in “passing off” the Scout’s rank requirements. Like the Scoutmaster Conference, the Board of Review’s purpose is not to “retest” the Scout on his knowledge of the rank requirements, although there may be a few general questions probing the Scout’s basic understanding of fundamental skills. The primary purpose of the Board of Review is to serve as an institutional quality control check to ensure that the troop is following its own policies and procedures for rank advancement and delivering a high quality Scouting experience.

The Board of Review for the rank of Eagle is different from other Boards of Review. The official Board of Review for Eagle Scout candidates within the Vulcan District of the Greater Alabama Council is conducted on the second Thursday night of each month at Briarwood Presbyterian Church. Before a candidate’s Eagle Board of Review, he must submit an Eagle Scout Application and Leadership Project Workbook to the Council Office. All information in the Eagle Scout Application, particularly dates of signatures, dates of prior advancement, and dates of merit badges must be checked, verified, and certified by Council office officials before the Eagle Scout candidate is notified of the date and time of his Eagle Scout Board of Review, which will be conducted by Scout leaders who are independent of the troop. Although the troop’s Boards of Review for ranks below Eagle are less formal than Eagle Boards of Review, we try to conduct them in a way that will prepare the Scout to succeed at his Eagle Board of Review.

### Court of Honor

The Court of Honor is a ceremony at which badges symbolizing rank advancement and merit badges are formally presented, and Scouts are publicly recognized for their achievements. Troop 28 schedules a Court of Honor three times each year, typically in September, February, and May. Any Eagle Scout who desires to do so may have a special and separate Court of Honor

Courts of Honor are scheduled months in advance. Scouts who wish to be awarded a rank advancement need to plan their advancement activities so that they are completed sufficiently in advance of the Court of Honor to allow time for a Scoutmaster Conference and a Board of Review. A Scout who completes the last requirement for a rank on the Sunday before a Monday night Court of Honor will not be awarded his rank advancement at that Court of Honor, because there will be no time for a Scoutmaster Conference or a Board of Review. (Also, for each rank advancement, the Advancement Chairman must submit forms and records to the Council office and actually purchase the badge).

### **B. Merit Badges**

Unlike rank advancements, merit badges do not require a Scoutmaster Conference or a Board of Review. However, a Scout must have an approved merit badge counselor for each merit badge. The troop's Advancement Chairman determines who qualifies as a merit badge counselor. Typically, parents will not be approved as merit badge counselors for their sons unless the parent is a trained adult leader who regularly teaches that merit badge to scouts in the troop and his or her son happens to be part of a larger group working on the merit badge. It is critical that a Scout have his merit badge counselor ***approved by the Advancement Chairman before beginning work*** on the merit badge. A Scout must also obtain a Merit Badge Application Card, commonly referred to as a "Blue Card" (because of its color), from the Advancement Chairman ***before*** beginning work on a merit badge. The "Blue Card" contains both an application for the merit badge and a certification to be signed by the merit badge counselor upon completion of the requirements. When the Advancement Chairman issues the "Blue Card," he will record in the troop's computerized records that the Scout has commenced work on the merit badge. The requirements for some merit badges include minimum time periods (e.g., performing home duties for 90-days for the Family Life merit badge). If the minimum time periods have not elapsed between the time that the Advancement Chairman's records show the Scout began work on the merit badge (i.e., when the "Blue Card" was issued) and the time that the Scout reports completion of the requirements (e.g., because the Scout neglected to obtain a "Blue Card" before commencing work), the Advancement Chairman may be unable to allow the Scout to receive the merit badge at that time.

For each merit badge, there is a separate pamphlet which can be purchased at the Scout Shop. The troop also maintains a library of "used" merit badge pamphlets. The

merit badge pamphlet sets out the requirements for the merit badge, and provides much or all of the information the Scout must master.

There are no rank prerequisites for earning merit badges. A Scout can begin as soon as he joins the troop. Some merit badges, however, do require the completion of other merit badges as a prerequisite. For example, the Swimming merit badge is a prerequisite for the Life Saving merit badge.

### **III. Pace of Advancement**

Unlike Cubs Scouts, where boys tend to advance collectively as a den, each Scout sets his own pace for advancement. The only time constraint is that he can no longer advance after he turns eighteen. If he is to earn his Eagle, a Scout must do so before his eighteenth birthday.

Troop 28 would like for a majority of our Scouts to set as their personal goal attaining the First Class rank within a year after joining the troop. National statistics indicate that boys who do so are more likely to remain in Scouting and earn the Eagle rank. Also, because First Class Scouts are generally self-sufficient and require minimal supervision on campouts and other outings, a higher percentage of Scouts in the troop who have attained this rank will allow us greater flexibility in planning campouts and other outings, and will permit us to attempt more challenging outings. This is an ambitious goal, and in order to achieve it Scouts will almost certainly need to attend Summer Camp and a majority of the troop's overnight campouts during their first year.

Setting goals is an important part of Scouting, and can be helpful in a number of ways with respect to advancement. It is important that Scouts not become discouraged or stressed simply because other Scouts their age advance at a faster pace. Most boys have a healthy competitive spirit, and are subjected to constant pressures to compete with one another at school, in sports, and at virtually every other activity in which they participate. Without adequate guidance, they are likely to feel stressed and discouraged if their peers attain a particular rank before they do. There are many reasons for Scouts advancing at different paces that have nothing to do with their relative abilities, character, effort, or the quality of their Scouting experience. For some boys, Scouting is just one of a number of activities (particularly sports) that place large demands on their time. For others, Scouting may be their primary activity outside of school. It is not realistic to expect boys in these two categories to advance at the same pace. By setting goals that take into account considerations that affect the rate of advancement (such as missing campouts due to ball games), a Scout can avoid any sense of failure just because one of his peers attains a rank before he does. As long as a Scout attains his own personal goals for advancement, he should feel no sense of failure if others advance more rapidly.

We encourage Scouts and their parents to confer with Allen Sydnor or other experienced adult leaders to discuss considerations that may affect the rate of advancement and to develop realistic personal goals that are consistent with their own particular circumstances.

## **IV. Opportunities For Advancement**

### **A. Merit Badges**

Each year, the troop offers opportunities to earn a number of merit badges. Recently, Scouts had opportunities to earn Citizenship in the Community (Eagle required), Citizenship in the Nation (Eagle required), Citizenship in the World (Eagle-required), Camping (Eagle-required), Communications (Eagle-required), Family Life (Eagle-required), Personal Fitness (Eagle-required) and Personal Management (Eagle-required). Apart from these more demanding Eagle-required merit badges, the troop has also offered Aviation, Small Boat Sailing, Salesmanship, Weather, Cooking, Archery, Medicine, Public Speaking, Skating, Law, Dentistry, Archery, Art, Journalism, Fishing, and other merit badges.

Merit badge classes are not normally held during troop meetings. Instead, merit badge classes will be offered immediately before or after the regular meetings, as determined by the merit badge counselor and the scouts taking the merit badge, or at some other time selected by the merit badge counselor and the affected scouts.

Other than through the troop, the best opportunity for earning merit badges is at a BSA Summer Camp. The troop attends at least one each year. Before a Scout selects the merit badges he will attempt to earn at Summer Camp, he should discuss his selections with the Advancement Chairman. The troop has a strong preference for working through some merit badges exclusively within the troop. We simply feel that we can do a better job than the instruction typically offered at Summer Camps.

From time to time, the Greater Alabama Council of the Boy Scouts of America or one of the Districts within that council (Troop 28 is in the Vulcan District) will sponsor an "Advance-O-Rama" or some similarly-named event at which Scouts can earn one or more merit badges on a single Saturday or Sunday. These events can be excellent opportunities to earn narrowly-focused merit badges. Nevertheless, a Scout should confirm in advance with the troop's Advancement Chairman that the troop will recognize any particular merit badge offered at such an event. Even if an Eagle-required merit badge is offered at such an event, it is unlikely that the troop will recognize that all requirements for the merit badge have been satisfied through attending. Our view is that the complexity and importance of the skills and substantive knowledge Scouts must acquire and demonstrate for Eagle-required merit badges are such that they simply cannot be adequately mastered through a compressed course of the type offered at these weekend events.

Finally, merit badges (other than Eagle-required merit badges) can sometimes be earned through attending programs offered by organizations that are not affiliated with Scouting. For example, a number of our Scouts have earned merit badges such as Journalism and Electronics through the offerings by the McWane Center, and the Space Exploration merit badge can be earned at the U.S. Space Camp in Huntsville. All such

merit badges should, however, be discussed in advance with the troop's Advancement Chairman.

### **B. Rank Advancement**

During the course of each year, the troop tries to schedule activities that will enable each Scout to satisfy all of requirements for the Scout, Tenderfoot, Second Class and First Class ranks. These opportunities are made available through a combination of Summer Camp, regular troop meetings, troop campouts, and other troop outings.

From the time new Scouts join the troop in the Spring until September, they are formed into a "New Scout Patrol," with experienced older Scouts assigned by the troop as their Patrol Leader and Assistant Patrol Leader. These Scout leaders will also help guide new Scouts through the early stages of the advancement process and "pass off" new Scouts on many of the rank requirements for the Scout and Tenderfoot ranks. In addition, the troop has designated an Assistant Scoutmaster to work with the New Scout Patrol.

Although we will monitor the Scouts' progress toward the rank of First Class, and may offer "nudges" from time to time, it is ultimately the responsibility of each Scout to manage his own progress, and to seek out and take advantage of advancement opportunities. By way of example, a Second Class Scout who needs to satisfy First Class Requirement No. 4.e. (i.e., "On one campout, serve as your patrol's cook.") should review the schedule for upcoming campouts and ask his Patrol Leader if he can serve as the patrol cook on one that he knows he can attend. Campouts are important opportunities to satisfy rank requirements through the First Class rank. A week or more before each campout, a Scout who has not yet attained the First Class rank should review the rank requirements he still needs to satisfy, and discuss with his Patrol Leader or an adult leader how he might be able to "pass off" some of those requirements during the campout.

Scouts working through the requirements for the Star and Life ranks need less adult guidance than younger Scouts, but may nevertheless need some help in identifying (or having the troop create) opportunities to earn Eagle-required merit badges, in selecting an appropriate service project, or in finding an available and appropriate leadership position. The troop has a number of trained and experienced adult leaders who will be happy to assist. Scouts should be ever mindful, however, that their peers will primarily decide which Scouts will fill most leadership positions. Scouts must earn the confidence and respect of their peers.

***Leadership Positions.*** It is particularly important that Scouts advancing through the Star and Life ranks toward their Eagle rank demonstrate their willingness and ability to assume significant leadership positions and then to faithfully carry out the responsibilities of those positions. A primary focus of the Scoutmaster Conferences for these ranks will be participation and leadership. Merely having the title for a leadership position will not suffice. The Scout must be active and effective in the position. If several

weeks pass without the Scout having engaged in any activities in his leadership position, he should seek guidance. Due to the importance that Scouting places upon leadership and initiative, it will not suffice for a Scout who has done little or nothing in his position to say: “Well, no one asked me to do anything.” Also, as noted above, selection for leadership positions will be heavily influenced, if not decided, by fellow Scouts. Scouts must earn the confidence and respect of their peers to obtain leadership positions that will satisfy this rank requirement. Without adequate progress in these areas, a Scout may not be ready to advance even though he has the requisite merit badges and has completed the necessary community service hours. A Scout should submit an Application for Leadership Position prior to the deadline announced by the Scoutmaster.

***Service Hours.*** Scouts who need service hours but have not identified an appropriate service activity or project should consult with the Scoutmaster. Also, whether a Scout identifies an appropriate means of service on his own or obtains assistance from the Scoutmaster, the Scoutmaster’s approval of the service activity or project is required in order for the activity or project to satisfy a rank requirement.

Finally, the step from Life to Eagle is the biggest and seems to be one where Scouts often stumble (perhaps because most are by that point driving, dating, and being subjected to other temptations and distractions). Carl Smyly is the troop’s current Eagle Advisor. He is an invaluable resource for Scouts attempting to complete this final step.

### **V. Conclusion**

Until Scouts and their parents become familiar with the advancement requirements and process, both can at times seem bewildering. While advancement is important, it is even more important that Scouts do not become so wrapped up in the process that they fail to have fun and miss out on the joy should come from the Scouting experience. We want the advancement process at Troop 28 to be as “user friendly,” understandable, consistent, transparent, fair, and meaningful as possible, and welcome all suggestions for changes and improvements.