

## **Vandals Strike Eagle Scout Project**

Next month I have been asked to speak at the Eagle Scout ceremony for Aidan Branch, a young man who brought a special community service project to Bastrop by building a trail at the Lost Pines Nature Trail as his Eagle Project. He has asked me to tell those in attendance about how the Bastrop community has received the gift of a trail that he and his fellow scouts, leaders, parents, and friends built in September of 2008.

While I have much good to report, sadly I will also have to tell the group of the theft of the two lovely cypress wood benches that Aidan, his father and a friend built and installed, reflecting the high ideals and character of this young man.

I doubt people who vandalize and steal think much about the implications to those they seek to hurt and desecrate, but I do know that oftentimes they take great pride in claiming bragging rights for their mischievous deeds. Somewhere there are two lovely pieces of wood that reflect the natural heritage of our region. Beautiful cypress wood that was carefully selected to reflect the connection we have with the land through which this trail winds. Somewhere there are two lovely pieces of cypress that have been carved by the skillful hands of a craftsman who chose this medium to show his love and admiration for the fine young man that Aidan has become. Somewhere there are two artfully crafted pieces of wood which have shown up from an anonymous source to serve as someone's benches or perhaps they have been adapted to some other purpose.

What am I to tell Aidan and his fellow Scouts about the character of our community? Yes, it is true we have some among us who have elected to take a less honorable journey in life than that elected by this Eagle Scout. Yes, we have among us those who choose to show their "manhood" or perhaps "womanhood" by lashing out against those symbols of our society that represent the high goals they have yet to aspire to.

What I am going to tell them is this: "We ... those of us who choose to take the high road, must stand tall and endure the slings and arrows that are hurled at us by those who seek to bring us down. It is our responsibility to show them the way ... to be a light ... in hopes that they will someday seek to join us in building community." I will tell them that it is young men and women like Eagle Scout Aidan Branch who carry our banner forward to the future generations we seek to nurture and celebrate.

Of our community I ask this: Help us return those symbols of honor and respect to their rightful place. We don't care to punish and lay blame, but we would like to restore the good work of Aidan and his followers to our community so those benches can grace our trails and remind us of those who rise to the highest honors. If you know where these benches are, or who is responsible, we request that you simply and anonymously have the benches returned ... no questions asked. Or if the person who is responsible is of such character as to own up to the deeds and wishes to help us reinstall the benches, there will be no offense taken, no charges or retribution. In fact, we will embrace his/her courage. I would like to tell them that our community rises above such acts by cherishing and, when necessary, restoring the integrity of the gifts given us.

Steve Box  
Lost Pines Nature Trails Project Coordinator