

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOR: *Daniel Hancock, 18*

Loxahatchee teen plants seeds that help him earn Eagle Scout

By MIMI PERREAU
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

Daniel Hancock's appreciation for nature and the outdoors has grown through Boy Scouts.

"I think through Boy Scouts and all of my experiences, I have become bonded with nature," Hancock said. "I have a growing love for animals and nature around me."

Hancock, 18, recently earned Eagle Scout, the highest rank attainable in Boy Scouts, after completing a landscaping project at Crossroads Baptist Church in West Palm Beach, using native plants.

Wayne Padgett, pastor of Crossroads Baptist, said Hancock asked him whether he could restore the church grounds for his Eagle Scout project.

"I have been friends with his family for several years," said Padgett, who's also a chaplain for Hospice of Palm Beach County, where Hancock's mom is a nurse. "Daniel did a great job."

Hancock spent several months planning the project. He researched plants and then asked nurseries in The Acreage and Loxahatchee areas for donations of native plants that require less water. He said that having plants that are resilient in the South Florida weather was important because the church is small and the pastor handles most of the landscaping maintenance.

"I was looking for Shillings dwarf plants that would mold into each other for coverage," he said. "They are perfect for the Florida weather."

Hancock said local nurseries donated satin leaf and geiger trees, annuals to put around the entrance of the church, heather to put around the trees, as well as mulch and top soil. Wal-Mart donated 10 pairs of gloves for the project, which Hancock said were helpful for pulling up roots and thorns.

Cap Cornwell, Hancock's Scoutmaster, said he was impressed with the project. Although it took only a weekend to install the plants, Hancock spent several months organiz-

ing it. Hancock, an assistant Scout leader, got all the Scouts in his Troop 120 involved, as well other friends and family.

A senior at Suncoast High School, Hancock works in the warehouse and office of Cornwell's painting business as part of an internship.

During his six years in Boy Scouts, Hancock has earned 38 merit badges. Only 12 are required for an Eagle Scout.

Hancock's Eagle Scout ceremony was held in February in the backyard of his parents' home in Loxahatchee. His parents, John and Sandra, brought in an eagle and a wildlife trainer from the Busch Wildlife Sanctuary and hired a bagpipe player for the occasion. Hancock's two older brothers, Matthew, 20, and John, 22, lighted a candle during the ceremony.

Hancock said he enjoys teaching other Scouts, and stayed with the program because he loves the outdoors, camping and learning about nature.

"I hate being cooped up somewhere. When you are with nature, you discover how great it is," he said.

He recently earned his lifeguard certification and worked during spring break at Calypso Bay Water Park in Royal Palm Beach.

He wants to study psychology in college. He plans to attend Palm Beach Community College for two years and then go to a four-year university, perhaps University of Central Florida in Orlando.

His interest in animals and nature inspired him to want to become a dolphin trainer. Sandra said her son's interest in training dolphins was piqued during a recent trip to Sea World in Orlando.

"Daniel talked to someone at Sea World about becoming an animal trainer and they told him what they look for is someone with a degree in psychology," she said. "Then we went to Discovery Cove and swam with the dolphins and he set his goal."

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