

# Openly Gay Boy Scout Among First to Achieve Top Rank After Ban Lift

A 17-year-old Maryland boy has become one of the first openly gay Boy Scouts to achieve the Boy Scouts of America's highest rank since the organization reversed its ban on gay youth nearly six weeks ago.

Pascal Tessier, who publicly voiced his opposition to the ban on gay members, started with the group a decade ago as a Cub Scout and earned 21 merit badges before being named an Eagle Scout on Monday, said his father, Oliver Tessier, a consultant in Chevy Chase, Md.

The Scouts, which on Jan. 1 lifted the longstanding ban on openly gay youth, did not confirm or deny Pascal's claim on the milestone, but activists are heralding him nonetheless.

Calls and emails to *Scouting* magazine, which is the group's official publication, and to Pascal's Scoutmaster were not immediately returned on Tuesday.

While the organization removed its ban on openly gay Scouts, it still prohibits openly gay adult leaders and volunteers. That means when Pascal turns 18 in August, he will not be eligible to stay involved in the Scouts as an adult leader or to volunteer.

Zach Wahls, 22, an Eagle Scout and the executive director of Scouts for Equality, an organization that fights discrimination in scouting, called the award "bittersweet" in light of the ban on gay leaders.

Although the Scouts declined to comment on Pascal, a spokesman said the group never inquired about the sexual preference of

its members, employees or volunteers.

Until January, it employed a don't-ask-don't-tell policy for members, Wahls said.

The Texas-based group's 1,400-member national council voted in May to allow openly gay Scouts but continue to prohibit openly gay adult leaders. The move drew criticism from both advocates and opponents of gay rights.

The Southern Baptist Convention in June condemned the decision to admit openly gay members, saying that homosexual conduct is contrary to the Scout oath that requires members to do their "duty" to God. Scouts have long been linked to churches, which host about 70 percent of troops.

Meanwhile, the continued ban on gay adult leaders led several major companies and foundations to halt their donations to the Scouts, including defense contractor Lockheed Martin Corp, Caterpillar Inc and the Merck Foundation.

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