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## **Tennessee Military Dept. hosts first Merit Badge University**

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** – On April 30, “Ready Now” met “Be Prepared” when the Tennessee Military Department hosted Scouts from all across the Middle Tennessee region to attend a Merit Badge University.

This is the first time the Tennessee Military Department hosted an event such as this at Nashville’s Joint Force Headquarters. Over 50 Soldiers and Airmen offered 23 different specialized merit badge classes from which the Scouts could choose. Over 400 participants registered with roughly 20 Scouts per class.

“This event benefitted both the Scouts and the Tennessee National Guard,” said Sgt. 1st Class Ken Weichert, the program coordinator for this Merit Badge University. “These classes were taught by Guardsmen who specialize in these areas; the Scouts learned from us, and we got to learn a lot about them. This was another great opportunity for our Guard members to engage with the community.”

The classes ranged anywhere from recreational activities to Eagle Scout required merit badges; Tennessee’s Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Jeff Holmes, taught architecture while members from the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency taught search and rescue. Some Scouts had the opportunity to visit the Capitol during the merit badge class for citizenship in the nation, while others navigated in the woods with a map and compass. Other merit badge classes offered included law, photography, journalism, personal fitness, engineering, first aid, and much more.

“There is a high percentage of former Scouts who say when surveyed that they ended up picking a career or lifetime hobby based on experiences that they had while working on a merit badge,” said Lt. Col. Dallas Clements, the project manager for this event. “For me, I distinctly remember being fascinated with the college radio station and several other commercial stations we toured when I went through a MBU. I think this experience influenced my decision to join the Signal Corps branch when I commissioned into the military.”

Clements earned his Eagle Scout in 1997 with Troop 48 in Soddy Daisy, Tennessee. Now, two of his children are Scouts, and Clements is the Cubmaster for Cub Scout Pack 135 as well as the Assistant Scoutmaster and a merit badge counselor for Troop 135.



During the classes, Scouts learned skills in their respected areas while completing the various tasks to meet the badge's requirements. Every Scout ended the day with at least one new badge, some even earned two.

For Eloy Caban, a 15-year-old Life Scout with Troop 106, he is one step closer to earning his Eagle Scout.

"I am glad they offered this merit badge university; I have never attended one hosted by the military before," said Caban. "I took the Journalism merit badge class because I can use it for one of my Eagle Palms. This class helped me get a little closer to my goal."

As COVID-19 restrictions continue to unwind and as the summer season approaches, the Tennessee National Guard hopes to increase community outreach events such as this.

"This was even more of a success than we had originally anticipated; this was a great opportunity for us to get involved in the community," said Weichert. "We greatly look forward to the next merit badge university and hope to bring even more classes and participation in the future."



The Tennessee Military Department hosted Scouts from across the Middle Tennessee region to attend a Merit Badge University held in Nashville on April 30. (Photo by: Lt. Col. Darrin Haas)



Tennessee National Guard's Col. Jimmy Reed and Sgt. 1st Class Ken Weichert helped lead the Scout Oath during the opening ceremony of the Merit Badge University held in Nashville on April 30. (Photo by: Capt. Kealy Moriarty)



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Tennessee's Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. Jeff Holmes, teaches a class on architecture during the Merit Badge University on April 30. Over 50 Soldiers and Airmen offered 23 different specialized merit badge classes for the Scouts to choose from. Over 400 participants registered with roughly 20 Scouts per class. (Photo by: Lt. Col. Marty Malone)



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