

Girl Scout Troop #130 grows while giving back

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GLEN CARBON – Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois (GSSI) Troop #130 has made a habit of giving back to the community – and all of these good deeds have been good for

them, too. The troop, which is made up of 23 girls from the Riverbend area who range from second to seventh graders, completes many community service projects – both big and small – a year.

The troop most recently delivered 136 boxes of Girl Scout Cookies to the Meals on Wheels sponsored by Senior Services Plus in Alton. Along with cookies, girls made cards, bookmarks and picture frames to help spread cheer to the elderly patrons.

Also, to celebrate Girl Scouts' birthday in March, the troop made "Birthday in a Bag" kits containing items such as cake mix, streamers, party favors, etc. These were donated to Riverbend Family Ministries, which assists children in emergency foster care situations and personal crisis such as home loss, fire or parental death.

"The girls have fun giving back," says Troop Leader Jennifer Melton. "They are learning that no matter how big or small the project is, they can make a difference."

The girls volunteer frequently at pancake and sausage breakfasts held by the Wood River Masonic Lodge, where they hold their troop meetings. The funds earned by this event, where the girls help serve and clean up, is used to fund local scholarships.

"They don't realize they're getting great job training," says Melton. "They can make mistakes here, learn from them and be ready for their first job in high school or college – and they think they are just having fun!"

On a larger scale, Troop #130 are regular contributors to GSSI's council-wide community service projects that are held twice a year. During the eight years the troop has been active, projects have included making blankets for St. Louis Children's Hospital, helping animal shelters, doing work and donating equipment for area camps, and baking treats for police, fire and ambulance stations.

One experience that stands out to the girls is volunteering at a baby shower hosted by an all-female American Legion Post for active military members or reservists. The troop provided small gift bags for the mothers being honored and baked bread for attendees to enjoy. The girls also helped serve refreshments and carry gifts, as well as greeting servicewomen and guests in attendance.

Melton recalled how one of her troop members ended up sitting with a retired 4 star general, who later pulled her aside to share compliments about the young Girl Scout. The general's positive attitude seemed to be the consensus – as Troop #130 was asked by the American Legion to help at an upcoming event honoring female veterans.

“I saw a new side to many of these girls,” she said. “I know they are amazing individuals, but I was awestruck with their maturity shown that day.”

Another experience the girls especially enjoyed was volunteering at the Special Olympics Spring Games, where they spent six hours getting medals and ribbons ready for event winners and cheering on athletes. The troop had such a great time that they will be returning to volunteer again this year.

“Ultimately, the girls are learning the joy in giving back,” said Melton. “They are also learning some valuable life lessons – gaining confidence and skills while having fun.”

The mission of Girl Scouting states: ***Girl Scouting builds girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.*** Girl Scouts is the world's pre-eminent organization dedicated solely to girls - all girls - where, in an accepting and nurturing environment, girls build character and skills for success in the real world. In partnership with committed adults, girls develop qualities that will serve them all their lives - like strong values, social conscience, and conviction about their own potential and self-worth.

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 Scouting has inspired more than 59 million girls and women since its founding in 1912.

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.

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