

THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Wednesday, June 16, 1982 SE

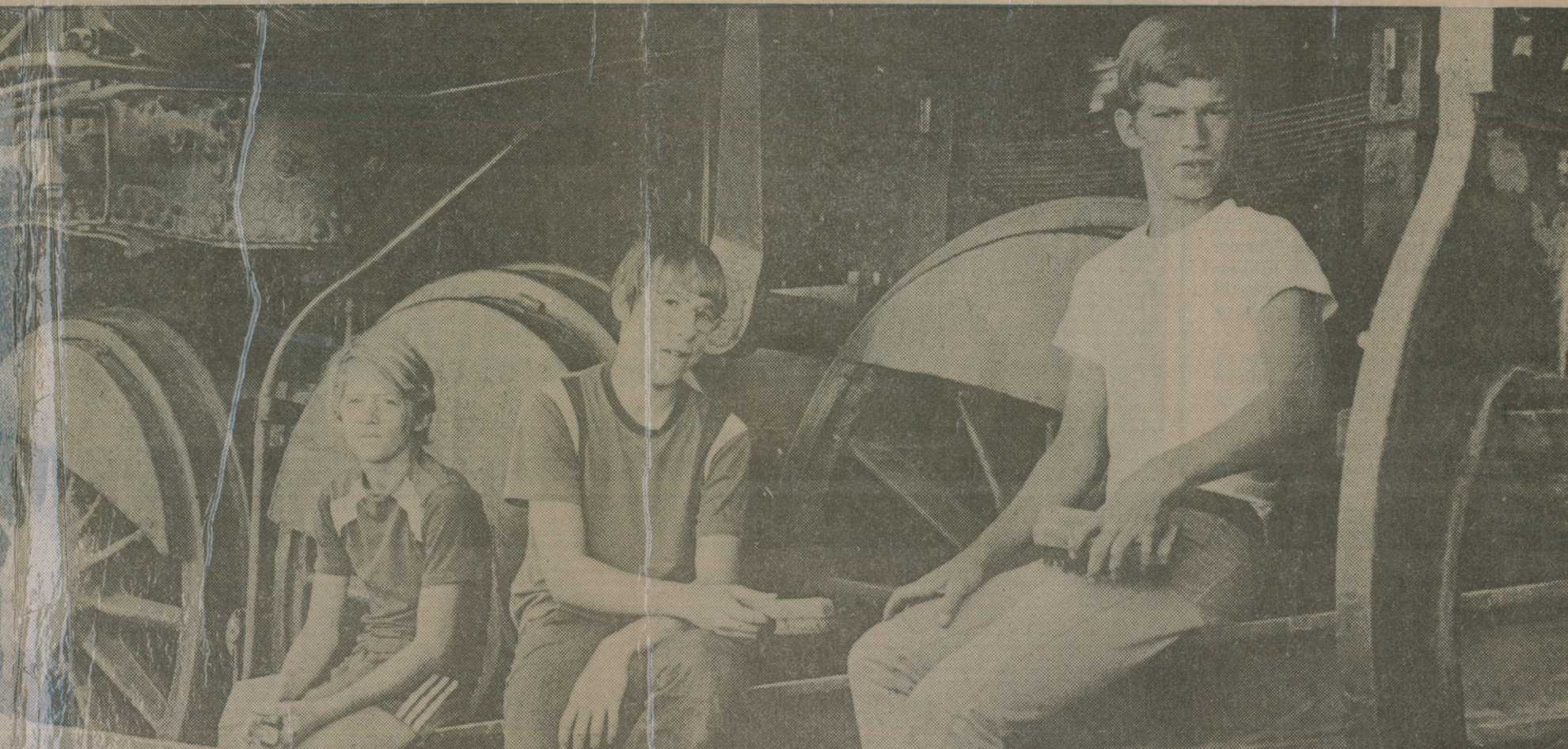
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Scout is hoping to earn honors by renovating locomotive

By Barbara Rose
Southeast Valley Bureau

CHANDLER — Jason Griffith lay on his back beneath Southern Pacific Railroad locomotive No. 2582, scraping through layers of grime and rust.

Jason, 15, knows every inch of this 76-year-old steam engine in Armstrong Park. He and his brother played on it when the climb to its cab seemed a long, long way up.

But his intimate knowledge of the 100-ton hulk began about six weeks ago, when the engine threatened to swallow his summer.

"I thought I'd just paint it," said Jason, who chose refurbishing the engine for his Eagle Scout project. "Then, whammo — (the job) grew faster than we could keep up."

He and six friends have devoted more than 100 hours to the project, working mornings from 6 to 8:30, and the painting has not yet begun.

The locomotive, donated to the city in 1956, was last sandblasted and painted in 1974 when the park was dedicated in memory of Ray Armstrong, a community leader credited with saving the engine from the scrap-heap.

It was Armstrong, according to city records, who organized a community "labor of love" in hauling the engine by tractor from the site of the current city complex.

Since then, it's served as a giant jungle-gym for a generation of children, attracting both graffiti and rust.

When Jason consulted Parks and Recreation Director Gary Anderson about painting the engine, he learned he'd have to repair, scrape and prime it first.

"We cleared out big chunks of loose metal and banged down" areas rusted beyond repair, Jason said. The activity worried neighbors who mistook them for vandals, alerting police who visited the crew on three occasions.

On a recent morning, only the sounds of birdsong and the smell of primer filled the air. Jason emerged from the bowels of the engine in shorts and running shoes, his white T-shirt smudged with grease.

Paul Barnes, spotted with rust-red primer, painted one side of the engine while Lee Shoemaker scraped graffiti off the other.

Jason's brother, Brent, rested in the engine cab, and their mother waited in a nearby car for the boys to finish. Soon, the black iron would become too hot to allow them to continue.

Jason spotted an unfamiliar, shiny patch of metal on the engine's belly, the handiwork of city crews who are doing the welding and riveting and will supply the paint.

"They got another strip in," he called happily to Lee.

This was a good morning, but the crew has experienced setbacks, such as the day they arranged for

a city fire truck to hose the locomotive down.

"We hoped the water would blow off all the rocks and grit, but the pressure was too low to do the job," Jason said. The boys gathered five garden hoses from their homes to finish the job.

When the park's revolving-sprinkler system doused them and the engine, they devised a method of keeping the sprinkler from turning by inserting a screwdriver.

Ahead lies the job of lining up a compressor and spray guns for the painting.

Jason, who will enter Chandler High School in September, wants this project and the Eagle award behind him. He also runs two afternoon paper routes and does yard work on Saturdays, banking half his earnings for college.

"This is something I'll always remember," he said, looking up at the engine. "Somebody else will have to paint it in 10 years, but I can always come back and say, 'I painted this thing.'"

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