

Boy Scout continues community service by making masks

Brando Duran helps others while overcoming grief

BY JULIE GALLANT

Healing from the loss of his father, Ramona resident Brando Duran, 13, is still motivated to help others by making masks for people who need them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Brando is halfway through his goal of making 300 masks for his Boy Scouts Eagle Scout project. Eagle Scout is the highest rank attainable in the Scouts BSA program division of the Boy Scouts of America and requires earning at least 21 merit badges.

"We need to keep busy for others because we're hurt a lot," said Brando's grandmother Cyndi Wear. "When you help others, it helps you to not have to focus on your own pain all of the time."

Brando, who is transferring from Barnett Elementary School to Olive Peirce Middle School this year, is busy sewing masks on a machine set side-by-side with his grandmother's machine in their poolhouse. He's stitching together remnants of fabric Wear has collected over the years.

Each time he makes five masks, he takes a break, often playing the Bop It game, laughing and having a good time.

His original idea for an Eagle Scout project that he planned since he was a Bear Cub was to make a blessing box. The small, handmade boxes are typically placed in a common area where people can leave donated goods for others to pick up anonymously. Some contain books, food or other necessities.

But COVID-19 derailed the communal blessing box project that had been planned as a shared

food resource to be placed in a public setting on the grounds of Immaculate Heart of Mary Church on E Street. Under COVID-19's stay-at-home restrictions, the Eagle Scout Alumni Association allowed Brando to make masks instead.

"It seemed like the right thing to do at this time," Brando said. "We started to make masks just for us and then we thought it might be better to spread it to everyone."

Brando is no stranger to helping others. In the past he's mobilized his Boy Scout Troop to gather new pajamas for foster children in San Diego. The troop members dropped off the pajamas at a local Mattress Firm.

Brando has also been a vocal advocate of having a skatepark built in Ramona. A year ago in March, he made a presentation to the Ramona Unified School District trustees, extolling the virtues of getting outdoors to exercise and make friends. He had the support of Ramona Skatepark Champions leaders, President Tracy Engel and skateboarder Justin Sturgeon.

"I've been skateboarding ever since I can remember," Brando said. "My uncle and dad were into skateboarding."

At only 12, Brando has also had his first job manning the corn cannon during Halloween time at the Mountain Valley Ranch pumpkin patch, where he later worked selling Christmas trees.

Brando's community service spirit was recognized in December, when Barnett Elementary honored him as the Inspirational Student of the Year.

The accolades don't come easily as Brando struggles with the loss of his father, Brandon



COURTESY PHOTO

Brando Duran, 13, is making several hundred face coverings for a Boy Scouts of America Eagle Scout project.

Duran, who was murdered by his wife in 2012. The spouse is now serving a life sentence plus 17 years in prison.

Brando has been participating in a peer support group at The Elizabeth Hospice since 2017, and is showing his appreciation by donating about 100 of his Eagle Scout masks to the grief support nonprofit.

Even while recovering from his own grief though, Brando is taking on a leadership role in the peer support groups for children who have experienced a recent loss.

Samira Moosavi, children's bereavement manager at the Escondido The Elizabeth Hospice location, said The Elizabeth Hospice is a community leader in providing child bereavement services from San Diego to Riverside counties.

The three programs being offered to youth are a peer-based grief support group, a school-based program serving 20 schools in the two counties, and Camp Spero.

Camp Spero, which translates to "I hope" in Latin, offers free bereavement camping for children ages 7 to 17 who have had someone in their lives die. Camp programs are tailored to newcomer campers in one group and alumni campers who have attended previous camps in another group.

The services are available to anyone in San Diego and south Riverside counties even if they are not affiliated with The Elizabeth Hospice.

"We understand grief has no timeline and children can participate as long as they need the services," Moosavi said. "Elizabeth Hospice supports them throughout their grief journey."

Moosavi said Brando has shown leadership skills in setting the example for sharing the story of losing a loved one in a supportive environment. The peer grief support group in particular gives children coping skills and allows them the opportunity to see they are not alone as their peers have encountered similar experiences.

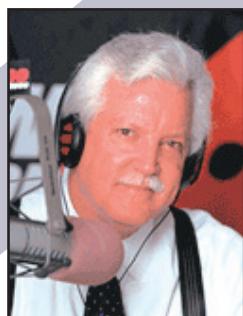
At Camp Spero, children engage in traditional camping activities such as camp fires, dancing, water and sports activities, along with grief-related activities to honor and memorialize their loved ones.

For Brando, one of the more memorable activities was being allowed to write and/or draw aspects of their grief on a plate, and then break the plate.

"It helps me a lot," he said. "It helps me remember him. The activities help to get stress off our mind about them."

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