

Eagle Scout aids Iraqi children with school-supply drive

By Janna Brancolini, Staff Writer



Derek Sisson directs fellow members of Boy Scout Troup 948 as they assemble school-supply kits for the nonprofit Operation Iraqi Children. The drive, which raised more than \$1,300, was Derek's Eagle Scout project. (Steve McCrank/Staff Photographer)

When North High School senior Derek Sisson began brainstorming ideas for his Eagle Scout project more than a year ago, he thought about the war in Iraq and how significant it had been for most of his adolescent life.

He felt that he should do something to help, and an online search introduced him to Operation Iraqi Children - a group that facilitates donations of school supplies.

"It's a good program," the Torrance resident said. "The children of Iraq haven't done anything. They deserve the chance to learn, to succeed."

On Saturday, 17-year-old Derek and fellow members of Boy Scout Troop 948 assembled more than 200 school-supply kits for his Eagle Scout project. The Scouts followed the organization's strict guidelines about what should go in the kits.

"No crayons are allowed - they melt in the Iraqi heat," he said. "And no pointed scissors."

Derek wrote letters to eight corporations asking for donations; five never responded and three sent rejection letters. But he persevered, organizing a flier drive in his

neighborhood and coordinating a school-supply drive at a local Office Depot. For three days, Scouts stood outside the store soliciting monetary donations or donations in kind, while others stood inside directing people to the proper supplies. They also handed out more than 1,100 fliers in Derek's neighborhood.

Although the Sissons weren't sure what to expect, the grass-roots drive raised more than \$1,300 for school supplies.

"I was amazed," Derek said. "I'm so thankful to all the people in my neighborhood and the people who donated."

Sitting in his living room - surrounded by boxes of folders, rulers and more - he said at least three stores ran out of supplies because of his efforts.

For Derek, Scouting is a family affair. His father, Gary, is the Scoutmaster of Troop 948 and an Eagle Scout himself. And younger brother Dillon is a Boy Scout, as well.

Derek's father has been hoping his son would become an Eagle Scout since Derek started Cub Scouts in first grade. "It's exciting," he said. "Of course, we're just very proud he stuck in there."

With a father as a Scoutmaster, Derek was especially involved in volunteering for camps and other Boy Scout functions. He and his dad joke that sometimes his name would just "randomly" show up on volunteer lists.

"(Boy Scouts) gave us a chance to do things together that were structured - more than you would probably do on a family vacation," Gary Sisson said. "It's been a real taste of the outdoors that he's really grabbed on to."

Derek said he loves to camp, backpack and swim. He's learned to lifeguard and scuba dive as a Boy Scout, and he has hiked more than 450 miles in the past four years. He has traveled to the East Coast for Boy Scout conferences, and he said he has learned how to get along with others by working in a team. He has had the opportunity to lead and mentor younger Scouts, and he said all these different experiences prepared him to be an Eagle Scout.

Being an Eagle Scout, he says, "means you're mature, you know how to hold yourself. You're responsible, you have leadership experience."