The Naples Press
NEWS FOR NEAPOLITANS

Eagle Scout project makes shores safer

By J.C. Amodea

Enterprising 14-year-old Christian Woodward, a Life Scout and the second-highest rank in Scouts BSA, races sailboats at Florida beaches, including those in Sarasota, Fort Lauderdale and Miami.

He noticed many beaches had ocean rescue towers that help lifeguards monitor the surf and respond to water emergencies — however, he noted that Vanderbilt Beach in Naples had none.

Woodward discussed the idea of building towers with the local fire chief, and the idea became the impetus for his community service project, the last task required to qualify for the highest rank in scouting: Eagle Scout.

During the summer, Woodward completed his project and erected two rescue towers, numbers 28 and 30. Along with tower 29, the towers were dedicated at a ceremony on Vanderbilt Beach on Sept. 4. Tower 29 was funded and constructed by the North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District.

Woodward's towers stand out as fitting additions to the upscale Naples beach in aesthetics, form and function.

Both of his towers are topped with cherry-red umbrellas and feature custom circular stainless metalwork by Adam Welsch of The Metal Edge in Georgia.

Tower 30 sits in front of Ritz-Carlton Beach Resort and features blue artwork of snook. Tower 28 depicts turtles, fitting its location near the Turtle Club.

According to Mark Woodward, the scout's father, the two-tone towers weigh 2,000 pounds each and include 1,200 pounds of composite material and pressure-treated wood, rot-resistant stainless-steel legs and extra-long eye bolts installed and used to tow the tower into place.



Lifeguard Maitland Lambley with Life Scout Christian Woodward on Vanderbilt Beach in Naples at ocean rescue tower 30.
Photo by J.C. Amodea

The towers measure 12 feet high, each topped with a 20-foot flagpole, and have a projected lifespan of about 50 years. Each tower cost $10,000 to construct.

Genesis of the idea and donors

To begin the project, Woodward researched the elements required for a lifeguard tower. He recruited architect Randy Rosal of Humphrey Rosal Architects in Naples to draw plans.

After the initial draft, Woodward added design elements such as a ladder that served as the door to a hidden storage area.

In March, he officially pitched the idea and plan to the North Collier Fire Control and Rescue District, and the Board of Fire Commissioners was on board.

Next, he embarked on a campaign to raise funds.

Six major donors and private donations supported the project and will be memorialized on a sign soon to be erected at the towers.

Donors included Stock Development, Pelican Bay Rotary Club, Brooks and Joan Fortune Family Foundation, Woodward, Pires & Lombardo, P.A., Meals of Hope and NCH Safe and Healthy Children's Coalition of Collier County.

Local vendors such as Naples Lumber donated lumber, and Decks and Docks supplied discounted composite wood for the framing.

Woodward secured materials by May, and construction began at his home in late June, with a target end date of Sept. 4, the dedication date for Tower 29.

"... This isn't just an Eagle Scout project, it's a lifeguard tower, a major piece of public safety infrastructure, that's going to help keep people safe on that beach for years to come," said Claudine Léger-Wetzel, vice president of sales and marketing for Stock Development.

The build

Woodward had support from his father, his older brothers and others who helped build the frame at the family home; a dozen troop members helped with painting.

Adults assisted with complex exterior cuts, and a carpenter helped finish the project. The biggest challenge, according to Woodward, was assembling the composite ladder.

"Even though we had the architect's plan, there were no details about where to locate the hinges or how the ladder would support weight, so we had to figure things like this out as we went along," Woodward said.

Eventually, they built two prototypes, which will be used to erect future towers.

Personally satisfied with the project, Woodward said, "I can go to the beach, look at the towers and think, 'I built them; and that's pretty cool.'"

Woodward plans to submit his project for the National Eagle Scout Project of the Year, which will wind through the approval process to the Southwest Florida Council and on to national consideration.

Woodward, a scout since grade one, meets weekly with his Troop 2001 at North Collier Fire Station 45, led by Scoutmaster Bradley Ritter.

He values the leadership skills, discipline, patience and service commitment to God and country learned through scouting, and said he recognizes the "opportunities offered by scouting that kids not in scouting wouldn't ordinarily have," which he believes helped prepare him for projects such as this.

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