

Book flies with Eagles

Author follows adventurous Scouts. Program ‘teaches you how to be a self-starter ... an entrepreneur.’

By Bo Emerson
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Atlanta writer and Eagle Scout Alvin Townley had a house and a job and decided to trade both to pursue an idea he'd harbored for years: write about Eagles in high places.

He quit the job, sold the house, hit the road, interviewed senators, an astronaut, a Supreme Court justice and others whose outstanding performance in Scouting prefigured excellence to come. The result was 2007's "Legacy of Honor," about the influence of the Eagle badge.

In his followup, "Spirit of Adventure," published this month by Thomas Dunne Books, Townley went further afield, to focus on a younger generation of Eagles, the 20- and 30-somethings who are diving in Australia, surfing in Hawaii, fighting in Iraq, inspired by the sort of adventurous streak that typifies those at the pinnacle of Scouting.

We caught up with Townley, 34, just after he'd finished addressing a crowd of 1,500 at the Boy Scouts of America's national meeting in Orlando.

Q. Why do Boy Scouts have a reputation as being square?

A. The guys I met, they are so far from that stereotype, you wouldn't believe it. Guys that are rough and tumble: Peace Corps volunteers, NFL football players, free-style skiers. The wrong images are out there. When people read the book, I think they'll realize Scouts find all sorts of paths, and that most of them are not the stereotypical paths that people might at first think about.

Q. What is the quality that Eagle Scouts embody that is critical to America?

A. Entrepreneurism. Eagle Scouts are entrepreneurs in the broadest sense of the word. Some of them do start businesses, but some of them take it upon themselves to start well-drilling projects in Africa, for example, or a program for orphans in China; guys that decide to go do Teach for America at an inner city school, which is not easy ... Scouting teaches you how to be a self-starter, how to be an entrepreneur: That if you want something, you have to make it happen.

Q. Scouts typically become inactive from age 18 until they have children of their own. How do you get that slice of the population interested?

A. That's the slice that I represent and that's the slice that I want to get back involved. I'm piloting a new program in Atlanta called Eagle Reserve. [It challenges Eagle Scouts to donate one weekend a year to take a local Scout troop camping.] In the fall I got six of my buddies who are Eagle Scouts, and none of us had done anything for Scouting since we were 17. We took Troop 100 camping. The trick is getting volunteers. My generation is here, we're ready to take the torch and do our part.

For information: www.alvintownley.com.

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Eagle Scout Alvin Townley has followed his first book about the influence of the Eagle Scout badge, "Legacy of Honor," with "Spirit of Adventure." In it, the Atlantan focuses on a younger generation of Eagles.