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Two Visalia teens earn prestigious rank of Eagle Scout

By Marty Burlison

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Of the 2,000 Boy Scouts in the Sequoia Council, which serves Tulare, Kings, Fresno and Madera counties, about 40 can be expected to achieve the rank of Eagle Scout.

What's unexpected? Finding two in the same troop, Visalia's Troop 317.

"Only about 2 percent of the boys that join Scouting make Eagle," explained Mary Dolin, registrar at the council's Visalia office.

Among the newest are William Bravante, 15, and Gerald Joseph Millette III, 16, who on Tuesday received their coveted badges, the highest award in Scouting. A Scout needs 21 merit badges to earn the Eagle Scout designation: Bravante has 28; Millette has 37.

"I plan to get more if I have time," said Millette, who may be hearing the footsteps of a stepbrother, Ryan Dolin, who's closing in on his own Eagle Scout designation.

Bravante has two siblings of his own in hot pursuit.

"He's been a good example to his younger brothers," said Bravante's father, George Bravante. "Mario will have his Eagle in six months, and Matt is about a year behind."

Among the requirements for making Eagle Scout is the completion of a community service project outside of a Scout's school, religious or community activities.

Bravante's and Millette's projects were erected at the Dry Creek Preserve, a former gravel quarry near Lake Kaweah that the Sequoia Riverlands Trust is restoring to its natural state. Bravante planned and led the construction of a 20-by-18-foot structure for growing potted plants and conducting educational efforts; Millette did likewise for a 60-by-72-foot shade structure featuring 6-foot posts and quarter-inch cable.

Bravante's structure went up during the course of seven weekends, with much of the material donated.

"[The preserve has] a nursery, but they needed a place to work," said Bravante, a Redwood High School sophomore. "I'm really proud of how it came out."

Bravante said he based his design on the orange-storing juice bins at his father's Reedley packinghouse.

"I was more of the supervisor, but I had a hand in building it," he said. "I put in screws and nails, but the purpose was to demonstrate leadership."

Millette, who attends La Sierra Military Academy, said the Dry Creek Preserve project will eventually be a top-notch learning center for schoolchildren. For that and other reasons, he said, his new Eagle Scout badge is a source of pride.

"It means that I showed good discipline and all the skills to achieve it," he said. "It's hard work. Not many people get [the badge]."

While Bravante has been a Boy Scout for just four years, Millette got started with the Cub Scouts a decade ago. He acknowledges that becoming an Eagle Scout was not always on his radar.

"I joined for the camping," he said. "It looked like fun."