



Girl Scout Gold Award Centennial Feature

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**Cheyenne Chalkus: Girl Scout Gold Award Recipient and Heroic
Lifesaver**



Glen Carbon, Illinois – Since 1916, Girl Scouts have been making meaningful, sustainable change in their communities and around the world through their Girl Scout Gold Award projects. The Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest honor a Girl Scout can earn, acknowledges the power behind each recipient's dedication to not only empowering herself, but also to making the world a better place for others. As the Girl

Scout Gold Award celebrates 100 years of girls changing the world, Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois (GSSI) will highlight some of our shining stars who exemplify the greatness of this award.

A simple newspaper article on a beginner's class in cemetery cleaning inspired Cheyenne Chalkus of Salem, IL to pursue her Girl Scout Gold Award. Cheyenne knew she wanted to do something unique for her Gold Award project, and this was just the ticket. She cleared overgrowth and restored vandalized headstones at Dickens Cemetery, a historic burial site owned by the City of Salem. After obtaining the proper permits to start her project, Cheyenne went to work – fixing damaged memorials, clearing brush and removing poison ivy from the site. To ensure the cemetery would stay maintained, she held a public presentation and distributed pamphlets about volunteer upkeep of historic cemeteries. To emphasize the importance of treating aging burial grounds with respect, Cheyenne included genealogy of those who were buried at the cemetery during her presentation.

Not long after earning her Girl Scout Gold Award, Cheyenne earned another prestigious Girl Scout award – the Girl Scout Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor is a lifesaving award given by Girl Scouts of the USA to girls who have saved or attempted to save a human life under circumstances that indicate heroism. This award is reserved for those Girl Scouts who have performed heroic acts beyond the degree of maturity and training to be expected at their age. At the age of 18, Cheyenne saved the life of her 22 month old nephew when he ended up face down and unconscious in a hot tub. Thanks to her CPR training, Cheyenne was able to revive her nephew by the time paramedics arrived.

Cheyenne will likely positively touch and save many more lives in the future. She currently attends Kaskaskia College where she is enrolled in the school's nursing and band programs. Once she graduates from Kaskaskia, Cheyenne plans to further her education by pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing.

The Girl Scout Gold Award recognizes a Girl Scout's commitment to excellence as she develops skills and values to meet present and future challenges in her life. To earn the Girl Scout Gold Award, a Girl Scout Senior or Girl Scout Ambassador must design and carry out a project that fulfills a need within a girl's community, creates change, and is sustainable. The project must be completed with a suggested minimum of 80 hours of work. Only about 5 percent of eligible girls earn the prestigious Gold Award. "It's an accomplished feeling to have completed Girl Scouts 'all the way'," says Cheyenne of earning the Girl Scout Gold Award. "If I could give any advice to future Girl Scouts it would be to finish Girl Scouts to the fullest (earn the Gold Award) because you will become a better person from the characteristics instilled throughout the program," Cheyenne added.

Today, Girl Scouts of the U.S.A. is the largest voluntary organization for girls in the world. Its sole focus is to meet the needs of all girls (ages 5-17) from diverse racial, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Today's Girl Scouts not only enjoy camping and crafts, but they also explore math and science and learn about diversity, good citizenship, leadership and teamwork. Girl Scouting is the place where girls experience the fun, friendship and power of girls together.

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois is a not-for-profit organization supported by various United Ways throughout the region. Girl Scouts is a Proud Partner of United Way. For more information, please call Tricia Higgins at 618.242.5079.