

Triplets' dedication to scouts pays off

If there's one thing the Podhorniak family knows, it is how to get things done.

Rosemary Podhorniak smiles when she talks about her triplet sons - Nicholas, Matthew and Jimmy - ascending to Eagle Scout status May 21 in a ceremony at St. Joseph, Fullerton, but the boys just shrug their shoulders as if to say, "It was just another task in our way."

"The Court of Honor - that eclipsed their graduation to me," Mrs. Podhorniak said of her sons, who recently finished at Calvert Hall College High School, Towson. "I was very proud and still am very proud."

Despite everything they had done to prepare for the ceremony, the humble White Marsh teenagers found themselves uncomfortable with the spotlight at St. Joseph, where one final test awaited.

"I was nervous," said Nicholas, who was asked to address the gathering. "There was a bunch of people, and the lights were shining on us. I don't like public speaking."

By any standard, the story of the Podhorniaks, members of Our Lady, Queen of Peace in Middle River, is a remarkable one.

Only four in 100 scouts reach Eagle, and the probability of three brothers reaching that pinnacle is miniscule.

Magnifying their accomplishment - and that of their mother - the boys were just 15 months old in 1991 when their father, George, died of lymphoma.

Mrs. Podhorniak raised her sons with the same determination they display everyday. She wanted to make sure they were caring, active boys who help each other and the people around them.

Each day, no matter how stressful, has been a reward, she said.

"It was tough," Mrs. Podhorniak said. "There were times when it was sad because it would have been nice to share it with their father when they did something really cool. I know he can see it, because he's in heaven."

Over the last seven years, the boys were driven to achieve the Eagle Scout level, with Matthew and Jimmy having started as Webelos in the fifth grade. Nicholas soon joined in, and their elite journey began.

"After we got so far, I thought 'there's no reason to stop now,' " Matthew said. "Just seeing some of my friends make it, I thought that if they could make it, then I could make it."

In order to move to Eagle, a boy must complete a community service project. Nicholas made a trophy case for Ridgely Middle School in Timonium. Jimmy put gravel down at Marshy Point Nature center to make a wheel-chair accessible trail for a summer camp there. At the family's church, Matthew cut a construction fence around a playground from eight feet to four feet and put in a new gate with toppers.

Combined, the brothers collected 83 merit badges. A Scout needs 21 to become an Eagle, while displaying extraordinary leadership, spirit and dedication to service.

Through the years, Mrs. Podhorniak juggled the schedules of the boys, particularly with the demands of their musical interests at Calvert Hall.

Matthew, who will major in computer science at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, was in the band and excelled in the chorus. Jimmy won awards and shined in many bands, and will likely participate in a Towson University band while he mulls a major.

Nicholas' various experiences in scouting spurred an interest in biology, which he will pursue at Neumann College in Pennsylvania.

The tight-knit triplets realize they are transitioning into a new period in their lives where they will go their separate ways.

Life in scouting, they said, had equipped them for life. They learned how to manage their lives both in and out of the house.

"I took a lot of stuff away from it like leadership skills," Jimmy said. "There are rewards in Scouting and a lot of opportunities most people don't get."

Mrs. Podhorniak will miss her sons as they embark on their respective college journeys, but continues to marvel at their achievements.

"They don't realize that a lot of kids make Eagle Scout and they have two parents," she said. "They did it simultaneously with one parent. They had to help each other. They've done something special. They really did."