the Eagle Court of Honor book

BY MARK RAY

Chapter 2

Planning the Court of Honor

A step-by-step guide to planning the perfect court of honor

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Planning the Court of Honor

A slip-shod and carelessly run Court of Honor is distinctly dangerous to Scouting.
—*The How Book of Scouting*, 1938

Eating Elephants

An old joke asks, "How do you eat an elephant?" The answer—"One bite at a time"—applies equally well to planning an Eagle court of honor. It's a big job, but you can do it. You just have to take it one step at a time.

On pages 10–11, you'll find a court of honor backdater, which is simply a step-by-step list of what you need to do and when you need to do it. I recommend that you photocopy these pages and record both the target date and the person responsible for each item on the list.

The great thing about backdaters is that they put everything in chronological order; the bad thing is that they make it hard to see the relationship between different items on the list. So in the next few pages, I'll talk you through the planning process.

First Things First

The first thing that must happen, of course, is that the Scout must pass his board of review. On that date, he is officially an Eagle Scout, although his application must still be reviewed by the local council and the national office of the Boy Scouts of America.

You should talk to the person in your local council office who handles Eagle applications to find out about local procedures; this could be the registrar, the office manager, or another

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support-staff member. Check back with her to find out when the application was mailed to the national office, and make sure you're notified when the application is approved or if unforeseen problems arise.

Preliminary Planning

Now you're ready to start planning. As quickly as possible, schedule a meeting that includes you, the honoree and his parents, and the Scoutmaster. At this meeting, you need to decide where and when to hold the court of honor. The BSA recommends that you schedule the court of honor no less than six weeks after the board of review, but I think you should allow a little more time, just to be on the safe side.

Many troops hold Eagle courts of honor on their regular meeting night (in place of the normal troop meeting), which helps minimize conflicts and maximize attendance by troop members. On the other hand, you may want to consider a weekend court of honor if you expect out-of-town guests to attend. In either case, be sure to avoid conflicts with major school, community, or chartered organization events.

Run your tentative date by the troop committee and patrol leaders council for approval. Then immediately reserve the facility where you want to hold the event. Send a letter to the person in charge of the facility to confirm the details. With the date and location confirmed, you can start recruiting presenters and promoting the court of honor.

At your initial meeting, you should also discuss what type of ceremony the family would like and whether they want to involve any particular people in the ceremony. Decide who should recruit these people and what level of involvement the family will have in further planning. Discuss which expenses are the responsibility of the family, the troop, or the chartered organization.

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Eagle Court of Honor Backdater

Photocopy this backdater and use it as a worksheet as you begin planning the court of honor. Give copies to all participants so they know what is expected of them.

Weeks	Date	Action	Assigned To
-8	_____	Board of review is held.	_____
-7	_____	Chairperson is selected.	_____
-7	_____	Chairperson meets with family to begin planning.	_____
-7	_____	Set date and time for court of honor.	_____
-7	_____	Secure location.	_____
-7	_____	Send confirmation letter to person in charge of location.	_____
-7	_____	Order invitations.	_____
-6	_____	Develop invitation list.	_____
-6	_____	Begin promoting the event within the troop.	_____
-5	_____	Order needed supplies from council (awards, program covers, etc.).	_____
-5	_____	Order plaques and other recognition items.	_____
-5	_____	Solicit congratulatory letters from public officials and other VIPs.	_____
-5	_____	Flesh out program and prepare script.	_____
-5	_____	Order NESA membership.	_____
-4	_____	Mail invitations.	_____
-4	_____	Recruit master of ceremonies and presenters.	_____
-4	_____	Recruit volunteers to coordinate support functions.	_____
-4	_____	Distribute scripts to presenters.	_____

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-3	_____	Order refreshments.	_____
-3	_____	Visit the court-of-honor location to check facilities.	_____
-2	_____	Have programs printed.	_____
-2	_____	Mail press releases. If possible, include a black-and-white photo.	_____
-2	_____	Call troop families to promote.	_____
-1	_____	Gather all necessary materials, props, awards, etc.	_____

Days	Date	Action	Assigned To
-2	_____	Hold a rehearsal with all presenters.	_____
-2	_____	Confirm attendance of all presenters.	_____
-1	_____	Confirm access to building.	_____
0	_____	Set up and decorate room.	_____
0	_____	Set heater or air conditioner.	_____
0	_____	Check all audio-visual equipment (microphones, projectors, etc.).	_____
0	_____	Make sure all awards and other props are in place.	_____
0	_____	Reserve seats for presenters, the honoree, and his family.	_____
0	_____	Set up refreshments.	_____
0	_____	Position greeters at the door(s) to hand out programs.	_____
0	_____	Check with all presenters one last time.	_____
0	_____	THE COURT OF HONOR	_____
+1	_____	Send thank-you notes.	_____
+3	_____	Send write-up (with pictures) to newspapers.	_____
+5	_____	Evaluate the event and make notes for next time.	_____

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The Invitation List

Early on, the family should start developing an invitation list. This list should include troop members, non-Scouting friends, other family members, godparents, religious leaders, teachers, coaches and band directors, Eagle board of review members, district and council VIPs, past Scout leaders, those who helped with the Eagle service project, and anyone else who's played a part in the boy's development. I've include a list in the box below to give you a head start.

Developing a good invitation list is especially important if the Eagle Scout is older or has not been highly visible within the troop recently. Take the case of a Scout who passes his board of review just before his eighteenth birthday and comes home from college for his court of honor. Many troop members won't know him well, so you'll have to work extra hard to boost attendance.

Invitation List

People won't come to a court of honor if you don't invite them. Even members of the troop need an invitation. Here's a list to get you started.

- Troop members and leaders
- Representatives from the chartered organization
- Past Scout leaders
- Den leaders
- Cubmasters
- Merit-badge counselors
- Those who helped with the Eagle service project
- Eagle board of review members
- Buddies from camp staff
- District executive
- District chairman
- District commissioner
- Family members
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Godparents
- Religious leaders
- Favorite teachers
- Members of the troop's sister Cub Scout pack

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The parents will probably be responsible for ordering invitations, having them printed, and mailing them. Invitation cards are available from your local council service center, but you can also design your own if you wish.

Sometimes the Eagle Scout adds a personal note when inviting relatives and other people who have been especially important to him. For out-of-town relatives, you might suggest a message like this one: "I know that it may not be practical for you to attend my court of honor because of distance and time constraints. The purpose of sending this invitation is to let you know of my accomplishment. Achieving the Eagle Scout award is very special to me, and I wanted to share this moment with you."

Developing the Ceremony

Your next big job is to develop the ceremony to be used. You may want to start with one of the samples in Chapter 7 and modify it to fit the Scout you're honoring. Your initial meeting with the Scout and his family should have given you some ideas for customizing the ceremony.

As you write the ceremony, think about the location you're planning to use: Will the action take place on a stage? Can you dim the lights for your slide show? Where will the honoree sit?

Once you've developed your script, begin assigning parts. Some assignments will be easy: the Scoutmaster will probably do the actual badge presentation, and the Scout's religious leader is a good choice for the invocation and benediction. Other parts will take some thought: Who's the right person to deliver the Eagle charge, for example? Remember to use any special people the family requested.

Also remember that this is a troop function. You don't need a bunch of VIPs (Scouting or otherwise) on the program to have an effective ceremony. The new Eagle Scout *is* the VIP.

How many presenters should be involved? Six to eight main

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presenters is probably the maximum. The more presenters you have, the more complicated the event will be and the more time you'll waste with introductions, entrances, and exits. Your presenters may be Scouts, Scout leaders, or other adults.

Chapter 3 covers the ceremony itself in much greater detail.

Recruiting

I said earlier that the way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. But there's actually a better way: get a lot of friends to help you. That's where recruiting comes in.

Once you've decided who you want to involve in the court of honor, you need to go out and recruit those people. Do this early to be sure that you get the people you want. As soon as they're recruited, send them a printed script with their parts highlighted.

At the same time, you need to recruit some important support people. Support jobs include physical arrangements, publicity, decorations, refreshments, and the printed program. You may also want to recruit someone to solicit congratulatory letters from public officials and other dignitaries. (This is usually a separate job from sending invitations.) Support functions are discussed in Chapter 8.

Shopping Spree

Part of the court of honor involves giving the new Eagle (and his parents) a number of recognition items. These usually include the Eagle badge itself, the Eagle certificate, a letter from the Chief Scout Executive, an Eagle mother's pin, and an Eagle tie tack (or lapel pin) for the father. The certificate and letter are automatically sent by the national office in the Eagle packet; the other items are purchased from the council service center.

In addition, many troops and chartered organizations give a

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gift, like a plaque or a neckerchief, to the Scout. One troop I know of gives each new Eagle a flag that flew over the U.S. Capitol on his board of review date. (For details, contact your U.S. representative or one of your U.S. Senators or visit **www.usflag.org** on the World Wide Web.)

Some troops also have a large plaque in their meeting place on which they engrave the names of all their Eagle Scouts; you can purchase these and other plaques from the council service center. Be sure to allow time for engraving any plaques that you're using.

Another "item" that's often purchased is a membership in the National Eagle Scout Association (NESA); a life membership makes an especially nice gift. An application comes with the Eagle packet, and at this writing, it mentioned a special fee—$10 versus $25—for five-year memberships for new Eagles. NESA applications are also available at your local council service center, although they don't mention the special fee. Sometimes the

The Question of Gifts

People attending Eagle courts of honor often wonder if they're supposed to bring a gift. While traditions vary among troops, I don't think court-of-honor guests should feel obligated to come with present in hand. Some people will choose to bring gifts, of course, especially family members and close friends, and they may turn to you for advice on what to bring.

A good place to start looking for gift ideas is the BSA catalog. Over the last few years, the BSA has greatly expanded the range and quality of the gifts and recognition items it sells. At this writing, you could buy gifts through the BSA catalog ranging from a few dollars to more than $250.

But you don't have to limit your search to the BSA catalog. You can find bald-eagle cards, prints, sculptures, and related items at many gift shops.

A final note: the honoree should consider giving a small gift to his Scoutmaster and a bouquet of flowers to his mother.

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family has the NESA and Eagle Scout certificates framed before the court of honor. (For more information, write to NESA, 1325 W. Walnut Hill Lane, P.O. Box 152079, Irving, Texas 75015-2079 or visit **www.bsa.scouting.org/nesa/index.html**.)

Your refreshment coordinator will need to order a cake and buy cups, plates, napkins, and utensils. Many of these supplies can be purchased from the council service center, where you can also buy Eagle Scout program covers.

You should visit the service center as early as possible in case some of the things you need must be ordered. The council may keep a small supply of program covers on hand, for example, or may only stock one style. You can also order directly from the BSA catalog; be sure to allow plenty of time for delivery.

An Eagle court of honor can be an expensive affair, but it doesn't have to be. You could, for example, use red, white, and blue napkins, plates, and balloons instead of the more-expensive Eagle-logo items.

Expensive or not, decide up front who is going to pay for what. For example, the family could pay for the reception and the NESA membership, the chartered organization could pay for the plaque, and the troop could pay for the invitations, Eagle badge, and other recognition items. Some troops will reimburse the family up to $50 or $100 for any expenses they incur. Whatever arrangements you make should be consistent from one court of honor to the next, and whatever costs the troop is expected to bear should be included in the troop budget.

Final Details

If the people you've recruited are doing their jobs, you should have little to do in the last few days before the court of honor. Your main task will be to make sure all the parts come together.

A few phone calls near the end will make a big difference.

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Call all your presenters to make sure they're ready. Call the custodian to make sure the building will be open. Call the senior patrol leader and have him remind all the boys to attend. Call everyone who's supposed to bring something (cake, programs, flags, etc.) to make sure they haven't forgotten.

I recommend that you have a rehearsal, perhaps a few days before the court of honor. By walking through the ceremony, you'll improve the program's flow and spot problems you didn't think about before.

The Big Day

Those involved in the court of honor should arrive long before the program starts. Chairs need to be set up, the room needs to be decorated, the microphones and lights need to be checked, and the thermostat needs to be set. All these chores should be finished at least half an hour before the program is due to begin.

Follow-up

Follow-up is brief but important. Be sure to leave the room cleaner than you found it. Send thank-you notes to the people who helped you (including the custodian and the person who let you use the building). Send a press release to the local newspapers (if they didn't already publish a story).

Finally, take some time to evaluate the court of honor and make notes for the next time. Since you did such a great job this time, you'll undoubtedly be asked to plan the troop's next court of honor, too!

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