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RE: Eagle Scout project enhances County Park

Submitted by Public Information Officer Sharon A. Driscoll

Eagle Scout candidate Matt Amidon of Cazenovia recently designed and facilitated construction of a 25-foot bridge along with clearing and remarking over a mile of trail in Madison County's Oxbow Falls Park.

Building a foot-bridge over a small stream does not sound like an overly taxing project until you add a few of the variables. The stream is located in a densely forested area about a quarter of a mile up the side of the Helderberg escarpment that is accessible only by a narrow root and rock littered dirt path that twists and turns through the underbrush. If it happens to be raining or has recently rained traversing the steep dirt path is interesting to say the least.

However, Matt did not let a small thing like the steep terrain and an overgrown path deter his quest. He went forth into the community and was able to obtain contributions of lumber, hardware and manpower. In fact, he secured all of the lumber for the project except for one 18-foot, 5/4" by 6" piece of pressure treated lumber that was paid for by Madison County. Paul Manion, of Cazenovia, generously donated the majority of hemlock for the bridge. Manion, owns his own woodlot in DeRuyter and has a small saw mill.

Matt rounded up 35 fellow scouts, friends, and relatives and following his carefully laid out plan they cleared and remarked the mile-long loop trail and the area where the bridge now stands, not to mention sawing up two large trees that had fallen on the trail during the winter. They carried several 5-gallon buckets of stone from the bottom of the escarpment up the trail to the construction site where the stones were placed in the cribs (steps).

Matt's initial idea for his Eagle Scout project was to clean up a ravine that has been used as an illegal dumping area for too many years, but there was no easy access to the ravine. Although, cleaning up the ravine was a more than worthy project it was just not feasible.

The young Eagle Scout candidate met with Associate Planner Jim Petreszyn, who is in charge of Madison County's Parks and a new project was born. Matt was to design and facilitate construction of a foot-bridge in Oxbow Falls Park. This project included clearing brush and undergrowth from the one mile looped trail that leads to the area where the new bridge would be constructed, design the bridge, solicit donations for materials and/or the actual materials needed to construct the bridge, outline a work schedule and put a work crew together to clear the trail and construct the bridge.

Years of training in the Scouts had prepared Matt for the task at hand. Having advanced through the ranks of Tenderfoot, Second Class, First Class, Star and Life Scout Matt drew up a plan. He and his dad, who is a Civil Engineer and bridge inspector, sat down and designed the foot-bridge and cribs. The steps are each five foot with the overlap of the stringers.

"Matt's work on the foot-bridge far exceeded my expectations for this project," said Petreszyn as he marveled at photographs of Matt and his crew carrying massive pieces of lumber up the steep and twisted trail.

The actual construction of the bridge took only two Saturdays, but about six weeks went into the planning, solicitation and preassembly of the bridge at his home on Rte. 20 in Cazenovia.

On a weekend prior to constructing the bridge, Matt set up the first workday to clear and remark the loop trail, explained Scout Master George Schmit. "Matt had everything planned out in advance, right down to the tools we would need and how each of the four teams would execute the task. We cleared and remarked the entire one-mile trail in less than two hours.

Schmit said, "Matt's Eagle Scout project is one of the best organized projects I have ever seen and I have been an Eagle Scout advisor for over 20 years. Matt has great communication skills. He held pre work sessions, had all of the material and tools lined up and ready to go on the scheduled work days and was in constant contact with his team. Nothing was left to chance.

The purpose of an Eagle Scout project such as the construction of the bridge in Oxbow Falls Park is to prove that a scout has learned to use resources in planning, communication and management. If Matt achieves all required criteria for this high ranking position and receives final approval from the Boy Scouts of America National office in Texas an Eagle Court of Honor will be planned, where he will finally receive the rank of Eagle Scout.

"He was recently elected Senior Patrol Leader by his peers. This position is the highest leadership position in the troop," said Schmit. "Scouting in general promotes life skills such as leadership, character development, citizenship, responsibility and organizational skills that will last a life time."

Matt, 16, has been involved in Scouting since he was a baby in his mothers arm; attending one of his brother David's scouting events at age six-months. The Amidons', Paul and Debbie, are committed to their children, Scouting and the community.

A junior at Cazenovia High School, Matt is a member of Troop 18 in Cazenovia, which is a member of the Revolutionary Trails Council of the Seneca-Tuscarora District. The Boy Scouts of America Revolutionary Trails Council consists of portions of Madison, Oneida, Herkimer and Lewis counties.



Eagle Scout candidate Matt Amidon, left, and members of the bridge building crew stand on the newly constructed footbridge in Oxbow Falls Park in the Town of Lincoln. The new bridge replaces the small decking section in the foreground.



Scouts, friends and neighbors of Eagle Scout candidate Matt Amidon work to clear the one-mile loop trail at Oxbow Falls Park that leads to the newly constructed footbridge.

### **Background Information on Scouting:**

The rank of Eagle Scout carries a special significance, not only in Scouting but also as an Eagle Scout enters higher education, business or industry and community service.

The award is a performance-based achievement whose standards have been well maintained over the years. It should be noted that not every boy who joins a Boy Scout

troop earns the Eagle Scout rank; only about five percent of all Boy Scouts do so. About 1.7 million Boy Scouts have earned the rank since 1912.

Some famous Eagle Scouts are Willie Banks, Olympian, former world record holder in the triple jump and long jump; Thomas Foley, former speaker of the House and former United States Representative, Washington; The Honorable Gerald R. Ford, 38<sup>th</sup> president of the United States; James A. Lovell Jr., Apollo astronaut, J. Willard Marriott Jr., chairman of the board and president of Marriott Corp. and H. Ross Perot, founder, Electronic Data Systems Corp and the Perot Group.