

# Scoutmaster Leads Hundreds of Scouts to Eagle Rank

## Mike Lanning is the 'Heart and Soul and Vision' of Scouting in Pacific Palisades

By SIERRA SHAFER  
Staff Writer

When Mike Lanning joined Boy Scouts more than 70 years ago, there was little competing for his time and attention. Growing up near the Coachella Valley, Lanning's small town offered no organized sports for boys his age. Scouting was a choice of default, but one that would lead to an outstanding legacy in Scouting.

Decades later, he leads a troop of 143 young men on the same journey. Troop 223 in Pacific Palisades is the largest it has ever been, and the number of boys earning their Eagle Scout ranking is climbing at an impressive rate.

During his 60-plus years as a Scoutmaster, Lanning has seen 680 of his scouts earn the Eagle rank; more than any other Scoutmaster in the history of Boy Scouts.

Starting with a troop of just five boys, Lanning is seeing a second generation of scouts rise through the ranks of Troop 223 as the sons of many of his earlier scouts are now taking their turn. Thirty-five of Lanning's Eagle Scouts have gone on to become Scoutmasters of their own troops. The troop has seen immense success, but it's been a battle.

"It's one thing to hook the parents, but you've also got to hook the kids. Scouting has evolved because we have to compete with three things," Lanning said. "One, we have to compete with these very

evolved sports teams. Secondly, academics have been ramped way up. The demands are greater and the competition to get into a good school has gone way up. The anxiety parents have for their children to be successful has ramped way up. Third, kids don't know how to entertain themselves in groups anymore. They want all the time they can get on their electronics."

Although scouting must compete with these demands for time, Lanning maintains that Troop 223 offers more than just entertainment, — something of real quality and something worthy of dedicating so many years to.

"I love to see the results — a young person leading skillfully, making good choices and serving others — that's something worth devoting your life to," he said.

"Eagle Scout is the only thing a 50-year-old man puts on his résumé from when he was 15 years old."

Although Lanning recognizes that the young boys typically join for the fun, adventure and friends, he understands the harder sell is often the parents. After decades as a Scoutmaster, however, he knows exactly what he's selling and exactly how to pitch it.

"We make a promise to the parents of these boys. We promise we'll make [the boys] a better parent, a better husband and a CEO, in the sense that they are given qualified, formal leadership," Lanning said. "Not only are they given the training, but the chance to practice it. These boys become



Scoutmaster Mike Lanning has led 680 Boy Scouts from Troop 223 to their Eagle Scout Rank, the most of any Scoutmaster.

Rich Schmitt/Staff Photographer

community leaders. Becoming an Eagle Scout is going to take you into college and into a job. It puts you on a special list."

To be awarded the Eagle Scout ranking, a scout must earn 21 merit badges in subjects like business, archery, camping, chemistry and first aid. He must hold a leadership position for at least three years and is also required to complete 20 hours of service each year in addition to his Eagle Scout service project, which will involve coordinating more than 100 man-hours from additional volunteers.

"The program Mike has developed in Troop 223 provides a young man a chance to work with his peers to accomplish something extraordinary. Earning the Eagle award demonstrates leadership, citizenship, physical fitness and strong character," said Jim Rushton, Scout Executive and CEO of the Western Los Angeles County Council. "Mike has found a way to see these

boys all the way through, together. If they want it, if they do what they are asked, they will become an Eagle Scout."

Last year, the Boy Scouts of America reported that only 7 percent of Boy Scouts earn their Eagle Scout rank, making the honor one of exclusivity and distinction.

"Eagle Scout is a brand name. It says I am trustworthy, dependable and determined. Eagle Scouts tend to excel wherever they go," Lanning said. "It means you had to stick with something. Sure, there's a lot of fun and adventure, but there's also a lot of hokey. Just try backpacking 60 to 75 miles over 11 days. These qualities get built into your DNA. We're producing a self-motivated person that is going to walk through the doors already ahead of other people."

Maybe it's summer camp at Emerald Bay where scouts learn wakeboarding and snorkeling, high adventure camps backpacking

through the wilderness or bi-annual trips to Denmark and Hawaii that keep the scouts coming back year after year. But Lanning is firm; Boy Scouts is more than fun and games.

"Backpacking is the single best thing you can do to build confidence. When you go out backpacking, you learn to survive out there. That really builds you up. When you learn how to shoot a rifle, you learn responsibility and what it means to care for others," he said.

Boy Scouts is unique because it

"Eagle Scout is the only thing a 50-year-old man puts on his résumé from when he was 15 years old."

~Mike Lanning

is peer led, Lanning said. Although he and 90 assistant Scoutmasters are there to facilitate activities, it's the older scouts who actually lead everything. The concept is that knowledge and skills will trickle down the ranks.

"They are teaching each other, trusting each other and running the operation. The eighth graders

are helping sixth graders make it. They're becoming leaders and forming partnerships. It's a door opener for the rest of your life," Lanning said.

At 81, Lanning is recognized as a Distinguished Eagle Scout, an award given to 25-year Eagle Scouts who have distinguished themselves in their profession and their community.

"Mike helped identify several dozen committee leaders that have helped our council become one of the best in America," Rushton said. "In addition, his fundraising efforts along with his work to develop Camp Emerald Bay has made our local camp one of the best camping locations for Boy Scouts. Mike is the heart and soul and vision behind Emerald Bay."

A 41-year Palisadian, Lanning and his wife moved to their home in the Highlands after being deterred by the \$85 monthly rent in Brentwood. He had planned to move away from the area while attending law school, but the parents of his Boy Scouts had other plans for Lanning.

"They wanted me to stay and be the Scoutmaster, so the troop moms got together and made a schedule of when they were going to have me over for dinner. They kept me close and fed me through law school," said Lanning, who remained Scoutmaster of Troop 223 while earning his Juris Doctor degree from UCLA and becoming a founding partner at Lanning & Petterson, LLP, where he continues to practice law.



Boy Scouts in Troop 223 work together to earn the 21 merit badges required as part of the Eagle Scout Rank, the highest award in scouting.

Photo: Edward Pelligrini



Members of Troop 223 (l to r): Clayton Hill, Brennie Pellegrini, Nick Steele, Otis Jones, Xander Carlson, Joe Walker and Thomas Dameris, hike 75 miles on the revered two-week long backpack trip in Philamont, a journey well known among Eagle Scouts.

Photo: Matt Walker

**JONATHAN CATES**  
*I work for your trust.*  
(310) 570-9444 Direct  
Jonathan.Cates@coldwellbanker.com  
BRE#01915688  
COLDWELL BANKER  
RESIDENTIAL BROKERAGE

REPRESENTING EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE & THEIR HOMES  
**RANDY FREEMAN**  
310.230.3719  
310.420.9242 (cell)  
randyfreeman@prula.com  
www.randyfreeman4realestate.com  
Prudential California Realty  
2011 Top 100 Agents in Region  
Serving the Westside for over 20 Years  
DRE #01088639

TIME FOR A TRIM?  
**BAY CITIES TREE PRESERVATION**  
(A JOHNSON FAMILY BUSINESS SINCE 1924)

310 454-6547 YOU KNOW AND TRUST OUR CREW

CONSULTING ARBORIST/FOREMAN: BRAD JOHNSON  
TRACY RYAN-JOHNSON

FULLY INSURED • LICENSE # 659113  
BAYCITIESKELLEYTREE@GMAIL.COM  
WE CARRY ON IN LOVING MEMORY OF SCOTT JOHNSON,  
CERTIFIED ARBORIST #600

*Wishing you the merriest holiday season  
with great blessings and joys  
in the New Year.*

MARY LU AND KATHLEEN TUTHILL  
ESTATE AGENTS FOR THE WESTSIDE  
WWW.MARYLUTUTHILL.COM

PREVIEWS INTERNATIONAL