

Local student earns Eagle Scout honor, scholarship

By Thomas Franz

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Dakota High School student Robert Gracin is pictured next to a television stand he constructed for the Marvin Blank Senior Center as part of his Eagle Scout project. (Photo provided by Bob Gracin)

MACOMB TOWNSHIP — Robert Gracin spent plenty of time during his childhood going to camps at the Marvin Blank Senior Center in Macomb Township.

When the time came for Gracin, a member of Troop 349, to pick a beneficiary for his Eagle Scout project in the summer of 2014, he had an easy answer.

After talking with the director of the senior center, Gracin learned that the building was in need of a few different things, and that is how he came up with the ideas for his project.

“It was my style of a project because it was something that had lasting power,” said Gracin, a senior at Dakota High School.

Gracin wound up leading the construction of two television stands and a bookshelf for the senior center. To raise funds for the work, Gracin held a bottle drive and sent out letters of request for donations. In all, he collected \$600 for the project, and ended up donating \$150 in extra funds to the senior center.

The project was one of Gracin's last qualifications to earn the rank of Eagle Scout, and his work also propelled him to the top of a list of approximately 400 applicants to be a Soaring Eagle Scholarship recipient. Gracin was one of three winners who were notified of their scholarship in late February.

Gracin said one component of the scholarship application was to write an essay that discussed the importance of service in local communities and abroad.

"I thought that was a very good prompt for me to write about because I had a lot of experience with service through the multiple things that I'm involved with," Gracin said.

Gracin said he wrote about a service trip to Costa Rica that he participated in with a Spanish class group at Dakota. Gracin said he and other students visited an orphanage in Costa Rica as well as a high school, where they planted trees after learning about the school's dedication to sustainability efforts.

"It was really a great experience for me to learn about other people's values. It was a great service abroad opportunity for me. Then I got to come back and bring a lot of knowledge that I gained there," Gracin said.

In addition to his project and trip abroad, Gracin has earned 31 merit badges since becoming a scout in sixth grade. He earned 13 badges that were required to become an Eagle Scout. Gracin said one of his most memorable badges to earn was a communications badge in 2009.

"That really came back to me when it was time to do my project, because it was coordinating with the beneficiary and my volunteers with the logistics of everything," Gracin said. "I've found that really useful in my endeavors with student government and National Honor Society."

Gracin also mentioned a 2010 weekend trip with his troop for junior leadership training, which provided an opportunity to learn leadership and communication lessons, as an event in his scouting career that has helped him in his other endeavors.

"What I really like is how here in 2016, six years later as an Eagle Scout, the man who was scoutmaster when I first crossed over, he's asked me to come back to do junior leadership training as a mentor to lead the boys and teach them the same skills which I learned in the program," Gracin said.

At Dakota, Gracin has been a member of the school's cross country and track and field teams for all four years. He is Dakota's student government vice president, and is also a member of the National Honor Society.

Next year, he will be attending Michigan State University to study in the James Madison School of Public Policy.

Gracin said that a series of three merit badges in civic engagement that he earned in 2010 will help him with college studies.

"They go hand in hand with the career path I'm trying to follow," Gracin said. "That, combined with a lot of the classes I took in high school, really helped me pursue the passion I have for the major I'll be studying."