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Cub Scout honored as national hero

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A North St. Paul Cub Scout has been recognized as a national hero for his part in pulling a boy to safety during a canoe trip gone awry.

Antonio Vandal was only 9 years old when he and his father, Rocky Vandal, embarked on a canoe trip with a group of friends in August 2010. Because of his life-saving efforts, Antonio was awarded the National Boy Scout Award of Merit for Heroism on Feb. 18 with U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar in attendance.

Antonio is one of seven Webelos Scouts, out of more than 615,000 Webelos in the country, to have earned the merit award last year.

A timely practice

According to Antonio, he and his father decided to practice canoe safety techniques before the trip, since Antonio had never been canoeing.

"We went to the scout shop and we rented a canoeing merit badge book," Antonio said. "We rented a canoe and practiced in Silver Lake ... hoping we would never have to use the skills."

The day of the canoe trip arrived, and Antonio and Rocky began their trek down Namekagon River with five other canoes in their group. Although the weather was forecast to be calm, the recent rainfall had created a quick current and rapids, making for a rougher than expected ride.

Antonio said they ran into trouble when the Vandals' canoe went around a blind curve. As they rounded the curve, they saw their friends' canoe had capsized, throwing a young boy and his father into the rapids. The father had nearly reached the shore, but his son was bobbing in the rapids without a life jacket.

"I yelled to my dad, 'Let's go!'" Antonio said.

Once Antonio and Rocky reached the boy, Antonio stabilized the canoe while Rocky pulled the boy out of the water.

"I said, 'Antonio, stabilize the canoe, just like we practiced,'" Rocky recalled.

Sudden celebrity

Naomi Vandal, Antonio's mother, said Antonio has been overwhelmed with phone calls and letters of congratulations since the merit award was announced. Mayor Mike Kuehn proclaimed Feb. 18 as "Antonio Vandal Day" in North St. Paul, and Antonio received congressional recognition from Sen. Amy Klobuchar's office for the feat.

"I would say we're in shock. Everybody's calling, we have people knocking, he's been getting mail that says 'Mr. Antonio Vandal,'" Naomi said.

But the national recognition hasn't turned Antonio's head, she added. "It's nice to see he's growing up to be a well-balanced young man."

Although the canoe trip was not Cub Scout related, Antonio said he might not have thought to practice safety techniques if he wasn't a Cub Scout.

"Without scouting, this rescue might not have been possible," he said.

"If it wasn't for God, we might not have had the inspiration to practice," Rocky added.

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Linda Baumeister/Review
Cub Scout Antonio Vandal received the rare Boy Scout National Certificate of Merit from U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar Feb. 17. Antonio was recognized for his efforts in the rescue of a capsized canoeist in the Namekagon River rapids. Klobuchar praised the young scout for his courage and composure.



Linda Baumeister/Review
The Cub Scout National Court of Honor Award Ceremony for Webelos Scout Antonio Vandal, North St. Paul, took place at the NorthStar Boy Scout and Girl Scout Museum Feb. 17. Pictured with U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar are Antonio Vandal and his parents Naomi and Rocky.

