



A few topics pop up over and over for reporters covering the suburbs: zoning squabbles, school board conflicts and property taxes.

These bottomless fountains of contention could make reading the daily newspaper a depressing slog, if we weren't trying so hard here in Post-Gazette World to bring you word of the uplifting, the inspiring and the good. We turn out a steady stream of articles on students' academic achievements, sports triumphs and musical productions -- as well as news of projects that various charitable souls have undertaken to make their community or yours a better place to live.

I was going back over some of these stories the other day when it struck me that a great many of the charitable projects had a single thing in common: **Eagle Scouts**.

It could be a kind of "duh" moment: Community service? Building stuff outdoors? That's just what Eagle Scouts do.

But when you consider the sheer scope of these kids' good works and the power inherent in their quietly accumulated number, attention must be paid.

More important, when you read what the Scouts' community partners have to say about them, it makes you stop and think about how good character is built. That's something that lasts even longer than the wood and wire of all their projects.

Last week's North edition carried a story on handicapped-accessible, raised garden beds designed for therapeutic use at The Woodlands Foundation, and it was right there in the photo caption -- "built as an Eagle Scout project" by Eric Sinclair, 17, of Bradford Woods and Troop 81.

Just three weeks earlier, an article on Patrick Eger's senior project at Thomas Jefferson High School -- arranging a Pirates game outing for eight nursing home residents -- mentioned that he'd also helped his older brother Christopher construct a gazebo at a Mt. Lebanon retirement home as -- you guessed it -- an Eagle Scout project.

An April 24 story reported that Troop 181 in Ross has nine -- count 'em -- nine Eagle Scouts as current members. In recent years, the troop's Eagle Scouts have, among many projects, erected a gazebo at an elementary school, worked as camp counselors, built benches, put in electrical outlets and poured concrete pads for nearby public parks.

Ross parks and recreation director Pete Geis said, "There is not enough time in the day for me to tell you all that Eagle Scouts have done for Ross parks."

And so it goes, in virtually every borough and township, week after week. What would community life be like without these people committed to giving so much?

I don't come from a Scouting family; all we did, besides school, was church and music. Lots and lots of church and music.

I begged my mom to let me try Brownies, the Girl Scouts' branch for young girls, when a friend at school was doing it, but that lasted barely a year. Keeping track of uniforms and badges and "flying up" ceremonies was too much for my preoccupied parents to handle.

But my husband's family squeezed Boy Scout obligations in with their church activities, fife-and-drum corps and endless outdoor pursuits. Although only his older brother made Eagle Scout, Andy's habit of

always having a pocket knife handy -- of always being prepared -- prompted me a few years ago to start calling him "The Boy Scout." And I say it admiringly, not mockingly.

I was surprised to find out quite recently that some of my husband's colleagues call him the same thing. The Scouts just seem to turn out a certain kind of man with a capable, honorable, can-do spirit that stands out at any age.

That's because it starts at an early age. A mid-April article profiled a young Scout in Ross who hopes to collect 5,000 cans of food for the needy by the time he makes Eagle Scout. He's already gathered and distributed 2,421 cans, and he's only 12 years old.

Stories like these make me wish it weren't about 10 years too late to get my sons involved. And no, it doesn't bother me a bit that the Boy Scouts of America is a boys-only organization.

Women can participate as Scout leaders, and girls can join two different Boy Scout programs as well as their own Girl Scout branches, like my short-lived Brownie experience. I think society has come full circle from gender exclusion, to inclusion, to realizing that some gender-specific experiences can be very valuable to children's healthy development.

And the evidence of Scouting's value to society's overall health is all around us. The stories just keep on coming.

One Pittsburgh-area Eagle Scout has just raised \$75,000 to build a home with Habitat for Humanity in Katrina-ravaged New Orleans. You'll see the details soon in these pages.

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## **A garden for healing in Bradford Woods**

Woodlands Foundation lets people with disabilities get their hands dirty

Thursday, May 29, 2008

By Doug Oster, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Doug Oster/Post-Gazette

*Denise Robinson, of Monaca, uses a long-handled tool to work in the adaptive garden at the Woodland Foundation in Bradford Woods. The garden was built as an Eagle Scout project and allows people with disabilities to enjoy gardening.*

At this time of the year, gardeners are planting, weeding and enjoying the therapeutic benefits a garden provides.

There's a particular garden at The Woodlands Foundation in Bradford Woods that lets every visitor, no matter the limitations, experience the special feelings gardening offers. And this garden has the added benefit of acting as a tool for healing, according to Patrick Monaghan, director of operations at the foundation, which serves people with disabilities and chronic illness.

"There's certain activities you can do that everyone can gain something from, and I think being able to get your hands dirty, work with the soil, plant something, cultivate it and see it grow really instills a lot of appreciation and self-esteem to see what you've done."

The garden is constructed in a manner that allows people with disabilities to work the soil, and Mr. Monaghan believes time in the garden can help visitors in a multitude of ways.

"With gardening there's sensory stimulation. A lot of the kids that we work with here, young adults, some may be blind, some may have a lot of sensory issues," he said. "[We're] integrating adaptive gardening into a form of treatment really. They are feeling the soil, the instructor can prompt them what that feels like, what's that make you think of."

The garden is a large, raised bed built by **Eric Sinclair**, 17, of Bradford Woods, as part of his **Eagle Scout** community service project for Troop 81.

He spent three months planning and building the garden, designing it to be as accessible as possible.

"I hope that they can use their wheelchairs to be at the right height so instead of having to lean over, they can wheel their wheelchairs up along side of the garden," he said.

There was actually another garden there that had seen better days. With the help of friends and other Scouts, Eric tore out that old garden. He also made careful choices about what materials to use to replace the railroad ties used in the original.

"I did some research of the pressure treated wood. Sometimes it's made with chemicals and some of the kids have skin diseases so I realized that wouldn't be the right wood for it if they were leaning on it."

He decided on cedar, a naturally rot-resistant wood that's beautiful and affordable.

Funding was provided by the Perry Highlands Junior Women's Club.

A group of visitors recently was working in the garden with volunteer Joyce Chalfont, planting flowers the group had voted to use in the garden. Mrs. Chalfont believes time in the garden delivers something rare and precious for these fledgling gardeners.

"I think like, for most of us, it's a relaxation activity. It's something really relaxing just to dig in the dirt and plant things and see them grow. And it's exciting for them, too, to make the decisions [about] what they are going to grow, to have ownership of the garden."

It wasn't the first time Matthew Butler, of New Kensington, a member of the group, had gardened. Even though he's blind and in a wheelchair, he has helped his mother in her flower beds.

With the help of Mrs. Chalfont, he tucked some pansies into place along the edge of the wooden walls that contain the garden. Sitting in his wheelchair, he could easily reach to the center of the garden with the help of some long-handled tools.

"It felt good ... digging through the dirt. It was kind of tough at first."

He believes gardening will strengthen his arms and hopes to be back soon to continue working in the garden.

"It's more fun than I thought it was going to be. I thought it was going to be boring," he said with a laugh.

Mrs. Chalfont hopes the garden provides something for the visitors that most gardeners take for granted. "That they find an activity that they enjoy; that they can do for a lifetime. Gardening is that for a lot of us."

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## Experiences as volunteer helps on project

Thursday, May 08, 2008

By Margaret Smykla, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

*Note: It's the season for senior projects for high school students, part of the state requirements for graduation. This is one in an occasional series highlighting some of the outstanding work done by South Hills students from the Class of 2008 and Class of 2009.*

Besides a leash, strings were attached to the puppy that **Patrick Eger**, 17, received from his parents when he was 5. Patrick, insisted his parents Mike and Terrie Eger, had to take the dog to a nursing home once a week to entertain residents.

"It was important to learn to give back to the community what your community has given you," said Mrs. Eger, who is activity director at the Southwestern Nursing Center and Assisted Living, in Pleasant Hills.

Patrick's volunteerism over the next decade included helping his brother, Christopher, build a gazebo at Asbury Place in Mt. Lebanon as part of the latter's **Eagle Scout project**.

He also accompanied his mother and other staff members on fishing, dining, and picnicking outings with residents of Southwestern.

On April 27, Patrick organized an outing to a Pirates baseball game for eight elderly residents of that facility for his senior project.

Although he is a junior, the graduation requirement at Thomas Jefferson High School of a project related to career goals may be fulfilled a year early. Patrick chose the outing because arranging such events is an aspect of sports management, his career choice.

He began by contacting the Pirates for 16 free tickets for the residents, himself, his mother, volunteers, and staff members. The request was granted for the handicapped section, since most of the residents were in wheelchairs. The Pirates also gave free baseball caps and T-shirts.

Southwestern donated the transportation.

"To be that young and get all that organized, I think that's a lot of work," said Barbara Mallonee, administrator at Southwestern.

Patrick also lobbied for, and got for the group, free lunches at Atria's Restaurant in PNC Park.

Although the outing was about baseball, football was the main topic at lunch among residents, said Mrs. Eger, especially the high school's state championship team, on which Patrick plays offensive tackle.

Patrick and his mother estimated the outing's total cost at \$1,000, all of which was donated.

The most challenging aspect of the event was making the arrangements, Patrick pointed out. "But with how generous everyone was, it wasn't difficult at all."

The Eger family lives in Jefferson Hills; Mr. Eger is self-employed.

Patrick next has to prepare a presentation on the outing for a pass or fail grade.

Besides how to arrange and set up a sports-related event, the experience has taught him the value of volunteerism.

"The expressions on their faces and how much fun they had -- it was just priceless," he said.

*If you would like South to consider publicizing a senior project, please e-mail -- only -- the student's name, phone, biography and a brief synopsis of the project to [vkjoe@post-gazette.com](mailto:vkjoe@post-gazette.com).*