



Girl Scout Gold Award centennial feature: Sophia (Thomasson) Cykert

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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 make 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) are highlighting some of our shining stars who exemplify the greatness of this award.

Sophia (Thomasson) Cykert always knew the importance of education. Growing up in Belknap, IL, she was able to see the positive impact her mom was able to make in the lives of children through her job as a teacher. In addition, Sophia's parents always encouraged her and her sister to actively pursue learning, whether it be to simply satisfy a curiosity or obtain a degree. She wanted to help instill that trait in the youth in her community, so she created programs to incorporate literacy and character education lessons for children and drastically expanded the library at the Massac County Housing Authority for her Girl Scout Gold Award project. Because of her project, children could access these programs and books when they came in for the existing lunch program. The children could even opt to keep their favorite books – with some of them taking home the first books they could call their own.

“Our world has so much hardship and suffering on its own, and I realized that kids can use all the help they can get to come out on the brighter side of things. I knew that if I could share the magic of reading with these kids who were struggling, they would have a safe space to escape long enough to discover their dreams,” said Sophia.

Sophia herself credits Girl Scouts with helping her to discover and fulfill some of her dreams. “Through Girl Scouts, I was able to develop a much stronger sense of self,” she said. “I learned to find practical solutions for turning my dreams into reality. Girl Scouting taught me how to actually reach my goals and gave me the skills I needed to do so,” Sophia added. One of those dreams she fulfilled was that of working for the US Federal Government. Upon graduating high school, Sophia attended Southern Illinois University in Carbondale on a full presidential academic scholarship. She now lives in Nashville, TN and works as a legal administrative specialist with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Sophia encourages other Girl Scouts to chase their dreams and earn their Girl Scout Gold Award as well. But, she emphasizes the importance of keeping focus on the work that is being done rather than the award that will be received. “I would encourage young Girl Scouts to not worry so much about the prestige or glory of the project,” said Sophia. “For me, God is the greatest part of my life. So, I believe the glory goes to him anyway. With that worry out of the picture, it frees you to focus on the helping of others. Focus on helping people and making a positive impact in your community, and the accolades will come,” she added.

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.