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## **Tennessee Military Department Hosts Merit Badge University**

**NASHVILLE, Tenn.** – The Tennessee National Guard embraced the Scout BSA slogan, “do a good turn daily,” as they hosted the 3rd Annual Merit Badge University for nearly 400 scouts who wanted to live up to their motto, “be prepared,” on April 27.

Held at the Tennessee Military Department’s Joint Force Headquarters in Nashville, more than 50 Soldiers, Airmen, and volunteers from the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency offered 23 specialized merit badge classes for scouts to earn. Participants from the Middle Tennessee Council and across the state were invited to attend.

“The scouts provide a tremendous foundation for leadership, and we see the benefit scouting had on many of our Soldiers and Airmen,” said Maj. Gen. Warner Ross, Tennessee’s Adjutant General. “We value the opportunity to host this event knowing that these young men and women participating today are becoming better leaders and citizens.”

The merit badges offered ranged from those required for Eagle Scout to professional based programs. During the classes, scouts learned skills in their respected areas while completing the various tasks to meet the badge’s requirements. Most scouts ended the day with at least one new badge, with many one step closer to earning Eagle Scout, the highest rank a scout can earn. After the day-long event was over, nearly 400 merit badges were earned.

“The selection of badges offered was diverse and there were many not often available during meetings or at scout camp,” said Sgt. 1st Class Ken Weichert, the Merit Badge University coordinator. “The classes were taught by Guardsmen who are professionals in their specialties and have years of experience.”

For example, volunteers with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency taught search and rescue, Army mechanics taught auto maintenance, and Tennessee’s Staff Judge Advocate taught law. Other merit badges offered included personal fitness, engineering, first aid, and many more. Maj. Gen. Ross taught the citizenship in the nation merit badge as well as took his class on a field trip to the state capital.

“Earning a merit badge in a field of interest can be very impactful,” said Lt. Col. Dallas Clements, the project manager for this event. “For me, I remember being fascinated with the college radio station and several other commercial stations we toured when I participated in a Merit Badge University with Troop 48 in Soddy Daisy, Tennessee. The experience influenced my decision to join the Signal Corps branch when I joined the military.”



Many Guardsmen, who were also scouts growing up, have similar stories.

“When I talk to many former scouts, they tell me that they often choose a career or life-long hobby based on their experiences while working on a merit badge,” said Weichert. “I remember taking personal fitness as a scout and it became my life-long passion and career. That is why I believe events like this are so important, not only are these scouts learning, but they are also being inspired.”

Weichert is a professional exercise science specialist, a certified life coach, and founder of Tennessee’s Holistic Health and Fitness initiative. He is a Master Resilience Trainer facilitator for the Tennessee National Guard and has taught the personal fitness merit badge at the last three Merit Badge Universities.

“This year’s university was much more successful than we anticipated,” said Weichert. “It was a great opportunity for Guardsmen to be involved in the community and for the scouts to learn different skills and about different professions. We look forward to doing this again next year.”

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Retired Col. Jimmie Reed assists with teaching the citizenship in the nation merit badge at the 3rd Annual Merit Badge University hosted by the Tennessee Military Department at Nashville's Joint Force Headquarters, April 27. (photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Brown)



Sgt. 1st Class Ken Weichert talks with scouts during the opening ceremony for the 3rd Annual Merit Badge University hosted by the Tennessee Military Department at Nashville's Joint Force Headquarters, April 27. (photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Brown)



Lt. Col. Dallas Clements teaches the radio merit badge in the Joint Operations Center during the 3rd Annual Merit Badge University hosted by the Tennessee Military Department at Nashville's Joint Force Headquarters, April 27. (photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Brown)



A scout from the Middle Tennessee Council explores an armored vehicle at the 3rd Annual Merit Badge University hosted by the Tennessee Military Department at Nashville's Joint Force Headquarters, April 27. (photo by Staff Sgt. Matthew Brown)

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