



Redding BSA Troop 15

Scouts Don't Skip a Beat During Covid!

There's no denying that Redding's wide-open spaces and vast hiking networks opened the door to healthy distractions throughout the pandemic. But, let's face it... the same drill, different day routine grew tired and shooing the kids outside for yet another hike didn't fill the void. It's bad enough that technology serves for most kids as a lifeline for education and social life nowadays, but the reality of technology addiction drove many deeper into the virtual hole and cut them further off from healthy lifestyles and meaningful interaction. What to do?

Build an adventure, learn a new skill, find a way. It's what Redding BSA Troop 15 has practiced and perfected in its more than 70 years of existence. When first faced with the cancellation of all in-person activities, Scouts pivoted to virtual and never skipped a beat with monthly meetings. Kahoot challenges kept them on their intellectual toes and evoked a competitive spirit that kept them coming back for more. Soon virtual backyard campouts were devised complete with cookouts, campfire sing-alongs and skits.

They even managed to maintain their decades long tradition of Memorial Day flag replacement at all town cemeteries and held a virtual ceremonial flag retirement for damaged flags collected by the town.

“We’re going over and above” health code requirements and recommendations “to keep the Troop safe and the parents reassured” said Scott Morris, Troop 15 Scout Master and Fairfield public school teacher. “We need to get these kids back to doing what they love.”



And that they did. Scouts spent three days trekking the Appalachian Trail. They camped overnight and sky gazed from tree-strung hammocks in the woods at Hoyt Scout Reservation. Clams were steamed, a bonfire built and tents pitched on the Shea Island shores. Days were packed with boat rides, swimming, sand castle building, target practice, slingshot honing, paintball games, 9-Square, volleyball and ultimate Frisby matches. When the weather turned cold and daylight ran short, layers piled on and lanterns lit the way for outdoor meetings and raucous manhunt games in the woods around Hoyt Scout Camp. All this while socially distancing, mask wearing and with a portable hand wash and sanitize station close at hand.

However, the most notable accomplishment during this period of cancelled gatherings and nixed celebrations, was that five Scouts joined the ranks of Eagle Scout. Erik Areklett, Karl Morris, Kyle Murray, Matthew Sun and Thatcher Unfried achieved the pinnacle award in BSA Scouting that boasts worldwide prestige. Each of them completed hours of community service, held leadership positions, demonstrated Scout Spirit, earned a minimum of 21 merit badges across a variety of topics and vocations, and completed an impactful community service project.

Navigating an Eagle project entails planning and development, obtaining approvals, gathering supplies and raising funds, and ultimately leading a crew through completion. The scope of which provides valuable workforce experience while enriching the community. Eric coordinated a collection and distribution of supplies for students in need at a Danbury summer school, Karl constructed and installed a sixteen foot bridge across the John Read Middle School courtyard pond, Kyle installed trail boardwalks at the Limekiln Nature Preserve, Matt replaced

boardwalks and bridges on the End Trail for the Redding Land Trust, and Thatcher constructed and installed a Hiking Bridge at the Mary Anne Guitar Preserve.

Scouts are industrious and find ways to adapt. “It’s important during these times, when everything is virtual or cancelled, to get outside and have fun with your friends, said Karl, Joel Barlow Sophomore and recent Eagle Scout inductee. “It relieves the stress that you have because of school and remote learning.”

Outside of Scouting, many organizations were not able to modify their programs to support rigorous health codes. With most sports leagues cancelled and camp opportunities scarce, many kids found few outlets to remain active. “Just seeing my friends is what keeps it together for me,” said Nathan, a JRMS 8th grade Scout.

Troop 15 welcomes Scouts from near and far at any time of the year. For more information about the program or to inquire about joining, please contact Jacob Cedusky, Committee Chairman, at jcedusky@gmail.com.