

California Boy Scout Group Challenges Ban on Gays

A California chapter of the Boy Scouts of America is directly challenging the national organization's ban on gays by formally recommending that an openly gay former Scout be awarded the top rank of Eagle.

"From what I understand, this has never happened before," Eric Andresen, father of former scout Ryan Andresen, told Reuters.

"It's the first in-your-face (challenge)," said Bonnie Hazarabedian, who chaired the Boy Scout district review board that signed off on Ryan's Eagle scout application and forwarded its recommendation last week to the national headquarters for final approval.

Ryan, 18, and his parents drew national attention in October after his Scoutmaster refused to sign his Eagle scout application because of his sexual orientation.

More than 462,000 people subsequently signed the Andresens' petitions at calling on the Scoutmaster to sign. Meanwhile, the Andresens pushed Ryan's application up the Boy Scout hierarchy in the San Francisco Bay area, where it landed before Hazarabedian.

"I don't think sexual orientation should enter into why a Scout is a Scout, or whether they are Eagle material," said Hazarabedian. "We felt without a doubt he deserved that rank."

The Boy Scouts of America did not respond immediately to questions emailed by Reuters on Monday afternoon. At the time Ryan's case grabbed attention last fall, BSA spokesman Deron Smith issued a statement saying Andresen's Boy Scout membership had been revoked.

Hazarabedian told Reuters she acted on Ryan's Eagle application because it was filed before his ejection.

Eric Andresen, who was a Boy Scout leader until his son was ejected, said the national office normally rubber-stamps the district recommendation within 30 to 60 days. Neither Hazarabedian nor the Andresens expect Ryan's Eagle award will come so easily.

"It's gotten to the point that getting the Eagle doesn't matter so much. It's the message that counts. It's the desire that no other Scout should ever have to go through this," Eric Andresen said.

Hazarabedian called the BSA anti-gay policy "something out of the Dark Ages."

In 1981 when Hazarabedian was a teenager, her friend's brother Tim Curran, a gay Eagle Scout, was the plaintiff in what became the landmark case in California upholding the right of the Boy Scouts, and private organizations in general, to discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

Hazarabedian said she recalls making posters and signing petitions in support of Curran and thinking, "By the time I have a son old enough to be a Scout, that will be years from now, they will have fixed this by then, they'll be more tolerant by then. But here we are, 2013, and the same thing is going on."

Ryan, who became something of a celebrity with national television appearances and strangers asking to be photographed with him, wants to focus on his last year of high school, his father said.

"We assume someday BSA will (change), and maybe at that time Ryan can retroactively get his Eagle award," he said.

Editing by Jane Sutton and Nick Zieminski.

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