

A Mom's Guide to an Eagle Court of Honor

When it was time to start planning my son's Eagle Ceremony and Reception I felt overwhelmed. Where do you start? After talking to other Eagle Moms, checking the information on the Troop's Website, and doing research online, I put together a plan and a binder containing everything I believed should be part of a Court of Honor. I found that being organized was the most important thing (things will get pretty crazy and stressful at the end). Although I did most of the work on the computer, I found it was helpful to have a binder with all the information in it. It made it easy to check on things without running back and forth to the computer. Hopefully this guide will help you plan your son's COH. You may want to add things or leave things out but these are the basics. Here are the major sections from my binder:

LETTERS OF CONGRATULATIONS

Send out requests ASAP. The troop website has a list of people to send letters to and information on how to address dignitaries. Some can be done online and some you have to send through regular mail. It takes a while to get letters back, especially if the person's office contacts you looking for more information. (Don't forget to include your phone number and email in your requests to speed up the back-and-forth of information.) Try to request letters from people your son would be interested in like celebrities or musicians or even companies like Nintendo. Keep a checklist in the binder so you know who you sent letters to and if you got letters back. Once you get the letters back keep them in plastic liners in another binder, to be read and displayed at the ceremony. Note: For dignitaries like the Town Manager, Senators, Representatives it's understood that when they get an invitation they will have a citation made up so you do not need to request one specifically from them.

GUEST LIST

Naturally the whole troop is invited so this is a list of everyone else. Family, your son's friends, family friends, people involved with the Eagle Project, former Cub Scout Leaders, etc. Include dignitaries like the Town Manager, State Senators, and State Representatives. Also consider the principal at your son's school and teachers who are important to him. Keep a checklist so you know who has been sent an invitation and who has RSVP'd. This way you can track down the people who haven't replied. Don't forget to invite the photographer from the local newspaper.

INVITATION

Setting the date is probably the hardest part. Check with the key participants in the ceremony to make sure they're available before you commit to the date. Pick the location based on the number of guests you expect, large halls for large groups. Find out if there are any restrictions to the location you want (no candles, whether you can get in early to set up, if they have enough tables and chairs for all of your guests, extra fees, etc.). Then, reserve your location and write the invitation. I found it best to send the invitations out a month ahead of time. Make your RSVP date a week before the ceremony, so you have time to call people who haven't responded yet. When the dignitaries RSVP you should mention 'we're hoping he/she will honor us by saying a few words' to make sure they know you wish them to speak at the ceremony. You may want to double check that they're having a citation made up. When people

RSVP it's very important to find out how many people they're bringing so you'll know how much food to order. We printed our invitations on our own computer, using cards from the Scout Shop. The troop invitation goes out through Troop Kit. Don't forget to include directions to the ceremony for out-of-town guests. At the Troop meeting before the ceremony we handed out one-page, one-sided invitations we made on our computer, as a take-home reminder of the event. The standard invitation is:

Mr. and Mrs. (First name and last name of father)

And

Boy Scouts of America Troop 56

Cordially Invite You to Attend

The Eagle Court of Honor

For

(Your son's name)

(Day of the week and month and day and year)

At X o'clock in the afternoon

(Location of ceremony)

(Address of ceremony)

Reception to follow ceremony

Please RSVP by (month, day, year)

(Your phone number and email address)

PROGRAM

The program can be however you want and include whatever you like, in whatever order you like. Photos can also be included. It's important to ask people to participate in the ceremony in plenty of time to have their names listed on the program. The Invocation and Benediction can be performed by someone in the troop, the Troop's Chaplain Aid, a special guest, or a member of the clergy (from your church or, if the ceremony is held in a church, the clergy from that church). We had the program done at the printers but you can print it yourself. There is a cover page which should include the words:

Eagle Scout Court of Honor for (name of Scout)

BSA Troop 56 Wilmington MA

The inside of the front cover can include things like Merit Badges Earned, Trail to Eagle (showing the dates the scout achieved each rank), Positions of Responsibility, and/or Other Achievements (like NYLT or OA).

The inside of the back cover should be a schedule of what will go on during the ceremony and list who will be speaking. Some standard things to include are:

Welcome/MC

Opening Ceremony (usually the SPL)

Presentation of Colors

Pledge of Allegiance

Scout Oath

Scout Law

Outdoor Code

Invocation

Eagle Honor Guard

Trail to Eagle

Eagle Requirements

Eagle Project

Eagle Presentation

Eagle Charge and Oath

Presentations (the dignitaries who will speak)

Letters of Congratulations

Parents' Moment

Eagle Scout's Remarks

Scoutmaster's Minute

Benediction

Closing

Please remain at your seats until the colors have been retired.

Reception immediately following the ceremony.

The back cover of the program can include whatever you like--photos, a description of the Eagle Project, information about Eagle Scouts (100 Scouts), poems about Scouting, the Scout's resume including where he's going to college, a thank you from the Scout, etc. You may even want to have an insert to the program with some of this information, since it's easy to exceed one page.

CEREMONY

There are lots of ceremonies online, it's just a matter of picking one that appeals to you and your son. Feel free to change them or take pieces from a bunch and combine them. I found it helpful to include directions for the speakers, in the script, in parenthesis, like 'Scout salutes MC and takes his seat' or 'Mr. X walks to the stage' or 'Mr. Y turns and faces Eagle Scout'. It is important that the people who have speaking parts in the ceremony get a copy of the script in plenty of time to practice and make notes. Have a master copy of the script, in a binder, on the podium at the ceremony so people don't have to worry about remembering to bring their scripts or so people aren't bringing up crumpled pieces of paper to read from. You may want to place the Parents' speech (don't forget to write one!) in the binder so you won't have to worry about keeping track of it or remember to bring it up with you. Don't forget to have the Eagle Scout write a speech! He'll probably tell you he wants to 'wing it' but it's better to have something written down. Once he gets up there he'll forget everything he wanted to say and end up rambling on, filling time, and not saying everything he wants to or needs to. Encourage your son to identify an Eagle Mentor, someone who helped him on his Trail to Eagle. In the Eagle package (badge, pins, etc.) there is a pin for the Mentor. Your son can present the pin during the ceremony. One thing we found helpful, once the script was written, was to read through the ceremony, using pieces of paper representing the people in the ceremony. We set them up and moved them along the tabletop to see how the script worked. This helped to point out if there was too much going up and sitting down or too many people crowded in an area at a time. After doing this it became clear that it was best to make place cards for the people in the ceremony, to tape to their seats at the ceremony, so they were sitting in places where it was convenient for them to get to the stage. (It also helped to save their seats.) There are things from the troop you'll need to get for the ceremony like flags and stands, the big wooden eagle, the Eagle Board and stand, the Trail to Eagle board. Make sure you get them in plenty of time before the ceremony. You may also want to get flowers for the stage. Don't forget any props you need for the ceremony like candles, posters, flowers for Mom (!), etc. The Troop will provide the Eagle neckerchief, badge, and pins for the parents. Make sure there is a table to place these items on. It's nice to provide bottles of water for the speakers. One hour before the ceremony, have the participants (not the dignitaries) come in for a run-through. It is important to send email reminders so people know to come early. It's a good idea to ask an adult in the Troop, someone who likes photography, to take pictures at the ceremony. You'll be too busy to do it yourself (never mind that you'll be on stage for some of it) and you'll be glad there's a designated person doing it, instead of hoping, later, that someone took photos and remembers to send copies to you. Don't forget to recruit a few Scouts to hand out programs.

RECEPTION

This is the second part of the Eagle Ceremony. The Troop will donate money towards the reception. It's nice to have a receiving line of the Eagle Scout and his family at the entrance to the reception. You'll be so busy you'll want this chance to see and thank everyone. At the reception make sure there is a clearly visible basket for cards and presents. You may want to have a guest book. Depending on where you have the reception and what type of food you serve, or if it's catered, the set-up and items you'll need will differ. Have a checklist to keep track of what you need to buy or order and if you did so. Things like:

Dinner plates and napkins and cutlery

Dessert plates and napkins and cutlery

Coffee stirrers, coffee, sugar, artificial sweetener, hot cups, coffee urn, cream and milk, tea, hot water urn

Soda, juice, water bottles, cups, ice, coolers

Serving spoons, serving platters, serving baskets, cake knife and server, trash bag liners, recycling sign

Centerpieces, tablecloths, gift basket, guest book

Food and cake

A table and corkboards for memorabilia (badges, shirts, photos, newspaper clippings, craft projects, Eagle Project Workbook, awards, etc.)

OVERALL CHECKLIST

You can never be too organized so this is an overall checklist of all aspects of the Court of Honor:

Congrats letters requested?

Congrats binder made (use sticky notes to indicate which letters are to be read the day of)?

Invitations printed?

Invitations (with directions) mailed?

Invitation emailed to the troop?

Invitations handed out to the troop for last-minute reminder?

People in the ceremony asked and accepted?

Program written?

Program printed?

Ceremony written?

Ceremony printed?

Copies of ceremony given to main participants?

Master copy of ceremony put in binder?

Town Crier notified, to send photographer?

Food ordered?

Cake ordered?

Paper goods, centerpieces, etc. bought?

Mementos organized, corkboards set up?

PARTICIPANTS REMINDED, A FEW DAYS BEFORE, TO SHOW UP 1 HOUR BEFORE CEREMONY FOR A RUN-THROUGH?

Flowers? Balloons?

Trash bag liners? Sign made to designate one trash barrel for items that can be recycled?

Buy milk and cream.

Get items from troop—flags and stands, the big wooden eagle, the Eagle Board and stand, the Trail to Eagle board, coolers, urns.

Place cards made for ceremony participants?

CHECKLIST FOR THE DAY OF THE CEREMONY

Reception Checklist:

Buy ice

Get balloons and flowers

Pick up cake

Pick up other food items

Ice drinks

Make coffee and tea

Eating Tables

Tables and chairs set up

Tablecloths on

Centerpieces on

Cake table

Tablecloth on

Cake

Cake server, plates, napkins, forks

Buffet Table

Tablecloths

Food, napkins, plates, utensils

Beverage Table

Tablecloth

Water bottles and juice boxes

Soda in coolers

Plastic cups

Hot Beverages Table

Coffee urn

Hot water urn

Basket of sugar packets

Stirrers

Tea bags

Hot cups

Milk

Cream

Memento Table

Table cloths

Cork boards

Photo albums

Uniforms

Knick knacks

Troop Eagle Roster Plaque

Guest book with pen and gift/card basket

Trash barrels with liners

Recycling trash barrel with liner and sign

Ceremony Checklist:

American Flag and stand

Troop Flag and stand

Flowers

Programs

Binder of congratulations letters (with sticky notes)

Master copy of ceremony in binder with parents' speeches

Water bottles

Table for pins and neckerchief

Wooden Eagle

Make sure your son has his speech!

The Eagle Court of Honor takes a lot of planning and work but it's worth it. You're proud of your Eagle Scout and want the day to reflect that. Ask for and accept any and all offers of help! You'll definitely need people to help during the reception to keep food platters full, cut and serve cake, etc. Even more important—ask the Scouts to help with the clean-up. You'll be amazed (as will your guests) at how quickly and thoroughly they can break down the room, clean up, and get everything back to normal. When it's all over you'll be happy, proud, relieved, and tired. Your work is done, you can relax. Until it's time to hound your son to write all of those thank-you notes!

Christine Johnston March 2011