

Boy Scout gives back to Catholic alma mater

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SALEM — When Luke Latino, 16, of Atkinson started thinking about a service project to become an Eagle Scout, he knew he wanted to give back to his elementary - and middle-school alma mater, St. Joe's. The only question was how.

"From the first time I went to the school, I told them that the one thing that was really difficult was to actually find the building," said Noreen McAloon, the principal at St. Joseph Regional Catholic School in Salem. The "faded, wooden" sign did little to alert passers-by to the pre-kindergarten-through-eighth-grade school nestled behind the stone-faced church on Main Street.

Latino, who became a Cub Scout at 8, is now well on his way to achieving Eagle Scout, the highest ranking in Boy Scouts. Only about 5 percent of scouts ever reach such status, and it requires a series of rigorous achievements, including a service project that is, from start to finish, organized by the scout himself.

Latino approached McAloon last fall to discuss how he might be able to help the school with his service project. After discussing a series of goals she had for the school, McAloon said Latino settled on getting a new sign out on Main Street.

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Courtesy Photo / St. Joseph School Boy Scouts from Salem-based Troop 409 remove the old, faded sign at St. Joseph Regional Catholic School.



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Courtesy Photo / St. Joseph School Luke Latino (left) poses with school principal Noreen McAloon in front of St. Joseph Regional Catholic School's new sign.

"I was excited," McAloon said. "I thought, this is exactly what we want from a graduate. We want graduates to be good people who pay good forward, and that's what he was doing."

He's quick to rattle off a list of helping hands, but Latino was dedicated to the project for the length of an entire school year. From finding sponsors to designing the sign, McAloon said Latino's focus never wavered.

"The part (of Luke) I've seen is quiet and thoughtful," McAloon said. "Someone who is a planner. Someone who wants to make sure that he has things all put together before he brings things forward."

Latino raised the funds for the sign through several outlets, including sponsors and ads, but his biggest fundraiser was a pasta supper he organized in March. Held at the school, Latino said more than 150 people came to support the endeavor, at the cost of \$8 per meal.

"I had help from the coach (Eagle adviser) and my family to raise all the funds," Latino said. Faculty at the school helped out too, gathering donations and supplies for the pasta dinner and providing cooks.

In the end, Latino raised about \$4,500 — but he wasn't done yet. He also designed the sign, placed the order, and, with the help of his family and Salem-based Troop 409, installed the new sign the week of St. Joe's eighth-grade graduation, which had been his deadline goal.

"My project really helped me. I was able to talk to a lot of my old teachers," Latino said. Volunteering "kept me involved, but my Eagle Project really got me involved again with my old school."

Though he graduated from eighth grade in 2013, Latino never completely left the St. Joe's community. He's been a volunteer coach for the school's robotics club since he entered high school, and with two younger sisters still enrolled, he's still a big part of the community.

"I enjoyed going there for eight years," Latino said when asked why it was St. Joe's he wanted to help. "I enjoyed being a part of the school. They pushed me in my education...to a point that really made me strive."

Latino still has one merit requirement — cooking — to go, but is now one step closer to achieving his Eagle Scout rank. As for St. Joe's, the school is one step closer to welcoming students back with a new message on its freshly installed sign.