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Tennessee Military Dept. Hosts Merit Badge University

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – The Tennessee National Guard embraced the motto, “Always Ready, Always There,” as they hosted the 2nd Annual Merit Badge University for more than 300 scouts who wanted to live up to their motto, “Be Prepared,” on April 29.

Held at the Tennessee Military Department’s Joint Force Headquarters in Nashville, more than 50 Soldiers, Airmen, and volunteers with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency offered 22 specialized merit badge classes for scouts to earn. Scouts from the Middle Tennessee Council and across the state were invited to attend.

“This event benefits both the scouts and the Tennessee National Guard,” said Sgt. 1st Class Ken Weichert, the program coordinator for this Merit Badge University. “The classes were taught by Guardsmen who are professionals in their specialties, have years of experience, and are also trained by Scouts BSA.”

Available merit badges ranged from those required for Eagle Scout to professional based programs. For example, volunteers with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency taught search and rescue, National Guard helicopter pilots taught aviation, and Tennessee’s Staff Judge Advocate taught law. Other merit badge classes offered included photography, journalism, personal fitness, engineering, first aid, and much more.

“The selection was diverse and there were many that are not often available during meetings or at scout camp,” said Weichert. “We also had some great instructors.”

Scouts earning the citizenship in the nation merit badge visited the Tennessee state capital, which was taught by the Military Department’s Legislative Liaison, retired Col. James Reed. He was joined by former U.S. Representative William “Van” Hilleary, who served as the U.S. representative for Tennessee’s 4th congressional district from 1995 to 2003. Hillary provided a level of expertise to the class that is hard to match.

“It was great to see these young men and women learn about the U.S. government from a former U.S. Congressman,” said Reed. “It was a rare opportunity that many of these scouts will always remember.”

During the classes, scouts learned skills in their respected areas while completing the various tasks to meet the badge’s requirements. Most scouts ended the day with at least one new badge, with many one step closer to earning Eagle Scout, the highest rank a scout can earn.

“When I talk to many former scouts, they tell me that they often choose a career or life-long hobby based on their experiences while working on a merit badge,” said Weichert. “I remember taking personal fitness as a scout and it became my life-long passion and career. That is why I believe events like this are so important, not only are these scouts learning, but they are also being inspired.”

Weichert is the founder of Start Fitness and is a professional exercise science specialist, a certified life coach, and motivational speaker. He is a Master Resilience Trainer facilitator for the Tennessee National Guard and a scoutmaster for Troop 418. He taught the personal fitness merit badge at the last two Merit Badge Universities.

“Not only did we offer interesting and memorable opportunities for the scouts, but we also hosted training for leaders and adult volunteers,” said Weichert. “During our adult leader training sessions, they were given presentations by our state’s counterdrug commander and an overview of the capabilities of our 45th Weapons of Mass Destruction, Civil Support Team.”

While all these events were happening, Gen. Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and his wife, Kelly, visited the event and talked with many of the scouts participating.

“It was great that they were able to attend and see everything these young men and women are doing,” said Weichert. “General Hokanson was able to visit with the adult leaders and scouts earning automotive maintenance and the citizenship in the nation badges. His wife was able to visit the 129th Army band as they taught the music merit badge, as well as others.”

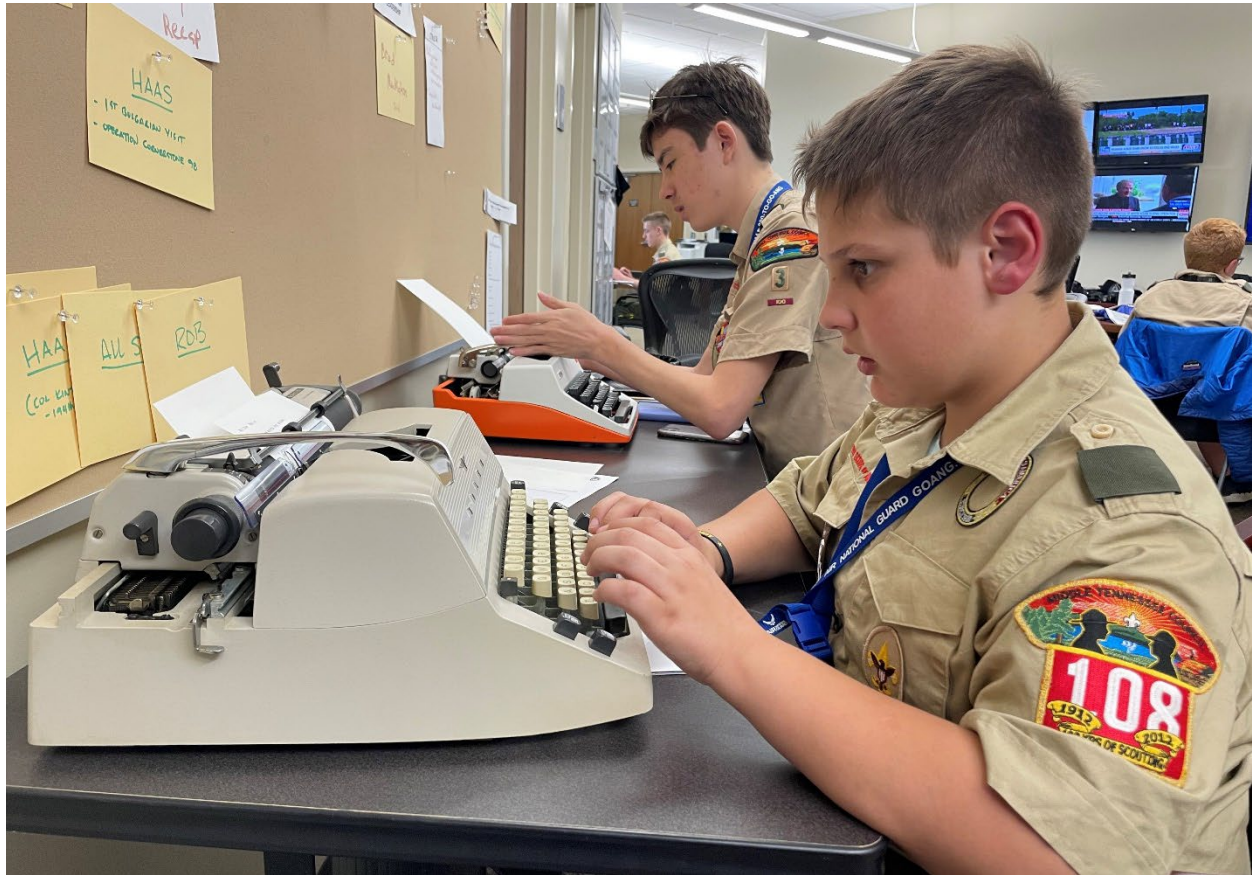
After the day-long event was over, more than 300 merit badges were earned by scouts from across Tennessee.

“This year’s university was even more successful than we had originally anticipated,” said Weichert. “It was a great opportunity for Guardsmen to be involved in the community and for the scouts to learn different skills and about different professions they may want to pursue in the future. We look forward to doing this again next year.”

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A scout writes a letter to an elected official while earning the citizenship in the nation merit badge at the 2nd Annual Merit Badge University hosted by the Tennessee Military Department at the Joint Force Headquarters in Nashville, April 29. (photo by retired Sgt. 1st Class William Jones)



Scouts learn how to write using a manual typewriter while attending journalism merit badge at the 2nd Annual Merit Badge University hosted by the Tennessee Military Department at the Joint Force Headquarters in Nashville, April 29. (photo by Lt. Col. Darrin Haas)



Maj. Gen. Jimmie Cole, Tennessee's Deputy Adjutant General, Gen. Daniel Hokanson, Chief of the National Guard Bureau, and his wife, Kelly, talk with a scout participating in the automotive maintenance merit badge at the 2nd Annual Merit Badge University hosted by the Tennessee Military Department at the Joint Force Headquarters in Nashville, April 29. (official National Guard photo)

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