

G. Ernest Heegard (Ern) dedicated himself to Scouts in a way that few men dedicate themselves to anything. Ernie spent his entire life in Scouting.

He joined Cub Pack 78 in 1944 and moved to Boy Scout Troop 78 in 1946. At the age of 15, he became the Troop's 4th Eagle Scout. At age 18, Ern became the de facto Troop 78 Scoutmaster. When he was 21, he officially became our Troop Scoutmaster and held this position until 1994, 42 years later. His contributions to our troop and the initial development of our program are simply not measurable. His leadership and vision helped provide the foundation of the Troop program we have today; and set us up to expand and thrive in ways that surprised and delighted him for years after he 'retired' as Scoutmaster. Ern continued to contribute to the Troop until the day he departed this world, as an Assistant Scoutmaster, a member of the Board of "Friends of Troop 78" and our Troop Committee. Countless Eagle projects and service projects for Council and Camp Horseshoe were done because of him and his knowledge and passion. As far as anyone can remember he always wanted to be called Ern, by our Scouts, Parents, Campers, Committee members at all his ages, in all of his various positions in Scouts.

His service to our Troop is enough to make him legendary; but for those of us who knew Ern, our Troop while always closest to his heart, was only where he started in his service to Scouting. In 1948, he was inducted into the Order of the Arrow. He was elected Lodge Chief of Octoraro Lodge #22 in 1954 becoming the first youth in Chester County Council to hold that office. In 1956 he was bestowed the Order's highest degree, the Vigil Honor, and given the name Achgeketum, the Lenni Lenape word for "Teacher". This name would become familiar to generations of scouts to come after 1956 and stands almost as a prophecy of his work in the decades to come. He was the Lodge Advisor for the Order of the Arrow from 1963-1992 during most of which he was also serving as our Scoutmaster.

Ern's service to Chester County Council camps also stands as unmatched. From his very first week at Camp Horseshoe, where he logged that "He found the secret valley". In his second year, he was invited to join the staff as an Assistant Stockade Leader. The ensuing years would find Ern advancing through positions in virtually every department. He was then asked to direct the new Explorer Base on the Lewis property (now Camp John H Ware III). The next year he was asked to be the Program Director at Camp Horseshoe, but at the close of staff week that season, was made the Camp Director by the Scout Executive. This was the beginning of his 29-year tenure running Camp Horseshoe. Ern has camped at Horseshoe every year from 1946 to 2023. In 1988, the Camp Horseshoe Campfire circle was relocated, renovated and renamed Achgeketum Circle to honor his nearly 3 decades as director of Camp Horseshoe.

Over the years he received dozens of Scouting accolades such as District Award of Merit, the Silver Beaver, the Founders Award, and in 2019, the Chester County Council BSA Distinguished Citizen of the Year to name just a few. The Troop also has an award for our Scouts, based on Ern's commitment to Scouting and Leadership, one that was established in his honor upon his retirement as Scoutmaster, the "Achgeketum Award

for Outstanding Junior Leader of the Year". Ern of course won our first ever Scout of the Year Award, and is one of a small group of scouts to win back to back Scout of the Year awards. For Ern it was in 1948-49 & 1949-50 when he first served as our Senior Patrol Leader. In 2017, Troop 78 named our 'new' cabin Achgeketum Lodge in his honor.

In his nearly 80 years of service to Scouting, he has enriched the lives of over 55,000 Scouts across all of his service to Chester County Council and Scouting. In our own Troop many of scouts are the 2nd and even 3rd generation in their families. Troop 78 and Chester County Scouting would not be what it is today without his dedication and teachings.

Mr. Heegard taught Industrial Arts at Haverford High School for 40 years. He was drafted into the Army when he was 26, and at the end of basic training was honored as the "Soldier of the Cycle". Ern served our country in the Counter Intelligence Corps. He married Betsy Kessler Stelwagon in a ceremony held in the outdoor chapel of Camp Horseshoe, and became a step-dad to Fred and Margie Stelwagon. Fred is a Troop 78 Eagle Scout, Senior Patrol Leader, and former Aquatics Director of Camp. Fred's son, Ern's grandson, has also camped with the Troop and worked at Camp in the Handicraft Department.

For many Scouts, his Scouting dedication is summed up in the Camp Horseshoe song verse that was penned especially for him. It has only been sung when Ern is in camp at the Achgeketum fire circle that is dedicated in his honor:

*"He served this camp upon the Mason-Dixon Line,
His years as chief numbered twenty-nine.
Achgeketum your lessons will e'er be mine.
In the Loop of the Octoraro Bend."*

For all who hold the troop closest to their heart, he will always be first and foremost just "Ern".

He was the model of dedication, humility, and service, we can only hope to try to emulate.

In our continued service to scouting and the youth of Chester County, we say:

**Ern, you taught us well, we will take it from here.
Rest now, Achgeketum.**