By Amy Guckeen Tolson

Staff writer

amy.tolson@theredstonerocket.com

From floor to ceiling, the walls of Nick Skoglund’s scouting room are covered with plaques, patches and medals, a testament to the success of his 57-year plus career with the Boy Scouts of America. But Skoglund’s biggest achievement can’t be found anywhere within those four walls, but rather, in the hearts and minds of Boy Scouts young and old across the United States.

Dedicating his life to the Boy Scout oath, Skoglund does his best to serve God and his country, as a trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent Scout. Through his membership in the organization, scouting has not only shaped Skoglund’s life, but in turn, has allowed him to shape the lives of countless boys as well. His impact has been so great, that it’s actually hard for him to go anywhere without getting stopped by someone who knows him as Mr. Skoglund, or Gray Beaver, his scouting name.

“They were kids this high when I knew them and now they’re grown and have kids of their own,” Skoglund said. “I personally think it’s an outstanding program. There are a lot of kids that need a lot of help, and some of them learn a lot of things that they don’t really expect to learn.”

Sometimes that learning has occurred in the most unexpected of places. When Skoglund was sent to Kwajalein in 1981 for work, he brought more with him than his expertise in electrical engineering and designing systems – he brought the Boy Scouts. When an old buddy discovered he was on the island, he informed Skoglund they needed to start a troop. Putting an article in the newspaper, they expected only three or four boys to show up to the first meeting, never anticipating that 37 boys would cite an interest in the troop that is still active today.

 “I tried to make a program that every week we did something entirely different,” Skoglund said. “I must have started something that was worthwhile.”

Throughout Skoglund’s four years on Kwajalein the scouts went on hikes, got their badge in finger printing, learned first aid, went swimming and did a lot of camp outs. Many are still in touch with Skoglund through email and facebook, just a few of the thousands of scouts he has made an impact on over the years.

“The biggest thing in scouting is the challenge, and I like challenges personally,” Skoglund said. “I hope they learn to live with and accept a challenge. To do the best you can with what you’ve got. I’m not rich and I’m not famous, but the fun part about it is what little bit I’ve got is a hobby and things I’ve learned and things I’ve done. I like to think I’ve set a good example for somebody.”

Skoglund himself joined the organization **himself** as a Cub Scout when he was 10 in 1944, where he and his fellow troop members helped the war effort, collecting metal and on occasion assisting with traffic control.

“I thought Boy Scouts was a lot of fun,” said Skoglund, who learned about knots, rope and braiding, as well as other talents he still uses today. “I grew up with it. The challenge, I think that was the major part of it, I’m into challenges.”

It was also the love of a good challenge that led him to the military. While his father wanted him to go into the Navy to guarantee his son a warm bed and a hot meal, Skoglund wanted to go for what he thought was the best branch – the Marines. Making PFC right out of boot camp, out of the 74 guys in his platoon only four weren’t sent to the infantry, Skoglund being one of them. Taking advantage of his interest in electronics he was sent to a communications outfit, where he was a communications maintenance repairman. Making the rank of corporal, he served three years active duty with the Marines, five years Reserve, for a total of eight years of service.

Upon his return to the civilian world, he also returned to the Boy Scouts and got his degree in electrical engineering, which allowed him to go into designing systems and working with NASA on the Apollo program. With his wife Joan, he moved to Huntsville in 1977, where he began working with Troop 364 and joined the Order of the Arrow, Scouting’s National Honor Society, which recognizes those that best exemplify Scout Oath and Law in their daily lives. Today he typically spends between 20 to 25 hours on scouting per month, primarily doing boards of review and courts of honor.

“It’s a constant,” Joan said. “This is what he does and always has.”

As the son of a career Coast Guardsman, scouting allowed Skoglund to meet new friends easily as he transitioned into new communities across the country, just about everywhere between Miami and Los Angeles, but it was ultimately moving that prevented him from achieving the highest rank possible, that of Eagle Scout. While he completed the requirements, refurbishing a hiking trail in California for his service project, he was unable to complete the board of review due to an automobile accident that hospitalized his parents for nine months, and sent the young Skoglund to live with his grandparents in Illinois until he was 18, past the age of eligibility. While he can’t call himself an Eagle Scout, all the commendations, paired with the years and hours he has spent making a difference in the lives of young men has well made up for the one badge he is unable to add to his Scouting room.

“I think that’s what’s pushed him to stay in scouting,” said wife Joan.

“I think I’ve made up for it, to be honest with you,” Nick added.