

Scout uses Eagle project to allay student fears of scoliosis screenings

By Matt Bower



Submitted Photo

HARD AT WORK: Gregory Goins, a Scout with Troop 49 Lakewood and a senior at Pilgrim High School who was diagnosed with scoliosis in fifth grade, recently completed his Eagle Scout project, which involved making a brochure explaining the scoliosis screening process after observing confusion and anxiety among his classmates during the school-administered screenings. Here, Goins (right center) instructs fellow Scouts on how to assemble the easels that hold the brochures.

D'Agostino, director of special education for Warwick schools, an outside graphic design company, a printing shop, and his fellow Scouts, Goins was able to develop and publish a brochure and easel display that will be distributed to Warwick elementary and middle schools.

"I thought about what I could do personally," Goins said. "I enjoy graphic design, and I thought about what there needs to be information for."

Goins said when he was diagnosed, his doctor did a good job of explaining everything to him that was involved with the diagnosis and treatment, but Goins noticed there wasn't a lot of information available at the school screenings. After learning about the condition and undergoing treatment, he noticed many of the medical terms involved were large words that elementary students might have trouble understanding, so he simplified the language in his brochure.

"My doctor recommended some websites for me to check out, and after writing a rough draft [for the brochure], I realized the language was too complex," Goins said. "I tried to make it on a fifth grade [reading] level because that's where most of the anxiety lies since you've never gone through it before."

Completing an Eagle Scout project combines community service with a leadership role, and it's a milestone that not every Scout attains. The most popular of projects is to clean up a local cemetery, but Gregory Goins decided to help his fellow classmates while also pursuing his passion for graphic design with his project.

Goins, a member of Troop 49 Lakewood who will be starting his senior year at Pilgrim in the fall, was diagnosed with a mild case of scoliosis when he was in fifth grade and underwent corrective medical treatment. Goins defines scoliosis as "a twist in the spine."

"That can be frightening to hear and people start questioning things in their mind," he said.

During scoliosis screenings provided by the school department for grades 5 through 8, Goins noticed many of his classmates were filled with confusion and anxiety while undergoing the process, so he decided to create a brochure that explains scoliosis and the screening. Working with his pediatrician, Dr. Robert Griffith, his technology teacher, Andrea Place, Dr. Richard

Goins' father, Steve, said one of the Troop mothers knows the Pilgrim nurse, who conducts the screenings with a scoliometer, an instrument used to measure the degree of curvature of the spine, and said screenings used to be conducted in groups and students were often fearful of removing their shirts. Gregory said while that has changed, as screenings are now conducted individually, there's still a need for more information. He said an informational videotape used to be shown, but that's no longer part of the screenings.

Goins said the schools can't diagnose scoliosis; they can only refer students to a doctor to be checked out.

"That's where lots of the anxiety comes in because you don't know if you have it," he said.

Goins said it took him about a month to complete the entire project, but it took close to six months to get everything approved and reviewed before moving forward.

"I had my doctor review the information and a design company reviewed the brochure [concept] to make sure everything worked graphically," he said.

Steve Goins said the school department also reviewed the project for medical accuracy and legality.

"Dr. D'Agostino was very receptive to the project, but he wanted to make sure everything was medically correct and legally in line," Steve said.

Gregory found the experience enjoyable, but there were some parts that were not what he first expected.

"The approval process took longer than I anticipated and I thought the printing [process] would be a bigger deal," he said.

Steve said Ron Lamb and Dave Izzi at Graphic Solutions in Warwick, where Gregory worked as an assistant last summer, donated the majority of the supplies and showed him how to cut printing costs. Then, Stanley Reuter of Allegra Print in East Greenwich not only donated 500 copies of the brochure on tri-fold, glossy paper, but he also gave Gregory a tour of his print shop and showed him the equipment used to print the brochures.

"The brochures were printed on a digital machine, so it was fast, and they were pre-folded, which I was going to have the Scouts do. They came out really nice," Gregory said. "Everyone was very open to my questions and was willing to help me out along the way."

Gregory fulfilled the community service portion of his project by designing and creating the brochures that will be distributed in the schools, and he took care of the leadership portion by instructing his fellow Scouts in building and putting together the easel layout and pockets to hold the brochures.

"That was harder than it looks," he said. "I enjoyed designing the brochure the most. We ran into some technical difficulties when making the easels, but it was cool to see everything come together with the Scouts."

Gregory said he conducted the research portion at home and used his independent study in graphics at Pilgrim and other class time to create the brochure through access to programs such as Adobe InDesign and with help from his teachers.

Gregory said he plans to pursue graphic design in college and encouraged other Scouts to take up an Eagle project.

“I didn’t have the most conventional approach, but I learned a lot,” he said. “A lot of my friends are doing the project now, so it’s nice to see them helping out the community. It [the project] lets you help out how you want and gives you an opportunity to fix something you think is a problem.”