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**AMBITIOUS BOY SCOUT BLAZING A TRAIL
17-YEAR-OLD BUILDING STRETCH OF GREENWAY TO EARN HIS EAGLE BADGE.**

JOE DEPRIEST, Staff Writer

They tried to talk 17-year-old Ryan Brennan out of taking on the Eagle Scout project.

Building part of Cramerton's public greenway this summer was much too ambitious, cautioned Scoutmaster Roy McGinnis. Brennan's mother, Debra Pardo, agreed.

Pick something a little easier, everybody advised. Don't be so hard on yourself.

But easy isn't Brennan's thing. Even though he already had a full-time summer job as a lifeguard at Carowinds, he went ahead with the project anyway. By October, he'll have completed a 775-foot-long by 10-foot-wide path connecting the Cramerton Village Townhouse development on Wilkinson Boulevard with the C.B. Huss Recreation Complex and Community Center on Julian Street.

The path's surface will be compacted pit gravel and it will be lined on both sides by timbers. Steps will go in near the townhouse development.

The estimated cost for all this is about \$5,000. Brennan has sold raffle tickets, applied for grants and watched major donations roll in from individuals and companies supporting his effort. To finish the work, he needs about \$850.

I recently found out about the project from Cramerton Town Manager Michael Peoples.

Over the years, I've written about the town's plans for a sprawling greenway network that will run from the South Fork River near McAdenville Road all the way to Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden on South New Hope Road. Peoples hopes the South Fork segment system will eventually become part of the Carolina Thread Trail.

To date, about a mile of Cramerton's greenway network is in place along the river.

Back in March, town commissioners approved conditional zoning for the 734-unit Village at South Fork on Wilkinson Boulevard at Peach Orchard Road. Hopper Communities of Charlotte plans apartments, condos, single-family homes and townhomes on 143 acres. Land will be donated for the town's greenway - a section of trail with canoe and kayak launches running along the South Fork under the Wilkinson Boulevard bridge.

You can see the entire greenway plan laid out on a big aerial photo at the Cramerton Town Hall. Brennan had a copy when I visited him.

'IT GETS PRETTY HOT'

We met around 8:30 a.m. because Brennan likes to start early on trail work before it gets too hot. Sometimes friends and family members help out. Sometimes he works alone.

A rising senior at South Point High, Brennan is a newcomer to the area. He lived with his father in Rhode Island before moving in with his mother and stepfather in Cramerton last December. Brennan came to Gaston County with a long-established love of the outdoors and scouting. In Rhode Island, he'd helped a friend with an Eagle Scout project that involved landscaping around a fire station.

Looking around for an Eagle Scout project of his own with Troop 55 at Belmont's Saint Mark's United Methodist Church, Brennan went to see Peoples at Town Hall and asked if anything was available. Of the several ideas suggested, Brennan picked the greenway.

The town already had cleared a rough path along a utility right-of-way. But there was a lot of work left to do, beginning with leveling the ground with shovels and rakes.

Brennan came up with a plan that got the OK from Cramerton, the Piedmont Boy Scout Council and Troop 55.

Work started in June - two or three days a week.

Brennan downplayed the challenges. "It's not super hard," he said. The closest thing to a complaint I could get out of him was: "It gets pretty hot."

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Early on, vandals struck. They ripped up 20 or 30 pieces of timber lining the trail.

Brennan stayed cool. He fixed the damage and moved on.

"Keep up the great work," a local resident wrote him.

When Brennan isn't at the greenway or Carowinds, he's exploring the world on a new computer - everything from solar power to the history of ancient Rome.

We talked about his dreams of being a business CEO, a computer technician or Air Force fighter pilot. He told me I absolutely had to see the new Batman movie and read Janna Levin's "How the Universe Got Its Spots."

"He's a level-headed kid," Scoutmaster McGinnis told me. "And he's a hard worker."

When Brennan joined Troop 55, membership had dropped to two members, and McGinnis was planning to shut it down. But he decided to keep the troop active a little longer so Brennan could complete the Eagle Scout work.

Even though McGinnis thought Brennan should have picked another project, he went along with the greenway idea, hoping to help make a difference in a young person's life.

Want to help?

If you're interested in making a contribution to Ryan Brennan's greenway project in Cramerton, e-mail ryan_e_brennan@yahoo.com.

Digital photos of the project can be viewed online on www.Topix.com. Type in Cramerton and go to Cramerton News.

For information about helping with other segments of the town's greenway network, call Town Manager Michael Peoples at 704-824-4337. To view the entire greenway plan to go www.cramerton.org.

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