

# Girl Scout Gold Award Centennial Feature

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## **Dara Weaver-Holmes: Girl Scout National Young Woman of Distinction**



**GLEN CARBON** – 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.

Dara Weaver-Holmes of Carbondale, IL was always active in Girl Scouts. As a teen, she didn't just stick with Girl Scouting – she excelled – earning the prestigious Girl Scout Gold Award her senior year. For her Girl Scout Gold Award project, Dara organized a highly successful career fair and virtual career website. “I kept hearing how young Americans were not trained to enter the work world,” she said. “I have never liked to be at the bottom. It's just not me. I got tired of hearing how we were not preparing American youth and decided to start preparing us,” added Dara.

Dara's initiative and successful Gold Award project paid off. Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois chose to nominate her for the highly honored award of National Young Woman of Distinction. Each year, ten exceptionally inspiring Girl Scout Gold Award recipients from throughout the country are chosen by Girl Scouts of the USA as National Young Women of Distinction. Dara was selected by GSUSA as a 2012 Young Woman of Distinction which also came with a \$3,000 scholarship, an all-expense paid trip to GSUSA's national convention and exclusive leadership opportunities with the organization.

Dara contributes a lot of who she is today to Girl Scouting and earning the Girl Scout Gold Award. “Earning the Girl Scout Gold Award gave me the opportunity to give speeches around the country, allowed for networking opportunities and provided a strong sense of family. Several of us Gold Award recipients remain in touch today,” she said. And, she encourages other Girl Scouts to set goals and achieve the Gold Award. “Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it. I heard that a lot throughout my life, but Girl Scouts pushed me forward and allowed me to fulfill my dreams,” Dara added.

Dara's success continues today. She currently attends Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, IL. In 2012, Dara co-founded their local chapter of the Association of Black Psychologists with Jasmine Jackson. Dara was President of the chapter until the fall of 2015. This spring, she will graduate from Southern Illinois University with a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a minor in American Sign Language. Upon graduation, Dara will be applying to attend law school.

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.

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.