

Two Unificationists Awarded Scouting's Highest Rank on June 8, 2011

Matt Holden and Teo Wilkening
June 8, 2011



Two young men from Bowie, Maryland were awarded Boy Scouting's highest rank, the coveted Eagle badge, on Wednesday, June 8, 6:00 p.m., at New Hope Academy, 7009 Varnum St., Landover Hills, Maryland, 20784. State Senator Douglas J.J. Peters and Mayor Lee Walker attended to read congratulatory proclamations at the ceremony.

Both Matthew Holden and Theodore Wilkening have had remarkable careers as scouts in Boy Scout Troop 1212, sponsored by New Hope Academy in Landover Hills, Maryland. Both also are active in the youth programs of the New Hope Family Church in Landover Hills, Maryland. The troop is the first Unificationist-sponsored troop in North America and has produced more than 23 Eagle Scouts since its launch in 1999.

Matthew Holden joined Troop 1212 at age eleven and got hooked on scouting after his first canoe trip. Theodore Wilkening (Teo) also joined at the age of eleven. As the following testimonies indicate, Scouting drew the commitment of both boys due to the high-adventure trips supported by Scoutmaster Jim Boothby, who has played a pivotal role in mentoring the scouts from the beginning.

Next year, Matt Holden will be enrolled in a year-long leadership program known as Special Task Force (STF). He says that he will focus on over-seas charity work, fundraising, discovering his identity and building a better life of faith. Teo Wilkening plans to work in Maryland this summer before enrolling at the California Institute of Technology in September.

The following testimonies by the Eagle awardees were distributed at the Court of Honor Ceremony on June, 8, 2011.

Reflection of Matt Holden



Matt Holden (photo credit: PeterHolden Photography)

I was born on December 21, 1992, and have lived in Bowie, Maryland for most of my life. At my first Troop 1212 meeting, the scouts were planning a canoe trip. After that outing, I was hooked on Scouts!

I have now been in Troop 1212 for seven years, and reflecting on those years, now as an Eagle Scout, is quite amazing. Scouting has allowed me to go on awesome trips and to learn really great skills like fire-building and knot tying. I also got to meet other guys and strengthen my existing friendships. Moreover, being in the Senior Patrol Leader (SPL) position for a whole year forced me to interact with a lot of adults. I acquired communication skills that I'm glad to have since most kids tend to be very shy or can't relate to adults.

Scoutmaster Jim Boothby has no doubt been a great influence on my life through the Scouting years. I grew very close to him in the year I was SPL and continue to have this awesome relationship with him as an adult leader. He guided me with the Scout meetings, and we talked for hours on the phone. He is the best Scoutmaster a young kid could ask for.

Jake Mas, an older scout, was also a great mentor, because he trained me and gave me advice while I was SPL. We would have talks about the frustrations I had. He could relate, because Jake was also SPL for a year. He knew exactly what I was going through and gave me advice on how to resolve situations and problems. He continues to be an older-brother figure to me, and I thank him for that.

I got out of my comfort zone by becoming SPL. I would say I took this new role very seriously—to the extent that I ended up not having as much fun on the outings as I used to. I think part of that was because I sacrificed joking around with my friends for the sake of the troop and thinking about things like “Where are we going to camp?” “Should we keep hiking?” “We have to clean up, guys!” “Should we start the meeting now?” etc. As SPL, I learned how to give detailed instructions, delegate tasks so others could grow in their own right, follow up to make sure things were done well, and see things from the point of view of the group rather than from just my own perspective.

I’ll always remember the first outing my dad and I went on, and, thinking back, it was probably the best trip during my whole Scouting experience. It was the canoe trip I mentioned earlier, and it was down the Rappahannock River.

On the first day, it started to rain in the afternoon, so we beached the canoes and set up a tarp to shield us from the rain. The guys started mud wrestling, and then we jumped off a 10-foot cliff into the water. I remember this like it was yesterday. Some older Scouts went farther up the river to find a good spot to camp. They found a nice sandbar island, and that’s where I camped for the first time with Scouts. On the second day, we ran into the river’s rushing rapids. They were so intense they capsized one canoe and almost flipped ours. My adrenaline was pumping. The first trip can either be a hit or a miss, and mine was a bull’s-eye, right on the money.

Going on Scout trips for the weekend is really great, because you get to leave everything behind — civilization, your loving mother, and whatever else. There’s something I love about backpacking for two days and getting all dirty. You’re away from everything, there are no parents (besides adult leaders), there’s a sense of freedom, and you can just be yourself. It is depressing when the trips come to an end, but you feel accomplished. While we were in the mountains, I always thought how other kids were playing video games and eating junk food. It’s a shame that those kids don’t experience the great outdoors as Troop 1212 does. When we’re out bushwhacking deep in the Shenandoah Mountains, the natural surroundings are so calm and peaceful, the trees and rocks untouched and sacred. It’s like discovering a new part of the earth that no one has ever found.

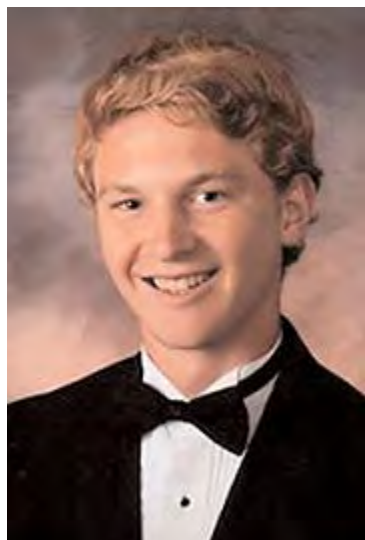
At Scout Camp every year, you take a variety of merit badges from Rifle to Astronomy. As I grew older, I realized that these badges could and should inspire young scouts to develop lifelong interests. Lifesaving merit badge was one of the most fun and useful badges I received. We learned the different techniques to save someone from drowning. The rhyme was, “Reach, throw, row, then go!” The No. 1 piece of advice in this merit badge was “Don’t become the second victim.”

I think one of the Scout laws I like and practice the most is being “helpful.” How I look at it is, by picking up a piece of trash or holding the door open for someone means someone else doesn’t have to work as hard, not to mention that it’s common courtesy. And going out of your way to help someone is being totally different from society’s norm.

For example, after just finishing my two-mile run around the neighborhood recently, I saw my neighbors struggling to bring in their new couches they had just bought. I said, “Hey, do you guys need help?” The wife and husband looked at me in surprise. The wife said, “You can take my place.” So I did, and helped them carry their two couches into the house. They were very heavy; it was a great workout after my run. They wanted to reward me with some money, but I refused and said, “I’m just helping another neighbor out.”

In this same spirit, I orchestrated a food drive for my Eagle project to help struggling families in the Bowie community. Sixteen Scouts from my troop and I collected nine full shopping carts of canned food and household items that the Crofton and Bowie communities donated. I also got my church community involved. I worked with the Bowie Interfaith Pantry and Emergency Aid Fund. Mrs. Langdon, the food director there, was very grateful for the food and all the hard work we put into the project.

Reflection of Teo Wilkening



Teo Wilkening

Thinking back over the years, I realize that Scouts has been one heck of a ride. Whenever you're around Troop 1212, there isn't a moment of dullness or boredom. I was always either doing something, or too exhausted from the trip to care. Being a part of Scouts has given me an opportunity to explore the outdoors in a way I would not have done otherwise. I belong now to a brotherhood, a group of guys whom I can relate to, one that I hung out with and went on adventures with weekly.

I was born the day after Christmas in 1992 in Washington, D.C. I grew up in the same house in Bowie, Md., as I live in today. From the get-go, my parents had me involved in sports like soccer and swimming. Instead of doing Cub Scouts, I participated in Indian Guides with my father and brother. I attended New Hope Academy, a private school in Landover Hills, Md., and was beginning sixth grade when I joined Boy Scout Troop 1212, the first Boy Scout Troop in the United States founded by Unificationists and still composed chiefly of Unificationists today. My dad serves on the board of elders of New Hope Family Church and is an Assistant Scoutmaster.

The minute I joined, I was awed by the older Scouts. I was probably just a snot-nosed fresh recruit to those guys, but everything I saw in them at that time I have tried to emulate in my Boy Scout career (at least the good points, anyway). Even—maybe especially—Amael Rodrigues, who was my cook on one campout in the wooded section of the New Hope Academy property. I hope I've served food half as good.

The uniqueness of our troop is summed up in a chant we came up with years ago: "We're the troop with attitude; we camp in snow, we hike in heat, Troop 1212, we can't be beat!"

Oddly enough, all of the parts of this Troop 1212 chant have come true at one time or another during the good times I've had over the years:

- **"Attitude"**: The Troop 1212 attitude has become part of the troop's culture: Do anything (within the bounds of reason and civility), do it differently. Do it with verve and passion and camaraderie.
- **"Camp in snow"**: And of course the famed annual winter trip to the Dolly Sods plateau in West Virginia!! I have had more than my fair share of the snow and ice there. My blood is now a part of that place, spilled out of a bloody nose from falling on the ice.
- **"Hike in heat"**: A few trips to the Shenandoah Mountains got pretty toasty. But the really sweaty times were more in the blistering heat of late summer as I helped other Scouts on their Eagle projects.
- **"Can't be beat"**: I shall never forget our summer camp at Camp Read in the Adirondack Mountains of New York, where we crushed the camp staff in Ultimate Frisbee even after they had been bragging about how good they were.

I had some great times with my dad, too. One was on a canoeing trip, my first canoe outing ever. We paddled in silence or in conversation, through the calm water or the rapids, and raced everyone else to the finish. In a canoe, we were forced to stay close and work together. I couldn't sprint off to the front of the pack, as I could on a hike. And honestly, I will never forget that canoe trip. I have no memory of what we did or talked about, but just being together made a deep impression.

There are a number of scouting skills I have learned over the years, but public speaking is a *huge* one. Having to lead meetings as Senior Patrol Leader (SPL) has greatly helped me to feel comfortable in front of a group, to speak loudly and clearly. Then, of course, there is the outdoors training. Though I don't feel like I could live off the land for long, I do think I could survive if I ever got trapped in the wilderness. I think my favorite merit badge was Small Boat Sailing. Being able to use the wind and glide across the water is an extreme pleasure.

But I have to say that the most useful skills are knots, basic knife-and axe etiquette, and fire-making knowledge. These have helped me numerous times in my life.

Cultivating a public mind through the years of service projects and watching older Scouts practice “the leadership thing” while finishing their Eagle projects culminated in an Eagle project of my own. Previously, it had always been easy to serve — all I had to do was show up. However, during my own Eagle project, I found myself in the position of planning a whole service event by myself. I think that is the part — the planning — that many people overlook, and yet it is more important for a Scout in terms of his growth than actually doing the service. When choosing my project, I found that I was forced to connect more to the public mind and need. In the end, I settled on hosting the Charity Swing at my high school- a mixture between a toy drive and a dance. To collect toys, the admission was set to at least one toy per person. Then, of course, there is the actual execution of the project. So many phone calls and e-mails were necessary to pull off the Charity Swing. But I did do it. Somehow. I will never treat another service project manager the same, now that I know how much work and effort goes into setting up the project.

Honestly, after seven years of Scouting, there are almost too many memories. Working with friends, playing dodge ball, wrestling night, rabbit-dinner night — the list goes on and on. Through these times, I really learned to enjoy the people I was with. There is nothing like freezing your toes off at the Dolly Sods or eating wilderness-cooked burgers together to create lasting bonds of brotherhood. I am not likely to forget Troop 1212 and the people in it anytime soon, if at all.

As for the future, I will be spending this summer in Maryland working and hanging out with friends and family before I leave to attend college at the California Institute of Technology. And after ten years or so, I see myself with a master’s degree (at least) in engineering, married, and perhaps starting or having started my own business.

Contributed by Matt Holden and Teo Wilkening, Boy Scout Troop 1212