

# Dakota sophomore earns Eagle status

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By Thomas Franz



Cheyenne Elementary Principal Mark Johnson (left) and former Cheyenne assistant principal Heather Batko are pictured with Alec DeMaria and his “buddy bench.” (Photo provided by Robert DeMaria)

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MACOMB TOWNSHIP — A new bench that sits on the playground of Cheyenne Elementary School is the product of a Dakota High School sophomore who recently earned Eagle Scout status.

Alec DeMaria recently earned the prestigious honor upon completion of his community service project, which wound up being a “buddy bench” for Cheyenne in Macomb Township.

“I called Cheyenne to see if they needed anything,” DeMaria said. “The buddy bench really stood out and meant something to me. I called the principal back and told him. I started working on that and it turned out to be really great.”

DeMaria is a graduate of Cheyenne. The idea of the buddy bench is that when a student sits on it, other classmates are supposed to visit with the student and invite him or her to join an activity during recess.

Cheyenne had purchased a buddy bench a year before DeMaria asked the school what he could do to help, but principal Mark Johnson said DeMaria had his crew of helpers produced a much better product.

“He kind of kept it secret from us. He would call or email me updates, but he would never send me any pictures, and I’m very happy he did that,” Johnson said. “When he unveiled this bench, it was beautiful. It’s better than any buddy bench you could purchase.”

DeMaria began his scouting career with the Cub Scouts in first grade, and joined the boy scouts in fifth grade. Through those years, he has earned 34 merit badges. He said that outdoor activities like fly fishing and kayaking were a couple of his favorites, plus a polar bear award, which he earned for braving the winter chill of northern Michigan.

When the time arrived for his Eagle project, DeMaria said the most difficult part of the work was the planning stage to get the necessary approvals from troop leaders.

“To set everything in stone on paper was the hardest part of it,” DeMaria said.

Scouts are not allowed to use their own money to purchase equipment and supplies for their projects, so DeMaria hosted a bake sale at his younger brother’s pinewood derby event to raise \$360 for bench materials and to feed his workers who helped construct the bench.

DeMaria enlisted the help of six other scouts who spent three weekends building and painting the bench under DeMaria’s instruction.

“It was interesting being the leader because you want to help out, but you can’t, you’re just supposed to be telling them what to do. The kids that helped me, they were all really nice and listened well,” DeMaria said.

Being only a high school sophomore, DeMaria has plenty of time to remain involved with Troop 149, of which his brother is now a member.

“I’m going to continue staying active in the troop, especially because my little brother just crossed over into Boy Scouts. I’m going to help him a lot. I plan to go camping a lot. I love camping. That’s probably my favorite part of scouting,” DeMaria said.

Bob Lemons, the scoutmaster of Troop 149, said DeMaria has been a model for other scouts to follow and looks forward to his continued involvement with the troop.

“I wish more of the scouts were like him. He’s a good example for the other scouts,” Lemons said. This is a good age for him to reach Eagle because now we have two years that he can give back to the troop. and he will be a leader for the other scouts.”



#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

*Staff Writer Thomas Franz covers Macomb Township, Chippewa Valley Schools and the Macomb County Board of Commissioners for the Macomb Township Chronicle. He also covers sports primarily for the Shelby-Utica News. He has worked for C & G Newspapers since 2013 and attended Michigan State University.*

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