

# THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

PRICE: \$2 • SATURDAY, MARCH 5, 2016 • OCREGISTER.COM



PETE SOUZA, THE WHITE HOUSE

President Barack Obama greets Eagle Scout Dan Ta of Cypress and other representatives from the Boy Scouts of America to receive their Report to the Nation in the Oval Office on Tuesday.



## Dad's determination is son's motivation in visit with Obama

Dan Ta, a 16-year-old Eagle Scout, got to hang out with the president. His father tracked every move.



**JOSEPH PIMENTEL**  
STAFF WRITER

At 8:22 a.m. Eastern time Tuesday, Dan Ta punched a message into his phone.

Three time zones away, at 5:22 a.m., his mother, Lan Vo, picked it up:

"White House."

She turned to her husband, Lu Ta, but he already was awake. Neither parent had been able to sleep for the last few days.

Their son, a 16-year-old Eagle Scout, was in Washington, D.C., to do

something that, in their eyes, was almost a dream – to meet face-to-face with President Barack Obama.

She texted back: "Time for you (to) shake hands."

For a brief time, at the White House, Dan Ta and nine other Scouts waited in a lobby outside the Oval Office. The mood was tense. He looked at paintings and other art.

Finally, Obama himself opened the

# SCOUT: Father struggled to escape communist rule in Vietnam

FROM PAGE 1

door and waved them in.

He might as well have been inviting in Lu Ta, too.

## THE MESSENGER

Dan Ta is a sophomore at Oxford Academy in Cypress. He's a little goofy, quick to laugh, but a spectacular student - a 4.25 GPA.

He's good at sports, too; he runs track and plays soccer for Oxford. But he devotes most of his free time to the U.S. Naval Sea Cadet Corps and the Boy Scouts.

As a federally chartered organization since 1916, the Boy Scouts of America presents an annual report to Congress that highlights the group's achievements during the previous year. National and local affiliations nominate delegates to

represent the Scout's 2.3 million members. Dan Ta was meeting Obama as part of that effort, one of the 10 delegates chosen to deliver the Scouts' Report to the Nation.

Dan Ta got the job for a lot of reasons. He's zero trouble. He mentors younger Sea Cadets. In the sixth grade he won eight medals in the Orange County Academic Pentathlon. He has a sailing license.

But more than all of that, Dan Ta is best known for one other thing - he's the founder of the Penny Wise Club at Oxford Academy.

The idea behind the club, to teach high school age students about money management and the power of saving while young, came to him a couple years ago, after his father told the family that it was possible he'd lose his job as a software engineer.

It speaks to Dan Ta's standards, and his hustle to get his Eagle Scout status, that he asked State Controller John Chiang to speak to his club.

And Chiang, who soon became the state treasurer, did.

"I get hundreds of projects on my desk, and this one just stuck out," said Jeffrey Herrmann, president and Scout executive of the Orange County Boy Scouts.

"Not many kids can do that."

## THE MESSAGE

As Dan Ta waited in the lobby outside the Oval Office, Lu Ta got out of his bed in Cypress and fired up his computer.

The screen showed blue zig-zagging lines and a cluster of orange dots - Dan's movements that morning.

As he clicked and tracked and imagined where his son



LEONARD ORTIZ, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Oxford Academy student and Eagle Scout Dan Ta is joined by his family: from left, mother Lan Vo, sister Ivy, Dan and father Lu.

was, Lu Ta had a moment of wonder:

"He's really there."

When Lu Ta was Dan's age, he was in a jungle prison cell in Vietnam. Lu Ta had been trying to escape communist rule, but he kept getting caught. And when he got caught, he was put in jail.

When he got out, he'd try again. Lu Ta's goal, even 35 years ago, was to get to a place where there would be opportunities for the kids he someday would have.

Lu Ta said later that his son's face-to-face meeting with Obama just validated what he has thought all along, even in a jungle cell in Vietnam.

"This is the land of opportunity."

Lu Ta's escape was a family affair.

His mother, he said, spent all of her savings to help him get out of Vietnam. In 1981, when he arrived in the United States, to stay with cousins in Rochester, N.Y., he was 19, spoke no English, and hadn't been to school past

the sixth grade.

He forced himself to learn to read and write English. He spent two years in high school and then went to the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he says he graduated in the top 1 percent of his class.

During that period, Lu Ta kept dairies, which he still has in his Cypress home. The pages are yellow, a little brown at the edges; withered. But the black ink, mostly written in Vietnamese, is full of life.

Page one tracks the day of his escape, in January 1981. Other pages show long, well-organized lists of common English words and Vietnamese pronunciations.

*Man [maen], back [baek], book [buk]...*

"The reason why I wrote this was I wanted to give them to my kids."

Lu Ta's goal was to motivate his kids. It worked.

When he sees the dairies, Dan Ta says he gets the message.

"I feel happiness, sadness ... anger."

## THE MEETING

The Scouts were tense. Obama wasn't.

During their 10 minutes in the Oval Office, Obama told them he'd been a Cub Scout. He also said that, as Scouts, Dan Ta and his compatriots were America's future leaders.

"He made everyone feel at ease," Dan Ta said.

"I gave him a fist bump as we were leaving."

They'd go on to shake hands with U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, as well as Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, and House Speaker Paul Ryan. But the highlight of the six-day trip was the 10 minutes spent in the world's most famous office.

Obama, Dan Ta noted, has a firm handshake.

"America has given so much to my family," Dan Ta said. "Now I want to give back and serve my country."

CONTACT THE WRITER:

714-796-2443 or

jimentel@ocregister.com



### **Ian C.**

Ian C. never looked to become a hero. But when the opportunity required it, in true Boy Scout fashion, he was prepared.

The son of a firefighter, a longtime member of the Huntington Beach Junior Lifeguards at the time and on his way to becoming an Eagle Scout, Ian had the training and the DNA needed to help save two terrified Boy Scouts who found themselves pinned behind a pounding 200-foot waterfall.

"I feel it should be the norm," he said. "Anyone who has the tools and training to help someone should do that."

The Huntington Beach resident was awarded the prestigious Honor Medal with Crossed Palms, the Boy Scouts National Lifesaving Award at his Eagle Scout Court of Honor. The medal is one of fewer than 300 the Boy Scouts have awarded nationally since 1924, and is given for "unusual heroism and extraordinary skill or resourcefulness in saving or attempting to save a life at extreme risk to self."

"Receiving this medal is a tremendous honor. It's an incredible feeling to know that I am being honored as highly as this. But I didn't do this for an award. I did this because I heard that there were two people that needed help and I knew that I could help them. I think that anyone who has the skill set to do anything for somebody else should do that," said Ian.

To those who know Ian, it is fitting. His Scout leaders praised his ability to take direction and his willingness to help others. "To watch him grow and achieve this rank is a major achievement. But then to hear he earned his Honor Medal with Cross Palms is just amazing. There are a lot of great young men, but to find one who is willing to risk their own life is very rare," said former assistant Scout leader Steve.

Huntington Beach City Councilman Erik Peterson agrees. He stated, "And this is one of those selfless acts that Scouting is based on. It's more than just you, it's everyone around you. It's an honor to come out and give this award to someone like Ian. This young man went the extra mile for that award."



### **Conner W.**

17-year-old Conner had just completed his mile run and was taking a break when he heard the sound of someone falling to the ground. A student had collapsed and was having a seizure. Conner and his teacher went to the aid of the student in need. The student was unable to speak following his seizure. When he did finally speak, he said he felt nauseous so Conner, with the help of his teacher and another student, turned the student onto his side. Conner checked the boy's eyes to see if they were dilated and they were. He waited with his teacher and the student until the paramedics arrived. Conner's teacher said that he helped her stay calm through this very scary situation. Conner attributes his quick actions to the skills he learned in his first aid merit badge course as well as other Boy Scout training.

For his exceptional act of character, Conner was awarded the National Certificate of Merit by the National Court of Honor.



### **Andrew C.**

In July of 2014, 11-year-old Andrew and his family went to their community pool to go swimming. His little brother Eliot was so excited to go swimming that before their mother was even through the gate, he jumped into the deep end without any flotation devices. He immediately began to panic and sink. Andrew jumped right in, dove under the water, brought his brother to the surface and securely placed his arm around Eliot's chest. He then swam slowly on his back to the ladder and assisted his brother out. Andrew sat with his brother until he was over his shock and calm enough to thank him for saving his life. Thanks to Andrew's quick thinking and the use of the skills he learned at summer camp while earning his swimming merit badge, he was able to save his little brother from drowning.

For his honorable action of saving a life, Andrew was awarded the Honor Medal by the National Court of Honor.