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Boy Scout uses own hospitalization to help others

Marlborough

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Marlborough - For Boy Scout Nathan Hunt, of Northborough, it was an opportunity to use what he learned during a painful chapter in his young life to help others who are going through a similar experience.

Hunt recently completed a service project by leading a host of volunteers who rebuilt a seating area for patients and families outside of Marlborough Hospital's Special Care Unit. The new seating area, which was completed in late fall 2006, features a red maple shade tree, mulched flower beds, cobblestone walkways and two wooden benches.

The service project was a highly personal one for Hunt. He chose it, one of the final steps on his quest for Eagle Scout ranking, as a means to give enjoyment and hope back to those who are going through a difficult time in their lives.

A few years ago, Hunt was hospitalized for several months with a rare disorder called hypophosphatemia, a tumor-induced depletion of phosphate in the body. The illness left the otherwise healthy and active teenager with two broken femurs and in a wheelchair for six months. While his friends could play sports, go camping and do all the things teens do, Hunt was confined to a hospital for long stretches of time. Going outside in a wheelchair, if only for a few minutes, was a treat and raised his spirits.

"It took a while for the doctors to figure out what was wrong, so I was in a lot of hospitals - Marlborough, UMass Memorial and then Yale New Haven. It could get depressing being in a hospital room all day," Hunt said. "Yale New Haven had a garden outside, and my dad would take me there in a wheelchair. I got out in the fresh air and could relax. It was great, and meant a lot to me."

A healthy, active teenager today, when it came time to choose his Eagle Scout service project, Hunt thought back to his experiences of a few years earlier and knew that he somehow wanted to help those who are in the hospital today.

With the help of volunteers from Boy Scout Troops 1 and 101 in Northborough as well as Dominic "Micky" Olivo, RN, and the nurses from Marlborough Hospital's Special Care Unit (SCU), Hunt embarked upon his project, which he estimates involved 260 hours of planning, fund-raising and work.

The actual hands-on work last fall included Hunt and his crew leveling the ground for the sitting area outside of the SCU, putting in the cobblestone walkways, replacing wooden boards on two benches, planting a red maple and flowering tulip and daffodil beds and mulching.

"Micky and the SCU staff helped me with the planning," Hunt said. "The project helped me learn a lot about being a leader, working with others in the community and reaching goals. It feels good to accomplish something other people can now enjoy."

Hunt, who started as a Cub Scout in the fifth grade, enjoys scouting and feels it has taught him lessons he will keep with him throughout his adult life.

"Everyone is in scouting for the same reasons," he said. "We go camping and participate in high adventure. Last summer we canoed in the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area in Minnesota. But it's not just camping. Scouting also teaches leadership, how to work with others and how to accomplish goals."

Marlborough Hospital President and CEO John Polanowicz, himself a Boy Scout leader, applauded Hunt's altruism.

"Nathan used a traumatic experience in his own life to help those who may be going through the same type of situation," Polanowicz said. "His vision, hard work and leadership with this project will touch the staff and numerous patients and their families here at the hospital for years to come."

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