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Hacienda's dangerous staircase replaced, thanks to project by public works director's son



Photo Vera Kochan

Eagle Scout John Knapp's completed Hacienda staircase project

By Vera Kochan

The name John Knapp might sound a bit familiar to Moragans in that he is the Eagle Scout son of Director of Public Works Shawn Knapp.

Knapp, the younger, was in search of a task in order to begin his Eagle Scout Conservation Project. He consulted with Parks and Recreation Director Breyana Brandt to see if there was anything available in her department. "We always have a whole list of things for a potential Scout project," she said.

After discussing several possibilities, Knapp felt strongly about the need to replace the rotting staircase leading from the Hacienda parking lot down to the La Sala Trail. "This has been sitting on our list for a while," stated Brandt. "There were projects town-wide, but he kept coming back to the stairs. I don't know if it's something we'd have agreed to except that his parents are both involved in public works [mom, Allison, is a deputy public works director for the county]. He had to come up with a comprehensive plan on how he was going to approach it."

"I wanted to do something

that would have a big impact to the community," explained John Knapp. "I noticed that it all needed to be improved. It wasn't fitting right. When people were walking down the stairs, it was moving."

"John found loose bricks and added that to the project," said his dad. "Wooden parts of the railing were crumbling, so he talked with Breyana about the appearance of it. The new handrails were made to follow the contours of the steps." Besides the aesthetically improved wooden railings, a metal ADA-compliant handrail was added to one side for additional gripping support, and the precarious bricks have been firmly reapplied with a heavy-duty adhesive.

Prior to the actual rebuilding of the staircase, Knapp began to have misgivings about tackling such a monumental endeavor. A two-week Philmont Scout Ranch High Adventure trip in New Mexico, which included hikes to the tops of several mountain passes, namely Baldy Mountain with an elevation of 12,441 feet, canoeing and hiking during inclement weather, while equipped with only the bare essentials of sur-

vival, helped Knapp to gain self-confidence.

Over 685 total hours went into the planning and construction of the project (340 of those hours involved construction man-time using 40 volunteers during two weekends). Knapp collected \$6,166 in cash donations for the materials (the town paid for the lumber and concrete), supplies and tools for the project through a GoFundMe account; a dine-in event at a restaurant; and direct solicitations.

Knapp was not without a support system during the project while his dad was sidelined with health issues. Family, friends, fellow Scouts from Troop 444 and their leaders (several of which are adult Eagle Scouts who are engineers) pitched in to dismantle the old staircase and build a new work of art. "I've done projects before on PowerPoint, but this was a first at being in charge," said Knapp. With an adult workgroup leader, he was encouraged to keep everyone on track and focused.

Every aspect and step of the undertaking was documented in what turned out to be a nearly 3-inch thick "John Knapp Eagle Scout Rank Candidate Binder" containing a project proposal, conceptual drawings, budgeting, materials used, work crew schedules, photos of the various stages of completion, receipts, and more. "Altogether, it took me one year from start to finish. Thank God, I'm done," rejoiced Knapp. "Overall, this project was complicated and needed a bunch of improvements, but it was worth supporting it."

His attention to detail has not gone unnoticed by the Boy Scouts of America. According to Knapp senior, "The scouting district representative, whose role for the past 10 years is to screen the Eagle Scout Service Project proposals and finished projects prior to their final Eagle Scout Board of Reviews, said this was the largest construction project and best put together report." The Knapps are keeping their fingers crossed that the project wins an award on a local level before being nominated for the National Eagle Scout Association Award.

"This was good training," commented Knapp, who's currently enrolled at Diablo Valley College, "but I'm still finding out what I want to do in life. I'm thinking of being a psychologist."

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Town Council: Wednesday, Feb. 9, 7 p.m.
Planning Commission: Tuesday, Feb. 15, 7 p.m.,
Park and Recreation Commission: Monday, Feb. 21, 7 p.m.,
Moraga School District Board Meetings: Tuesday, Feb. 8, 6 p.m. www.moraga.k12.ca.us.



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