Banning Eagle Scout Named Top Scout in Nation by VFW

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Local Eagle Scout Robert Morgan has been named “National Scout of the Year” for 2009-2010 by the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Morgan, 18, the son of Chuck and Donna Morgan, received a $5,000 scholarship as the VFW’s number one Scout in the U.S.

“The judges had a tough time choosing the second and third place winners this year,” said Steve Van Buskirk, VFW national director of programs. “But the judges had no problem in choosing Robert Morgan of California as the VFW National Scout of the Year. The point I want to make is that this young man, Eagle Scout Robert Morgan, was just head-and-shoulders above his peers, as a Scout and as a citizen. So we in the VFW are very, very proud of him, and pleased to honor him in this way.”

Members of the VFW are wartime veterans who have served in combat zones in foreign countries.

VFW Post 12020, based in San Jacinto, for whose Memorial Honor Detail Team 45 Morgan bugles at Riverside National Cemetery, sponsored Morgan. He had been named Scout of the Year for VFW District 23 in Riverside County and later won VFW’s National Scout of the Year award as the candidate from California.

Van Buskirk said Morgan was selected from as many as 60,000 Scouts, including Eagle Scouts, Explorers, Venturers and Sea Scouts.

Morgan has been involved in Scouting since the age of 11. A member of Boy Scout Troop 101 in Banning, Morgan worked himself up through the ranks to Eagle Scout. Now, he has received the VFW’s highest national scouting honor.

“We are so proud of Robert. This is a glorious ending to this chapter of his Scouting career,” said his parents, Chuck and Donna Morgan, who live in a rural area of Banning near Poppet Flats.

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"While only 21 merit badges are required for Eagle Scout, Robert has earned 93. This is typical of Robert's attitude of going above and beyond what is asked of him. His concern for honoring veterans with his playing of taps to the best of his ability, is also typical of him. This attitude will no doubt carry over into whatever God has planned for him in the rest of his life," his parents said.

"I think this honor to Robert Morgan as VFW's National Scout of the Year is great. He is a great kid. A hard worker. Energetic," said John Shields, a Riverside County Sheriff's Department sergeant, who has been Morgan's Scoutmaster of Banning Troop 101 for seven years. "Robert has been in a lot of leadership positions – Senior Patrol Leader, Troop Guide, Order of the Arrow Representative, bugler, trainer at the camp helping young Scouts. I'm just very, very proud of him," said Shields.

Lou Morales, past commander of VFW District 23 and incoming commander of Post 12020, and long a member of VFW MHD Team 45, said of Morgan: "We are really proud of" him. "He truly deserves this award as VFW's National Scout of the Year ... He's quite a kid. Very, very sharp. He picks up on everything very quickly, and works very hard. That's the kind of character he has — he will push himself beyond even what he thinks he can do in order to master whatever he is trying to learn. For instance, he's a great bugler on our MHD Team 45. He's made himself so knowledgeable about military protocol in military funeral services, that sometimes we forget he's just a kid and we treat him like one of us. A veteran," Morales said.

Throughout his Boy Scout years, Morgan has been devoted to service, assisting and honoring veterans for their service.

Since the age of 12, the mostly self-taught trumpeter has served as a bugler for not one but three Memorial Honor Detail teams, conducting military funeral services for fallen veterans at Riverside National Cemetery. He has played TAPs for nearly 800 funerals at RNC as bugler for VFW MHD Team 45; the National Guard MHD; and the Robert J. "Uncle Bobby" Castillo Honor Detail, Team 12, of American Legion Riverside Post 79, named for its founder, the late Legionnaire and D-Day Purple Heart survivor Robert "Uncle Bobby" Castillo, who mentored Morgan.

Morgan's project leading to his Eagle Scout rank was directly related to veterans and his home community in Banning. He planned, organized, implemented and supervised an important aspect of the renovation of the Banning Armory by the Pass Area Supporting Soldiers (PASS) group, which was founded by former Banning City Councilwoman Sue Palmer.

"I am extremely happy for Robert," Palmer said. "He has worked very hard over many years for this recognition. When Robert takes on a project, he is very serious. He studies and

researches the best way to achieve his goal and then focuses on that objective. I think we will see Robert move up as a leader in our country in a few years. He is focused and driven to accomplish great things."

Morgan, who has graduated from high school, is a member of the National Honor Society, and was the winner of the American Legion's High School Oratorical Competition on the Constitution this year for American Legion District 21 (which includes 22 Posts and 6,000 members in Riverside County).

Since turning 18, Morgan has served as an adult adviser and trainer for up-and-coming Boy Scouts, who one day may be Eagle Scouts. Having graduated from high school this year, Morgan is pursuing his dream of entering the Air Force Academy. Congressional representatives for the Pass area have been urged by veterans of the VFW and the American Legion to supportMorgan's application for admission to the academy.

His parents, Chuck and Donna Morgan, have dedicated hundreds of hours to Scouting, which they believe has nurtured their children, all of whom are involved in Scouting: Robert's sister Melissa, 19, is a Venture Scout and Michael, 10, has just graduated from Cub Scouts to become a Boy Scout in Troop 322 in Beaumont.

Eagle Scout Robert Morgan will receive his VFW National Scout of the Year Award, and $5,000 scholarship, which the family describes as "a Godsend" to help with his college education expenses, at ceremonies at Boy Scout Camp Emerson in Idyllwild, where he is at work helping young Scouts, at 8 p.m., on July 12.

Watch VFW present Robert with the Award.