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Scout Scores a Major HAT TRICK

Mike Behme of Findlay Township has gained a notoriety that most young people don't experience at his age. In the last few months, his Eagle Scout project, Hats Tricks 4 Humanity, has turned heads, literally, of local and regional media and even snagged an interview on ESPN, the nationwide sports television station, with host Dana Jacobson.

Mike's project entails scooping up the hats thrown onto the ice at the Penguins' games when a player scores the infamous "hat trick" and distributing them to those in need.

Mike, who is a freshman ice hockey player at West Allegheny High School, wanted to pursue a project for his Eagle Scout project through Troop 830 in Clinton that was related to his passion for hockey.

He wondered where the hats ended up at the Penguin games at the Mellon Arena when a hat trick was thrown. He decided to find out where they went.

What he discovered was that the Penguins were disposing of them in the trash, primarily due to sanitary reasons.

After several letters to Penguins officials, he got his answer. Ross Miller, director of marketing for the team, passed along permission to Mike to collect the hat tricks from the arena, but with one stipulation -- he had to guarantee they were cleaned and sanitized.

He promised he would do that, and the project got underway last spring.

Mike said the project has grown into something so much more than he would have expected.

"I'm so surprised that so many people are able to benefit from what I am doing," he said.

"I'm helping people through this, and I hope to keep doing it even after I earn my Eagle Scout badge," he added.

Since the collection process began, Mike has kept a detailed log on his computer of all incoming hats, and where they have been distributed. There have been lots of Penguin hats, of course, but also Pirates hats and winter hats, and just hats in general.

At last count, he had collected 3,500 hats. Even his classmates and teachers at West Allegheny have gotten involved. Mike partnered with the National Honor Society to conduct a hat drive. The drive netted more than 800 hats of all shapes and sizes for Mike to distribute. One of the high school teachers, Diane Boustead, who also co-sponsors the National Honor Society, keeps knitting hats for Mike's collection.

Even his neighbors and his dentist office have donated to his cause.

Mike is grateful for all of the support he has received.

"I would not have been able to accomplish this without all of the help of the members of my scout troop, the troop leaders, the people at the school, and my family," he said. "I want everyone to know how much I appreciate this."

Once a hat trick occurs at Mellon Arena, Mike calls Ross Miller, who gets them bagged up after the game. Mike goes down and picks them up. Then it's time for a "wash party." That's when the troop members and leaders spend some time hanging out at the Imperial Laundromat, using quarters and change Mike has received as Eagle project donations, to fill the machines so the hats can be put through a sanitation process. That process includes lots of Borax, said his mom, Susan Behme.

The troop then goes down the road to the Findlay Activity Center and sets all the hats out to dry, one at a time. Once the drying is complete, the hats are counted in



THIS PAGE: Top to bottom, Mike and fellow members talk to clients at the West Allegheny Food Pantry during a distribution night; NHS co-sponsor, Mrs. Lambert, and Mike look over the donations from the National Honor Society; Mike on the ice; just a sampling of the thousands of hats that Mike has collected.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Top, left to right: children from around the world have been delighted to receive hats. The photo of the child in the center with the oversized hat is Mike's favorite picture. Right, top to bottom: youths from Holy Family Institute enjoy getting a hat to wear; members of Boy Scout Troop 830 with their "Stanley Cup." Bottom, left to right: the washing process begins with the collection at the Mellon Arena, followed by washing and sanitizing the hats at the Imperial Laundromat, and ends with drying and bagging the hats at the Findlay Activity Center.



100s and placed into large trash bags which have also been donated.

The distribution process begins again, and more recipients will receive hats from this project.

Mike chuckles when he recalls some of the more unusual things that have been in the bags from the hat tricks.

“There was a red fedora hat with feathers once, a belt another time, even shoes; you never know what you will get in the bag,” he said.

Then there was Penguin Christmas stocking night, where the team handed out to the fans stockings adorned with the Penguin logo. About 250 of those made it onto the icy floor. Mike said they are holding onto those to hopefully do something special with them next Christmas for others who could use some holiday cheer.

The biggest hat trick of all, however, was the one by Sydney Crosby last November when 1,380 hats from Highmark, which sponsored that night’s game, hit the ice. They filled 15 large bags.

The hats have found new homes locally and abroad. One of Mike’s friends, Nick Hasulak, a Montour High School student who went on a mission trip with Union Presbyterian Church, distributed some of Mike’s hats in Guatemala. Mike has sent hats to Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti through local churches and organizations. Pittsburgh Youth and Family Services organizations such as Auberle and Holy Family Institute have received hats, as have autistic children at Pressley Ridge, Sonshine Community Ministries, and 200 Pittsburgh area soldiers being deployed to Afghanistan through Operation Troop Appreciation.

Last month, Mike was on site with several fellow scout members, distributing hats to clients of the West Allegheny Food Pantry.

For Mike, the project is no longer just about fulfilling his Eagle Scout project. He’s learned that something as small as giving someone a hat can make his or her day. He’s learned that it can take just one person to do something to help someone else.

He said he hopes that the project will continue long after he passes it on to someone else when he graduates from high school in three years.

And, while he says he went to a Penguins game in December, there weren’t any hat tricks that night. He’s keeping his fingers crossed, however, that he’ll get to be



there one time when it happens.

In addition to brightening someone’s day, Mike likes “going green” by recycling these hats. An actual hat from Sidney Crosby’s hat trick becomes a treasured keepsake rather than filling a landfill.

For more information, visit Mike’s Web site, www.HatTricks4Humanity.org. The Web site also was donated by a local web design company.



What is a Hat Trick?

If someone scores a “hat trick” in hockey, it means that a player has scored three goals in one game.