

**Hello Scouts, Parents, Counselors and Leaders,**



Welcome to Virtual Merit Badges, Advancements and More!

Let's look at 'virtual' for a minute. For me, as a person who is culturally Deaf, the virtual landscape is not a new world but one I've been using for a long time because of the advantages it provides to myself as a Deaf person. Some of the virtual technologies were used in the Deaf Community long before they became popular in the Hearing Community like video chats/conferences and group texting. From experience, the virtual world is ever changing as new technology is developed and others retired. For many, it may be a new world of uncharted territory where they spend time learning the ropes so please be patient and help if you know how.

Looking at 'merit badges' and 'virtual', some of today's technology is new to me like Google Classrooms or Zoom's added features of Break Out Rooms so I will be learning new technology right along with everyone. It is important to ask questions, share new technology, raise concerns, offer feedback and more as we explore and keep in mind.... Scouts' SAFETY FIRST.

Second, it is vital to remember we are members of the Scouting Community! In any virtual setting or dialogue, we should always conduct our actions and words to reflect the Scout Oath, Law, Motto, Slogan and Outdoor Code. Proudly wear your uniform in video conferencing and chats so pictures taken and shared (posted) virtual on Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, Instagram and etc. reflect a busy, thriving and cheerful Scouting community others will want to join. Invite friends to join, with approval first, so your friends get a taste of what Scouting is about and what they CAN do.

Third, as we move forward into the world of 'Virtual Merit Badges', please understand, I come from a very strong point of view of Scouts' SAFETY is FIRST, along with the counselors' safety. Reading through many of BSA's publications with safety in mind, I look at all angles of any platform we utilize. Reflect on how platforms are used now and in the future. I tend to go the extra mile in thinking about Scout's safety for the future along with following Lord Baden-Powell's purpose that Scouts-BSA is youth-led.

With that in mind, I strongly suggest parents (and leaders) to please consider the following as a precaution for your Scout's safety and youth protection to prevent future contacts of one-on-one by allowing Scout(s) to use parent's email, parent's Facebook account and parent's phone numbers and etc. as they roam the virtual merit badges world. Remember while utilizing parents' accounts, parents should not do anything a Scout CAN do for themselves. Part of the merit badge program is achieved through learning new skills, overcoming obstacles, improving social skills, developing self-initiative and self-reliance.

Remember, have FUN meeting new people from all over the USA and learning new things!

Yours in Youth Leadership,  
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