

Boy Scouts'
Eagle award
proves solid
training for future
superintendents

FLYING HIGH



BY CRAIG TIEDE

Dan Schuknecht had no trouble handling the multiple tasks needed so the Talons of Tuscany Golf Club could open for the current season. And in the off months, the assistant superintendent of the Ankeny, Iowa, golf course leads his maintenance crew in upgrading equipment, making repairs, preparing to hire seasonal staff and even starting to build a back nine.

These are no small tasks, especially when building a new course, but Schuknecht remains unfazed. And if you ask him about the source of his efficiency, he'll attribute it to being an Eagle Scout.

Schuknecht wanted to be a golf course superintendent ever since he stepped foot onto the green of his local course in his hometown of Greene, Iowa, during the summer after

Dan Schuknecht says his scouting years were invaluable in helping him develop the skills he uses as a golf course superintendent.

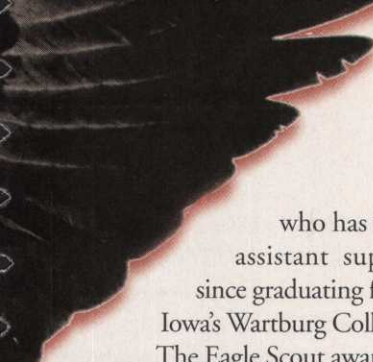
eight grade. As a seasonal maintenance worker, he fell in love not just with the sport, but with being outdoors as well.

Schuknecht says his scouting years were invaluable in developing communication skills, discipline and time management.

"A lot of those skills I use every day on the golf course," says the 25-year-old Schuknecht,



PHOTOS COURTESY: DAN SCHUKNECHT (LEFT), INDEXOPEN (TOP)



who has worked as an assistant superintendent since graduating from Waverly, Iowa's Wartburg College in 2003.

The Eagle Scout award is the highest advancement rank in Boy Scouting. To receive an Eagle, a Scout must fulfill requirements in the areas of leadership, service and outdoor skills, according to the Boy Scouts of America. A Scout must earn 21 self-selected merit badges within 119 different specialties, 12 of which are required in areas like first aid, citizenship in the community and the nation, and environmental science. Elective merit badge specialties range from astronomy to communications to forestry and, yes, even golf. In addition, a Scout must complete a community service project, all before turning 18.

Schuknecht's success as a superintendent can be attributed to his scouting background and his acquired affinity for the outdoors, says Renee Fairrer, associate director of marketing for the Boy Scouts of America.

"These are people who are leaders who know how to work with people," Fairrer says. "These are people who have learned how to approach a problem or an issue and then talk to people and do whatever's necessary to accomplish a final end result."

It doesn't hurt, either, that one of the underlying tenets of the Boy Scout philosophy is respect for the environment.

"What we call 'leave no trace' is taught from the youngest Cub Scouts on up," Fairrer says. It goes beyond not littering, to the point of instilling the wisdom that "what they do to the land will affect other generations to come."

Love of the outdoors also lured Bruce Williams to the Boy Scouts when he was a youngster. Growing up in the south side of Chicago, where his father was superintendent of Beverly Country Club, Williams longed for more than his urban environs could provide.

"It's hard to gain an appreciation for nature when you're in the city," recalls Williams, who is now the director of golf courses and grounds for the Los Angeles Country Club. "Scouting was a bridge to enable me to do that."

Moving to the north suburbs of Chicago when he was 9 years old, Williams became

a model Scout, receiving his Eagle by age 13 in 1963.

"When I go back to my developmental years, scouting was very important to me," Williams says. "I rank my Eagle award on my wall as every bit as valuable as my college diploma because of what it did for me preparing me for life."

Even after receiving an English degree

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Flying High



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from Baldwin-Wallace College in Ohio, scouting and golf remained very close to Williams because he went on to Michigan State for his master's degree in turfgrass science. Upon completion of his master's, he returned to follow in his father's footsteps at the Bob O'Link Golf Club in Highland Park, Ill., as superintendent.

Despite being immersed in his career, Williams never turned his back on scouting because he feels it shaped him to the person he is today.

"Early on in life you're given tests and challenges," Williams says. "Scouting provides real good tests for the making of a man, proper life balance and doing the right things for the community."

Williams served as district commissioner of the North Suburban Council of Chicago's Scouts for 20 years while holding leadership positions such as president of the of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America in 1996.

He moved to Los Angeles nine years ago and is the president of the California Golf Course Superintendents Association. Though inactive with scouting leadership since moving to Los Angeles, Williams still structures his career and life around what he learned as a Boy Scout.

"Scouting is certainly a major part of the cornerstone of principles I live by today," he says. "I don't have to don a uniform to regenerate those feelings. Once you have those feelings and live by the principles, they stay with you forever."

Being a Scout enabled Schuknecht and Williams to actualize their dreams by giving them the skills needed to excel at their chosen vocation. However, not all Scouts become Eagles like they did.

According to the Boy Scouts of America, less than 5 percent of the million boys who enter the scouting program as a Cub Scout go on to receive their Eagle award.

"Not everyone is destined to become an Eagle Scout," Williams says. "I think that's a



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pretty awesome situation to have a track record that shows you've accomplished above and beyond 96 percent of your peers."

Although 988,000 Boy Scouts were registered in 2005, only about 49,500 Eagles were awarded, making it a real honor and achievement.

Gary Grigg was a superintendent in Naples, Fla., at Royal Poinciana Golf Club for 32 years, and a former Scout. He never received his Eagle, though.

"I am what they call a frustrated 'life' Scout, because I never finished," says Grigg, who now owns a fertilizer supply company, Grigg Brothers, with his brother. "I've spent the past 50 years working as an adult Boy Scout leader to see to it other boys did not make the same mistake."

Grigg values scouting and the Eagle so much that during his time as superintendent he included a question on all his applications that asked whether the applicant was a Scout. If the applicant was a Boy Scout, Grigg then asked if he attained his Eagle.



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BRUCE WILLIAMS

CERTIFIED SUPERINTENDENT
LOS ANGELES COUNTRY CLUB

"It shows me that you're goal-oriented," he says. "It shows me they were committed and completed a task that very few do."

Even though he didn't receive his Eagle, Grigg credits his tenure in Boy Scouts as life changing and ultimately guiding him on his career path. This led him to earn a master's degree

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GARY GRIGG

GRIGG BROTHERS



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in agronomy from Michigan State University in 1968, after which he dove headfirst into golf course management until he retired in 2000.

“Most guys come up through the ranks,” says Grigg, who served on the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America board for nine years and was president in 1995. “The first

job I got on the golf course was superintendent.”

Eagle or not, scouting remained an integral part of Grigg’s and his family’s lives as he went on to be a committee leader for his local troop, where two of his three sons earned Eagle awards.

Grigg believes there isn’t a more suitable job for an Eagle Scout than golf course superintendent because of the parallel skill set and goals.

With more than 100,000 golf merit badges earned since its inclusion as a skills test, interest among potential Eagle Scouts is growing. Schuknecht urges anyone in Boy Scouts to not think twice about working toward his Eagle, especially if he aspires to pursue a career in golf course management.

“I would suggest anyone coming into the Scouts work hard and achieve the Eagle Scout award,” Schuknecht says. “The skills you learn are applicable to any field, turf management or otherwise. Those skills will help you in your career and all throughout your life as well.” ■

Tiede is a freelance writer from Chicago.

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