

THE DAILY GAZETTE

Schenectady, NY

FRIDAY, MAY 28, 2010

TELEVISION

Student's film on Boy Scouts to air Saturday on WMHT

By Bill Buell
Gazette Reporter

"The First Encampment"

WHAT: Documentary airing on WMHT

WHEN: 4 p.m. Saturday

MORE INFO: www.thefirstencampment.com

Seeing his first video on YouTube was fun, but Saturday at 4 p.m. Blake Cortright is taking things to a whole new level.

The Shaker High School sophomore's 26-minute documentary film about the first-ever meeting of the Boy Scouts, "The First Encampment," will be shown on the local PBS affiliate, WMHT. The Scouts met for the first time 100 years ago at Silver Bay on Lake George, and over the past two summers Cortright has also spent time there, interviewing various workers and volunteers and collecting material for his film.

"I had no intention of doing a documentary film at first," he said. "I just wanted to preserve the information I was collecting about the place, and in 2009 while I was editing what I already had, I thought then that maybe we should try to make a documentary out of it."

What he used as the basis for his film was a short presentation about the first Boy Scout meeting by Bob James, a longtime volunteer at Silver Bay, a resort and retreat center operated by the YMCA.

"I realized that if we organized it a little bit better and added a script, we might have quite a bit to work with," said Cortright. "I filmed his presentation, and then we just talked with him casually about the event and filmed that, and it all became very, very interesting."

GETTING TO WORK

With the help of some friends, Cortright updated his computer equipment and began making his documentary. His father, John, provided some of the script, and John Kearney, a family friend with some voiceover experience, became the narrator.

Cortright first came up with a 45-minute presentation. Steven Budlong, another family friend who's done documentary work for the PBS affiliate in Boston, WGBH, told him to either make it longer to fill up an hour, or make it shorter for a half-hour slot.

"I thought it'd be best to go for a half-hour, and really compress the information and make it more interesting," said Cortright.

"The whole process was a lot of work. When I was done I thought: 'I don't ever want to see this again.' I had seen every part of it at least two dozen times, and I was just ready to put it to bed."

But before he "put it to bed," he decided to approach WMHT and ask them if they would be interested in viewing it. In early January of this year they contacted him and said yes.

"I went down to the studio and worked on a few technical things with them and got it ready for broadcast television," he said. "It really is exciting, and once they gave us the air date I was very happy. I didn't know how to deal with it. I went to school the next day and told all my teachers and the other students."

Cortright began his film career making short videos that he and a friend, Matt Elton of Glens Falls, put together. While YouTube was fun, they wanted to get much more serious about the business.

"We've done a few short promotional videos for our school and our church, but this is the first documentary I've ever done," said Cortright. "But now we are doing decent-level productions, and Matt and I have formed a company we call Plasma Productions. We've entered a few contests, but this is the first thing we've had any real success."

He and his family have spent several summers up at Silver Bay, but it wasn't until two years ago that he finally learned about the Boy Scouts' first meeting.

ORIGINAL PRESENTATION

"There's a campfire ring in the woods behind the gym, and there are these stone pillars with plaques on them that I never really noticed before," he said. "I finally read them in 2008, and then at one of our camp-outs there, Mr. James gave a presentation about the Boy Scouts. There were a lot of little kids there and it was hard to stay focused on what he was saying. It was at night and all he had was a lantern and a binder full of old photos, but I knew it was a wonderful presentation. So, the next summer we asked him to do it again and this time he did it in one of the Silver Bay meeting halls. That's when I filmed it and brought some recording equipment."

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