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Know Your Knots

By Bryan Wendell

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Boy Scouts don't get to have all the fun. Sure, they can earn more than 120 merit badges, but that doesn't preclude adults from enhancing their uniforms. But for grown-ups with the urge to advance, it'll take more than consulting a merit badge pamphlet.

To earn a coveted square knot, volunteers must demonstrate continued leadership and service to the program's ideals.

"It's an opportunity to symbolize the dedication of our volunteers," says Bill Evans, who supervises square knots as part of his job as director of youth development. Four new rectangular badges have joined the official list in the past year, bringing the total to 41. So let's untangle the vast world of square knots. The numbers in parentheses will direct you to the illustrated version.

FOUR NEW KNOTS

If you're a lifetime member of the National Eagle Scout Association, you can now get more than a certificate and a membership card. You're now eligible for the **NESA Life Membership Award (1)**.

The accolades can continue if you earn a doctorate degree in commissioner science, making you eligible for the **Doctorate of Commissioner Science Award (2)**. To earn the knot, you must serve as a commissioner for five years and complete tenure requirements.

Can't stay away from that high-adventure mecca in northern New Mexico? You can snag the **Philmont Training Center Masters Track Award (3)** by attending courses at the training center, recruiting others to attend, and educating peers in Philmont ideals.

Got a penchant for public speaking? BSA Speakers Bank members who give at least 20 presentations are eligible for the **Speakers Bank Award (4)**.

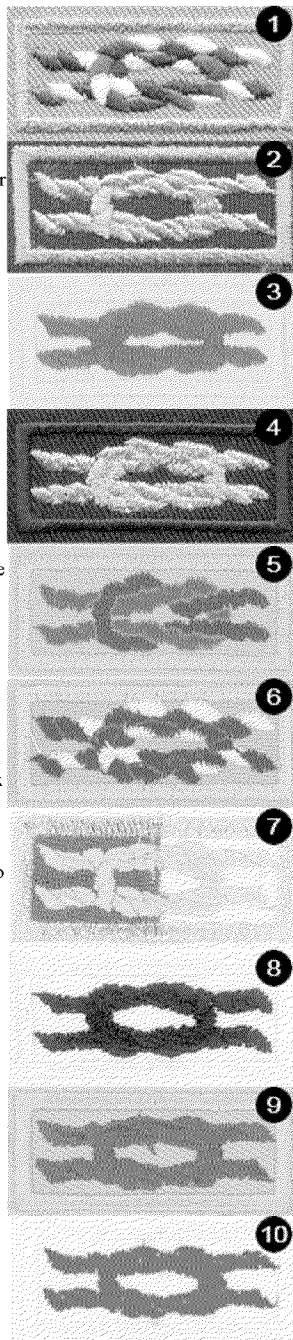
PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT OR SERVICE

You might not have thought about it as a child starting out in a Cub Scout pack, but earning the **Arrow of Light Award** means you can wear the **corresponding knot (5)** as an adult.

The same goes for recipients of the **Eagle Scout Award (6)**, **Venturing Silver Award (7)**, or **Sea Scout Quartermaster Award (8)**. If you earned these awards as a youth, make sure others know it by sewing the knots above your left uniform pocket.

You can aspire from an early age to be an Eagle Scout, but nobody plans to save someone's life. The **Honor Medal (9)** and **Heroism Award (10)**, which can each be earned by any Scout or Scouter, show that recipients did just that. The Honor Medal adds the distinction that the recipient put his or her own life at risk in completing the heroic task.

Recipients of the **Medal of Merit (11)** shouldn't be overlooked either.



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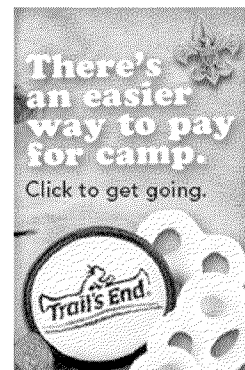
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Their outstanding acts of service don't involve rescue or risk but still have a profound impact on the lives of others.

Conservationists work to protect the environment for future generations. The **William T. Hornaday Award for Distinguished Service in Conservation (12)** has a lengthy name but a simple purpose: honoring those who help save our planet. The award's namesake gets credit for saving the American Bison and the Alaskan fur seal from extinction.

Donors who contribute through Friends of Scouting help keep the program afloat, but a special honor awaits benefactors who make an additional one-time contribution of \$1,000 or more to a council endowment fund. In a show of gratitude, the BSA offers the **James E. West Fellowship Award (13)**, named after the first Chief Scout Executive.

With about three dozen religious emblems available to youths and leaders, a separate knot for each could get a little cumbersome. Instead, **unified knots for adults (14) and for youths (15)** represent the award presented to recipients by their religious institution. You can wear both knots if you earned the award as a youth and as an adult.

Whitney M. Young Jr. was an African American civil rights leader and executive director of the National Urban League. Young earned the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Lyndon B. Johnson in 1969. The square knot named after Young (16) acknowledges extraordinary efforts by Scouters to extend the Scouting program to inner-city areas.

The **Asian American Spirit of Scouting Service Award (17)** serves as a Scouting "thank you" to leaders who deliver the program to Asian American youth. Similarly, the **Scouting... Vale la Pena! Service Award (18)** recognizes leaders who help Hispanic youths discover that Scouting is "worth the effort," as the Spanish expression implies.

Scouters who earn one of the previous awards could also be eligible for the **William D. Boyce New-Unit Organizer Award (19)**, which identifies volunteers who help start a new Scouting unit. It only fits, then, that the award bear the name of Boyce, who founded the Boy Scouts of America in 1910.

Boyce founded the BSA, but chartered organizations help keep units going. For these, the BSA created the **Community Organization Award (20)**, an award to honor recognition from civic or fraternal organizations such as the Elks or Lions Club.

Gold may be the metal of choice at the Olympics, but for Scouters, silver shines the brightest. Unlike Olympic medals, however, these awards are only given based on nomination through the council, region, or national office. We're referring to the **Silver Beaver Award (21)** for service to local councils, the **Silver Antelope Award (22)** for regional efforts, and the **Silver Buffalo Award (23)** on the national level. The Silver Buffalo, Scouting's highest commendation, is one of just two awards that can be presented to a civilian who isn't a member of the BSA.

The other is the **Silver World Award (24)**, and world citizens who serve their nation's youth are the targeted recipients. U.S. citizens are eligible, but only if they aren't members of the BSA.

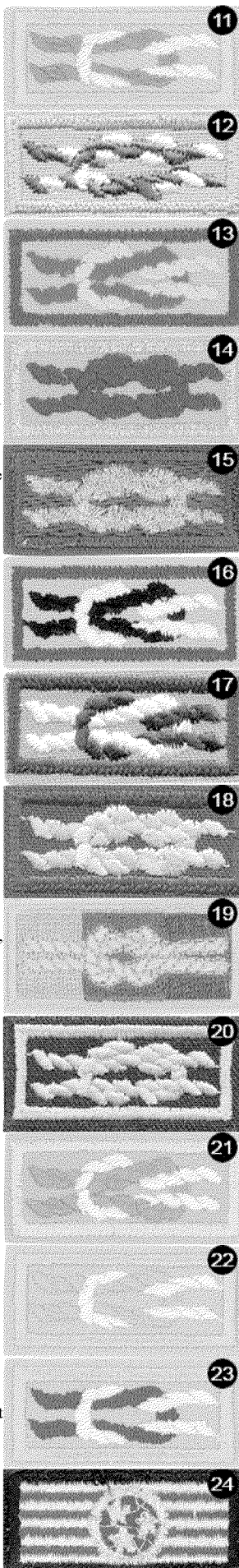
TRAINING AND LEADERSHIP

The previous awards represent the very best of Scouting and extraordinary efforts taken by Scouters to improve the lives of young people. But Evans says that the program's real strength rests with the volunteers who do the little things every day.

"The target is changing kids' lives, and the way we do that is through volunteers," he says. "We need to recognize their dedication."

That dedication starts with training and leadership, and for many volunteers, the **Tiger Cub Den Leader Award (25)** symbolizes their first foray into the program. After completing training and serving as a registered Tiger Cub den leader for a year, sew this knot above your left pocket. As your child or children grow, your knot collection can grow, too, with the **Cub Scout Den Leader Award (26)** and **Webelos Den Leader Award (27)**. Each requires the appropriate training and one year of service. Keep up the good work and serve for two years in a pack, and you're on your way to the **Cub Scouter Award (28)**.

If you're ready to take on a greater challenge, the **Cubmaster Award**



(29) awaits. To earn this award, complete the training and serve for one year as an assistant Cubmaster and one year as a Cubmaster.

Pack Trainers, who ensure that pack leaders are trained in their position, can now receive one of the newest knots, the **Pack Trainer Award (30)**, after completing two years as a pack trainer and fulfilling other responsibilities.

Don't worry, Boy Scout leaders, plenty of knots exist to fill up your uniform shirt, too. The **Scouter's Training Award (31)** represents a leader's devotion after completing training, serving two years as a Boy Scout leader, and fulfilling at least seven performance-driven goals.

For leaders in key positions, the appropriately named **Scouter's Key (32)** is given after three years. The following positions are eligible: Scoutmaster, Commissioner, District Committee Member, Skipper, and Venturing Advisor.

Though recipients are involved in distinct programs, one common square knot symbolizes the **Scoutmaster Award of Merit and Venturing Advisor Award of Merit (33)**. The knot acknowledges that its wearer has completed training and donated time while leading a unit.

For those who go above and beyond for the Venturing program, the **Venturing Leadership Award (34)** honors youths and leaders on the council, regional, and national level.

Sea Scout leaders who have completed Seabadge training can wear the **Seabadge (35)** as proof. You'll probably also notice that the Seabadge, which features a trident, is one of just three square knots that isn't actually a square knot. Another is the Silver World Award.

The third is the **District Award of Merit (36)**, which is shaped like an overhand knot. Each year, only one of these pretzel-shaped awards can be given for every 25 units. The award honors a volunteer or professional for service beyond normal expectations.

The council bestows the **Distinguished Commissioner Service Award (37)** for commissioners who meet benchmarks in their tenure. In addition to service as an active commissioner for five years, applicants must recharter at least 90 percent of units and ensure that the Centennial Quality Unit Award is garnered by at least 50 percent of units.

Speaking of distinguished, the **Order of the Arrow Distinguished Service Award (38)** is presented at the biennial National Order of the Arrow Conference for service beyond the local lodge level. Only 500 of these awards have been given since the award was created in 1940.

American labor leader George Meany, who was president of the AFL-CIO for more than two decades, lives on through the **George Meany Award (39)**. Every year, each AFL-CIO council and state federation recognizes one individual who helps expand the use of the American Labor merit badge or forms Scouting units connected to labor unions.

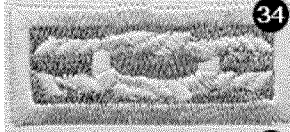
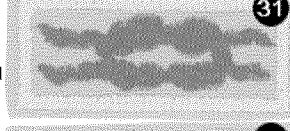
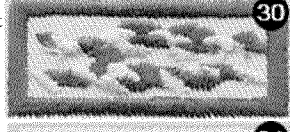
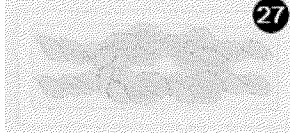
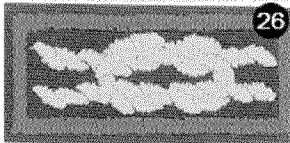
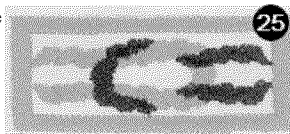
The **International Scouter's Award (40)** was added in 2003 to cheer on leaders who promote the Scouting program worldwide. Potential honorees must give leadership to international Scouting or international events held in the United States or abroad.

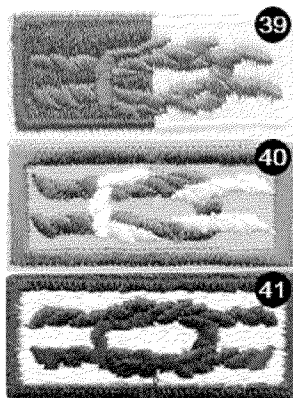
Finally, professionals can earn the **Professional Training Award (41)** after completing training courses and working for the BSA for at least four years.

While it's essentially impossible to earn every square knot, adding a few to your collection can prove to you and your Scouting family that your leadership experience has no loose ends.

"Most knots are pure recognition," Evans says. "They stand for the organization's appreciation for what you've done."

Bryan Wendell is the associate editor of Scouting magazine.





Know Before You Sew

Before you show off your accomplishment on your uniform, it helps to know how to properly place the knots.

First, a simple rule: Wear knots above the left pocket in rows of three, and make sure the front loop of the knot faces the left side of the shirt as you sew.

Other than that, you're free to be creative about knot placement. In 1980, the BSA mandated an order in which knots must be worn, but those regulations have since been eliminated, ending the need to constantly reorder your square knots.

The BSA Insignia Guide (BSA Supply No. 33066) suggests that the knot "deemed most important by the wearer" be worn on the wearer's right.

And if you dread bringing out the needle and thread, know that rows of fewer than three knots don't necessarily need to be centered. Many wearers prefer to make partial rows flush left so that adding future knots is easier.

From a Thought to a Knot

With four knots added in the past year and dozens more in existence, it might seem as if new knots are added all the time, but that's far from true, says Keith Christopher, who formerly sat on the committee that selects new knots. In fact, less than one per year is added on average, even though the committee annually gets 10 to 12 requests.

New knots start with an idea. When a volunteer believes there is a need for his or her colleagues to be recognized, he or she can submit a request to the insignia committee in the Council Solutions Group.

Ideas that are deemed worthy must first make it through a selection committee that consists of six "anonymous representatives of Scouting." If they like the idea, the knot could find its way to your uniform shirt.

Replacing the Ribbons

Square knots are familiar insignia now, but in 1934, the BSA issued ribbon bars to represent awards. These thin, multicolored rectangles resembled what you'd find on a military uniform.

To distance itself from the military look, the BSA in 1946 debuted square knots. The first six were the Silver Beaver, Silver Antelope, Silver Buffalo, Scoutmaster's Key, Scouter's Training Award, and Skipper's Key. Like the ribbon bars, knots are presented alongside medals or large plaques so Scout leaders can wear a lightweight piece of fabric instead of a heavy, bulky medal.

Since 1946, there have been 50 knots, not including updated versions of the same knot. Some, such as the Air Explorer Ace Award, have been discontinued after certain Scouting programs disbanded. Most of the knots that have been discontinued are associated with the old Exploring program.

You Won't Find These Everywhere

Typical patches become rare over time as they go out of circulation and their numbers dwindle, but square knots mainly become rare based on the infrequency in which they are awarded.

The BSA doesn't keep statistics on the number of square knots presented each year, but BSA officials such as Bill Evans and Keith Christopher can name a few especially uncommon knots.

The Silver Buffalo, of course, doesn't make its way onto many uniforms. When an award lists among its recipients 13 former U.S. presidents, Colin Powell, Neil Armstrong, and Charles Schulz, you can bet it's rare.

Also uncommon is the OA Distinguished Service Award, which has been given only 500 times since 1940. If you see someone with this knot, you better snap a picture.

You also aren't likely to find someone wearing the Professional Training Award. It's the only knot that volunteers can't earn.

Beyond the Knots

If knots just aren't enough for you, knot devices may add to the allure. The most prestigious is easily the Distinguished Eagle Scout award, which is a small gold eagle pin worn on the Eagle Scout knot.

To be eligible, you must have attained the Eagle Scout rank more than 25 years ago. In addition to that lofty requirement, recipients must have given "outstanding service to others." Past honorees include former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, President Gerald R. Ford, and H. Ross Perot, founder of EDS.

A much more common device found on Eagle Scout knots is the eagle palm. These small bronze, gold, or silver pins are presented for earning merit badges beyond the 21 required for Eagle.

For the especially giving, the James E. West knot can be adorned with devices, including the 1910 Society pin for gifts of \$25,000 or more or the Founders Circle pin for gifts of \$100,000 or more.

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