

# Local Boy Scout offers Santa holiday help

- By Nicole Tuttle For MediaNews Group
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Photos of children with Santa will make cherished memories for the 1,500 people that attend key holiday events in Macomb Township, and Boy Scout Matthew Mertens can say he contributed to making the magic.

Mertens, 14, is a freshman at Dakota High School in Macomb Township and a resident of the township. He has been a part of scouting since first grade and is a member of Boy Scout Troop 391. Eager to follow in his father's footsteps and become an Eagle Scout, Mertens sought in January to begin the necessary Eagle Scout project. He turned to Troop 391 Assistant Scoutmaster Marilyn Gross for advice. Gross recommended that he contact Macomb Township Parks and Recreation to offer services.

Macomb Township Parks and Recreation Program Leader Michelle Duda suggested a holiday bench project, aware of the photo opportunities included in the township's annual holiday events. The parks and recreation department already had one photo backdrop of a sleigh for Santa photos, which was created by an Eagle Scout.

"We had just finished the holiday season, and we have a lot of the same kids at both of our big holiday events. So I thought it would be a nice touch to have two different backdrops for the photos – a nice touch, not a necessity that I would have been budgeting for, which is the super-great thing about Eagle Scout projects," Duda said.

Mertens began the project with bench research, then chose a design he felt met the requirements. He received authorization from Duda and sought to begin the project. To fund his trips to Home Depot for the necessary materials, Mertens worked with the township to authorize bottle and can collections over the summer at a few outdoor music events. The cost of the project was \$350, but the collections earned around \$500, Mertens said. The additional funding has been donated to the township's parks and recreation department.

"So one of the things is I lead a team of scouts or volunteers to build my plan for a bench," Mertens said.

Mertens received assistance in bench building from between six and eight scouts for each work session. The project took a total of about nine months from planning and start to finish, according to Mertens. The finished bench project was presented to Macomb Township Parks and Recreation at the end of October, in time for Duda to prepare for the holiday season.

The Holiday Lighting Fest event is free and will be held on Dec. 3 at Macomb Township Hall at the township's parks and recreation center building from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The parks and rec buildings

are located off of Broughton Road, south of 25 Mile Road. The event includes caroling, live reindeer, the arrival of Santa and visits with him, tree lighting, children's crafts and other entertainment.