

Philmont or Bust for indomitable Scout



TOM ARNEBERG
 For the Herald

I rarely use the telephone at work, but a few weeks ago, I made an exception after getting an email from the mother of a Scout in our troop: "Please call — URGENT!"

That's when I heard the bad news: Dominic's doctor could not clear him yet for Troop 72's trip to Philmont. The stress fracture in his leg may not be fully healed in time for a grueling 12-day high-altitude backpacking trip in the mountains of northern New Mexico.

This was particularly heart-breaking, since I've rarely met a Scout with the sheer determination of Dominic Marticorena.

Dominic joined our troop late. Most boys are in fifth grade when they join a Boy Scout troop, but Dominic first came in March of his seventh-grade year.

And the only reason my son Simon could get him to come along was the theme of that campout: ice fishing. Dominic comes from an ice-fishing family, and is quite the expert.

You may not remember March of 2012, but unlike the past two springs, that one was unseasonably warm. In fact, the overnight low was 60 degrees that weekend!

With the ice on the lakes melting fast, we couldn't risk ice fishing. Instead, we slept outside under the

stars, and did some hiking with our backpacks to prepare for future backpacking trips.

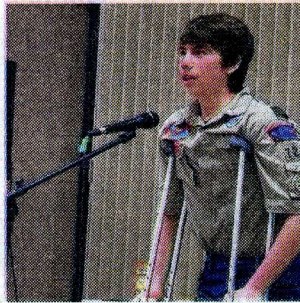
I thought the Mighty Ice Fisher would be disappointed, but Dominic had the time of his life! I asked him recently what he liked about that first campout, and he explained that it was how all the boys were "doers." Nobody sat around complaining or whining; everyone just pitched in to get the job done.

That's what happens when boys are divided up into small patrols and do all their own shopping, cooking and cleaning together. Some meals are masterpieces, some are disasters, but every meal is a learning experience. And the boys have the pride of doing it all themselves.

After seeing this teamwork in action one weekend a month for the past thirteen years, it all seems so normal to me that I sometimes forget how exciting it can be to a newcomer. So I asked Dominic what his impression of Scouting was BEFORE that campout.

His answer? The "Wilderness Explorer" kid selling cookies in the movie "Up." That made me chuckle. Yes, some of our Scouts do sell popcorn for four weeks in October, but the vast majority of our time and focus is dedicated to outdoor adventure, not selling stuff. (And definitely not cookies.)

I've seen many Scouts come and go, and often a new Scout will have a lot of initial enthusiasm that fades away. Not so with Dominic — his fire for Scouting continued to grow



SUBMITTED PHOTO

Dominic Marticorena addressed the audience as Assistant Senior Patrol Leader at Troop 72's "Court of Honor" ceremony at the Chippewa Valley Bible Church.

month after month.

In fact, as of this writing, Dominic has not missed ONE SINGLE CAMPOUT since that fateful weekend in March of 2012. That is a record for our troop. It includes 19 weekends, a hundred-mile canoe trip, two weeks at summer camp, and a rare eight-day trip to Northern Tier, the BSA's other high-adventure base in the Boundary Water Canoe Area.

And along the way, I don't think he has missed a single Monday night meeting, either. In his 27 months with the troop, he has climbed right up the rungs, advancing all the way to Life Scout, one level below Eagle.

He also progressed through the leadership positions, winning elections as Patrol Leader, Assistant SPL, and his current role as SPL (Senior Patrol Leader), the boy in charge of the whole troop.

Given Dominic's excitement and focus, I was a little surprised to get an email last year from a merit badge counselor who had

some concerns about him. I made another one of those rare office phone calls, only to end up laughing out loud.

This poor counselor had been emailing back and forth with Dominic, and was convinced that it was Dominic's MOTHER who was on the other end, because he was so articulate and precise! ("We want to make sure it's the SCOUT doing the work, not the parent!")

I said, "Lady, you don't know Dominic." Maybe it's because he comes from a bilingual home (his father Pablo, from Chile, helps us by hauling the troop trailer with his monstrous pickup truck). But for whatever reason, Dominic has a firm command of grammar and spelling. And he loves to email.

Perhaps the proudest I've been of Dominic is watching his preparation for Philmont. Getting in shape for the rigorous backpacking, he lost an amazing forty pounds on his basement treadmill. He went from sedentary to running six miles a day.

Ironically, over-training was the cause of the stress fracture that threatened to derail his Philmont trip. We had to convince him to eat MORE, not less, to build up his bones that weren't healing on schedule.

Last week, we received the best news I've heard in a long time — he is now officially cleared by his doctor! (Good thing I bought his Amtrak ticket despite the uncertainty.)

PHILMONT, HERE WE COME! Led by our indomitable Dominic, of course.