

The shrill whining of power drills disrupts an otherwise tranquil morning at the Potawatomi Area Council's Camp Long Lake, where about 300 Boy Scouts from southeastern Wisconsin have gathered for the weekend.

The noise comes from a pavilion, where two boys are drilling the final screws into the braces of a picnic table. The pair, along with several other Boy Scouts, have spent the morning building four tables—measuring, sawing, squaring, and fastening two-by-fours and two-by-sixes. Only when the Scouts turn this table, their last, upright, do they realize one of the legs is wobbly.

“Whoa, whoa...what’s going on here?” asks Bill Roehr, a veteran carpenter who is overseeing the picnic table project. “See how it’s leaning? You have to flip it back over and back all the screws out. You didn’t square them up or straighten them up before you put them in. You gotta straighten this out.”

Building trades

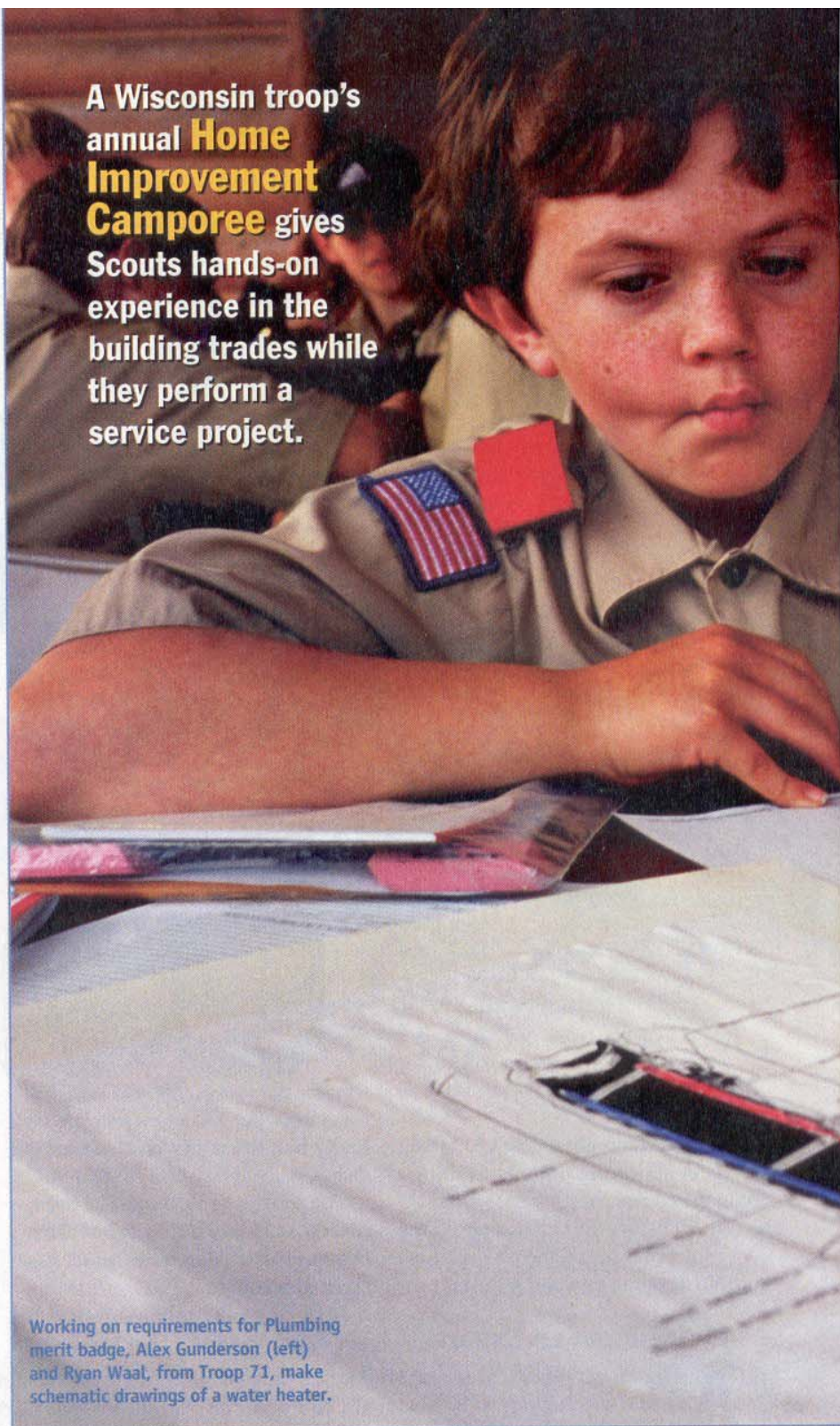
More than a woodworking project is in progress at the camp’s Boes Reception Center, a combination pavilion, trading post, and office. Yes, these Scouts are earning the Woodwork merit badge. And they’re performing a service project. But, perhaps equally important, they’re being exposed to a building trade.

And that’s the intent behind the annual Home Improvement Camporee, a weekend hosted by Troop 67, which is chartered to Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church of Menomonee Falls, Wis. The program includes hands-on activities in plumbing, landscaping, metalworking, painting, home repairs, wood carving, electricity, and drafting.

Scoutmaster Cliff Braden, who owns a heating/air-conditioning company, came up with the idea several years ago for a camporee that combines community service and an introduction to the building trades.

“I noticed it was getting harder and harder to get young people involved in the building trades,” Braden said. “Everyone these days wants to push buttons on a computer. If you can spark something here, maybe it will stick with some of these boys. Maybe

A Wisconsin troop’s annual Home Improvement Camporee gives Scouts hands-on experience in the building trades while they perform a service project.



Working on requirements for Plumbing merit badge, Alex Gunderson (left) and Ryan Waal, from Troop 71, make schematic drawings of a water heater.

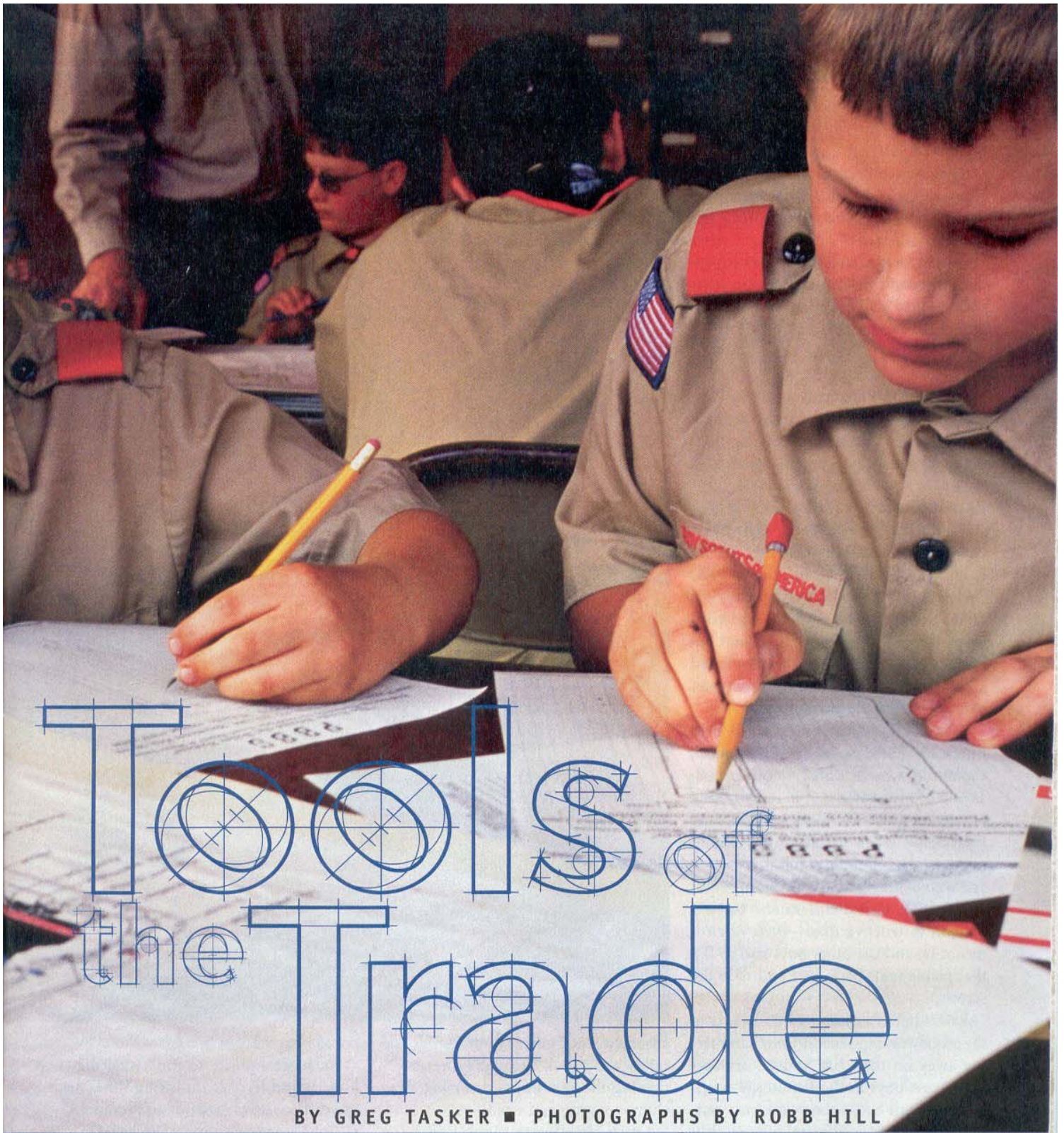
I’ll see one of them in the trades 10 years from now.”

Begun in 1996, the weekend has grown from about 100 boys and four merit badge sessions to 300 boys and 11 merit badge sessions. Attendance is now a sellout, and the 2003 event was able to accommodate Scouts from 24 troops.

Special feelings for a camp

Because the site is usually a camp with service project possibilities, the Scouts have spruced up several other council camps in southeastern Wisconsin in addition to Camp Long Lake.

“The camp still has some of its original buildings and there’s lots of work to



TOOLS of the Trade

BY GREG TASKER ■ PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBB HILL

be done there,” Braden explained. “And many of us have special feelings for Camp Long Lake, which is our council camp. My dad came here in 1949, and my two brothers and I came here in the 1960’s and 1970’s. Now, my four sons are coming here.”

Organizers spend weeks planning and

preparing for the camporee, said assistant Scoutmaster Kurt Kinateder. The 2003 event required the help of 102 adults, including about two dozen volunteer carpenters, plumbers, electricians, painters, and other skilled craftsmen. Those who weren’t involved with merit badge sessions helped with meals and other duties.

Nine building-trade merit badges—Drafting, Electricity, Home Repairs, Landscape Architecture, Metalwork, Painting, Plumbing, Wood Carving, and Woodwork—were offered, as well as the First Aid and Wilderness Survival merit badges.

The weekend begins on Friday with

registration, camp setup, and safety meetings. On Saturday, Scouts attend one morning and one afternoon merit badge session for which they have pre-registered. They are required to complete some requirements ahead of time, Kinatader said, so they can concentrate during the weekend on learning the “tricks of the trade.”

Instructors provide tools and equipment needed to educate Scouts in their trades. Safety and tool instruction sessions are held before any actual work begins.

“We try to make it a fun hands-on experience,” said Braden, whose plumbing sessions included cutting and soldering a copper pipe and cleaning out a sink trap. “It keeps these boys coming back until they get all these merit badges.”

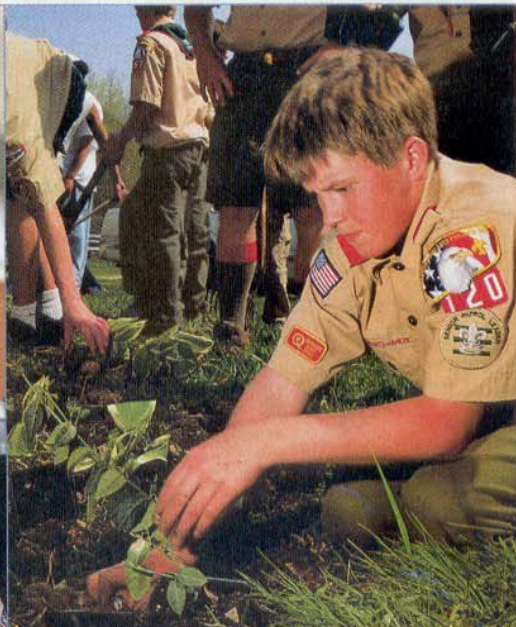
Earning merit badges

The efforts of three of the merit badge sessions directly benefited Camp Long Lake, established in Fond du Lac County, northwest of Milwaukee, in 1946. Scouts earning the Woodwork merit badge built picnic tables and bat houses. The bat houses were placed around the 200-acre camp to attract bats away from the pavilion.

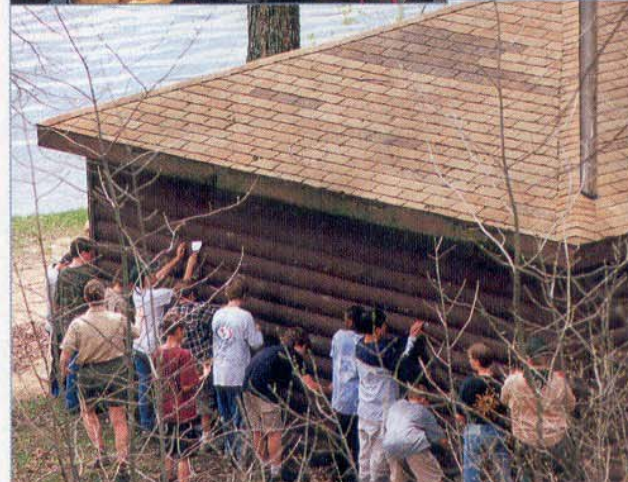
“My uncle is a carpenter, and I help him a lot,” said Scout Joe Herrmann, explaining why he chose woodworking as one of his sessions. “I like the feeling of putting screws in wood, and I like the final result when it’s all done. One of my passions is building stuff.”

Twelve-year-old Joe, a member of Troop 175, found Bill Roehr to be a patient, instructive man—even when it meant he and the other boys had to flip that picnic table back over and redo the screws.

Later that afternoon, while Scouts in the woodworking session were hammering away on their bat houses, another two dozen boys in the Landscape Architecture merit badge class were busy outside the pavilion, outlining a figure eight



(Top left) Jason Steller uses the “sweating” process for joining copper pipes, while Alex Washburn (left) helps heat a metal rod and Cody Roy (above) works on completing the Landscape Architecture badge.



(Above) For the Painting merit badge, Scouts scrape paint off Camp Long Lake’s boathouse. (Right) Roger Karnath, Troop 67, studies a simple circuit board while working on the Electricity merit badge. (Bottom left) The Woodwork merit badge required identifying wood by color and texture.



around a septic cover. With shovels and rakes, they took turns digging, overturning the ground, and carting away clumps of grass and weeds.

Once the figure eight had been shaped, Paul Praeger instructed the Scouts to plant hostas and purple leaf winter creepers, a task 12-year-old Cody Roy from Troop 120 tackled with zeal.

“I thought this would be an interesting session,” Cody said, while patting dirt around hostas. “It’s fun. I thought maybe if I learned something here I

could help more at home.”

As a prerequisite to the actual digging, planting, and mulching done at the camporee, each Scout was required to make a drawing of the existing landscaping around his own home, Praeger said. Then, he had to create a new landscaping plan, including a planting plan for new trees and shrubs.

About 30 Scouts in the Painting merit badge class were scraping the peeling paint from a log cabin—the camp’s Aquatic Building—on the

A Family Affair

For the Bradens, the annual Home Improvement Camporee is a family affair. Scoutmaster Cliff Braden is the man behind the annual event. Braden's wife, Lynn, and four sons, Andy, 22, Kyle, 18, Sean, 16, and James, 14, help with everything from registration and meals to merit badge sessions.

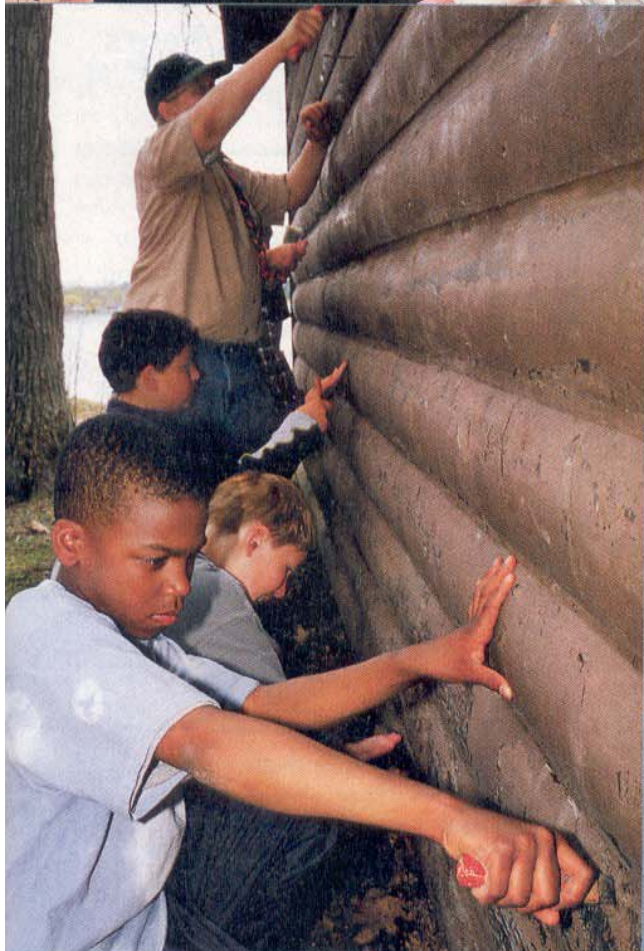
And Cliff Braden doesn't have to look beyond his own family to see that his dream of inspiring boys to pursue careers in the building trades has been achieved: Andy, a fourth-year steamfitter apprentice, credits the camporee with steering him toward working in one of the "pipe trades," where he is learning to install, maintain, and repair piping for heating and cooling systems.

"The program really gives boys an idea of what's involved in these trades," Andy says. "It really helps you

to become interested in things like plumbing, metalworking, and home repairs. Nowadays, a lot of boys aren't exposed to these kinds of skills."

The hands-on activities during the merit badge classes are especially effective, says Andy, who assisted his dad with the Plumbing merit badge sessions at Camp Long Lake. As a Scout, he earned merit badges in plumbing, metalworking, electricity, woodwork, and home repairs at the camporee, and he remembers making birdhouses, jewelry boxes, and metal flowerpots.

His son's career choice is not the camporee's only success story, Cliff Braden is quick to point out. "As a matter of fact, we've had as many as 20 boys go into the trades after attending," he notes. "The Home Improvement Camporee has been a real success story." —G.T.



(Top left) Jason Steller grimaces as he reaches into a pipe beneath a mock sink. (Left) Bryan Dykes and fellow Troop 87 members scrape the boathouse clean. (Above) Adam Vander Pas, Troop 167, finishes assembling a bat house.

Scouts well into Saturday evening finishing merit badge requirements. In the end, the Scouts earned more than 500 of the 620 merit badges available to be earned during the weekend.

But Cliff Braden and the leaders were quick to point out that the weekend's success can be measured by more than merit badges. They cited examples of fathers proudly observing that their sons returned from the camporee with a new-found ability to do minor home repairs or pinpoint a plumbing problem. And other Scouts are inspired to carry out similar service projects with their troop at home or for their Eagle rank requirement.

"We hope they will have achieved a sense of pride in their newly developed skills, as well as in doing something worthwhile for their community," Kurt Kinatader explained.

"Perhaps one of these boys will come to a better understanding of how important the trades are to everyday life...and maybe the Home Improvement Camporee will provide a foundation for skill development, whether in pursuit of a career or just sprucing up around the house." S

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shores of Long Lake.

"I hope to be a staff member here someday, so I decided to come here and help," explained Ryan Erkes, a member of Troop 87 who never removed his eyes from the job at hand as he talked. "It's actually kind of fun to scrape off old paint," he observed.

Instructor Kim Parker kept the Scouts on task, reminding them that they would be required to put every single paint can and brush away when their merit badge session was finished.

She also conceded that they wouldn't get all the painting done this weekend.

"I wish we could get paid for this," one Scout said.

"Well," Parker responded, "you *are* getting paid—with a life lesson. The next time you come to this camp, you're going to feel so good about what you've done. You're going to say, 'I painted this.' You'll be so proud of yourself."

New skills, new pride

Instructors worked with some