

After 24 years of guidance, he's retiring as Scoutmaster

■ "His level of energy and the enjoyment he got from Scouting are incomparable."

A.J. Kelly, Eagle Scout, on Scoutmaster AJ Vasta

By Irene Bowers
Correspondent

BAYSIDE

AJ Vasta never sought to control the reins. Recently retired after 24 years as Scoutmaster of Boy Scout Troop 375, Vasta believed in letting Scouts plan and execute decisions.

"It's how they become leaders," the Ocean Lakes resident said.

What emerged from his final meetings was that Vasta's formative role leads his Scouts home. From colleges, workplaces, after dinner with their own families – steady numbers of former Scouts returned to say thank you and goodbye.

His retirement is "the end of an era," according to Michael Bader, 34.

"AJ would take time with you; nudge you, if you needed it," he said.

Clint Fulcher, 37, said Vasta "cared for every Scout, not just the ones who were on the fast track."

Vasta joined Troop 375 in 1982, as a 17-year-old military dependent from Hawaii. He was the senior patrol leader and, at the youngest allowed age of 21, became Scoutmaster.

According to Assistant Scoutmaster Matthew Lee, 38, who was a Scout in 1986, Vasta had long hair and a beat-up Toyota Tercel held together with duct tape and crammed full of gear.

"The world operated with a whole different set of rules then," Lee said, recalling one misguided hike over, then back over the 4,063-foot summit of The Priest on the Appalachian Trail. "But what's at the heart of Scouting is still true today. That's why kids loved him then and love him now."

Boy Scouts of America Tidewater Council's Bill Deany said one of the best indicators of a great Scoutmaster is that his troop grows. Under Vasta's tenure, Troop 375 went from 30 Scouts to roughly 80, and



IRENE BOWERS PH

Retiring Troop 375 Scoutmaster AJ Vasta (right of center wearing cap) is swarmed by scouts at the end of his last official meeting at Old Donation Episcopal Church.

brought its numbers of Eagle Scouts up to 52.

Current senior patrol leader and Eagle Scout A.J. Kelly, 17, said Vasta's guidance was that of good supervisor's.

"He gave you a lot of power to make decisions, but if you needed help, you could turn to him," he said. "His level of energy and the enjoyment he got from Scouting are incomparable."

Former Eagle Scouts spoke of Vasta's impact. "He had an unyielding dedication to the troop and the ideals of Scouting in general," said Greg Weaver, 23.

Andrew Reshefsky, 28, agreed: "AJ pushed us to succeed; he formed many futures."

Proud developer of the Tri-fecta badge, comprising a 50-mile hike, 200-mile bike ride and 50-mile canoe trip, Vasta tried to calculate how many miles he has accrued.

"Not counting the 5,000 miles a year on my car,



Former and current members of Boy Scout Troop 375 showed their gratitude to retiring Scoutmaster AJ Vasta during a troop meeting at Old Donation Episcopal Church.

it's in the thousands," he guessed.

"AJ has more miles on him than a '65 Coupe de Ville," Lee joked. A kidney transplant seven years ago slowed Vasta down.

Troop 375's 10-year assistant scoutmaster, Tim Rarick, is the new scoutmaster. The 45-year-old Vasta, who said "it was the right time

to step aside," will continue to work for the Tidewater Council.

"AJ may be retired," Deany said, "but he can call him up anytime and he'll be back out the trail."

Leading them home, doubt.

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VET'S NOTES



Richard Dailey, D.V.M.

DENTAL CARE FOR DOGS

While most people are in the habit of brushing their teeth every day, most dog owners probably don't brush their dog's teeth every day. But, considering how important dental hygiene is, and how quickly plaque buildup can turn into tartar (the process begins in little more than a day), brushing the dog's teeth is worth thinking about. Start by getting the dog used to this new addition to the routine by pairing it with something the dog looks forward to, like a walk. Then let the dog taste veterinary toothpaste. The next day, run your fingers along the teeth, and gradually work up to brushing with a soft bristled brush meant for dogs. Brushing should take less than a minute.

P.S. Don't get discouraged if your dog balks at tooth brushing at first. While a good practice, brushing just doesn't come naturally to most creatures other than humans.

Preventative dental care is so important for the continued health of your dog. Please call for an appointment for personalized attention for all your pet's needs. We offer the latest in medical procedures, systems and services, but most of all, we offer care. Good dental hygiene is an important part of preventative health care. We strive to offer excellence in veterinary care to Virginia Beach, Virginia, and surrounding areas. Be sure to sign up with our Pet Portal and stay connected with us anytime, anywhere. Preserve the holiday memory! Come in December 7th, 5pm to 7pm, for a complimentary pet portrait with Santa!

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