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HE SOUGHT A PROJECT TO HELP PEOPLE

YOUNG ACHIEVER:

Steven Anderson organized and delivered 800 dental packs to vets.

BY NITA HILTNER
SPECIAL TO THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

When Riverside Troop 90 Boy Scout Steven Anderson, 17, was looking around for his Eagle Scout project, he wanted to do something that would have a larger impact on people than building a bench.

"I had a lot of options. Some scouts build and plant. I wanted to make a big impact on people," he said.

Anderson jumped on the Internet to research charities in Riverside and found the U.S. Vets, Inc. website. He had his project — put together dental hygiene kits for the 110 homeless veterans living at March Air Reserve Base. They live there under sponsorship of U.S. Vets, Inc., a nonprofit organization that helps homeless and at-risk veterans with housing, outreach and employment assistance.

Just the fact he'd gotten close to the Eagle Scout award was impressive, since he's only belonged to Boy Scouts four years.

"He really threw himself into scouting and it's neat he's gotten as far as he has," said Sherri Anderson, his mother. "He's not an Eagle Scout yet, but he's almost there."

The scout has presented his project and hopes it will be accepted soon. His scout master is Michael Burk.

"I had already decided on making dental hygiene kits, and I thought military veterans would be good to help since they do so many wonderful things for our country. I wanted to help pay them back," said Anderson.

At first, Anderson's goal was to put together 500 dental packs, including toothpaste, a toothbrush and dental floss, but there was such a big response from the community, friends, members of King High School's ROTC, of which he is a member, and dental professionals, that he ended up making 800 kits, which he presented to the veteran's organization on March 27.



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Boy Scout Steven Anderson, left, presents dental kits to U.S. Vets Inc. members, from left, David Thomas, Gina Vaughn-Mays, Tristian Fouche and Richard Harris.

"He put the whole thing together himself. It's just fantastic to see younger kids support these guys."

**GINA VAUGHN-MAYS,
DIRECTOR,
U.S. VETS, INC.**

"I collected 600 toothbrushes the first week, then collected more, plus money I collected," he said.

Anderson collected \$417 to buy products to even out what he'd collected from the community. As he put together the kits in baggies, he put a card in each that read, "Thank you for your service to our country."

Gina Vaughn-Mays, director of U.S. Vets, Inc. at the base, said Anderson called her at the beginning of this year and asked what he could do to help the vets and what they needed.

"He put the whole thing together himself," she said. "It's just fantastic to see younger kids support these guys."

A new building, built with funds from venture capital, federal grants and the March Joint Powers Commission, will house a 400-bed complex at the base soon, and Mays said that it will be filled as soon as it's completed with veterans from the Vietnam War up through Iraq and Afghanistan. U.S. Vets, Inc. currently houses 1,700 homeless veterans on its campuses in

Long Beach and Inglewood. Vaughn-Mays said 80 percent of the veterans at the Riverside base are employed.

Anderson is not new to

such leadership projects. He was one of 300 Junior ROTC members chosen worldwide to attend a leadership conference in Daytona Beach, Fla.

He is the only child of Sherri Anderson, a UCR library buyer, and Orrin Anderson, a graphic illustrator for the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Corona Division, in Norco. Steven Anderson will follow his father into the graphic design field at Cal Baptist University, where he's been accepted. He also plans to stick with scouting for awhile, enjoying "the fun stuff to do" in scouting.

Vaughn-Mays said the veterans are very grateful for the hygiene kits.

"I was so touched, and we're so grateful! The guys loved it," she said.

Information: www.usvet-sinc.org

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