

# **O'Fallon teen installs new camp bridge while working on Girl Scout Gold Award project**

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GLEN CARBON – Leah Walton from O’Fallon dedicated a new bridge that she built at Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois (GSSI) Camp Torqua on Friday, July 20, 2018. Nearly 80 girls, Girl Scout volunteers and friends attended the dedication ceremony to applaud her efforts, which she committed towards earning the Girl Scout Gold Award – the highest award in Girl Scouting. Earning this prestigious award requires a suggested minimum of 80 hours of community service and helps Girl Scouts give back to the world in ways that are personally meaningful.

GSSI’s Camp Torqua is a 72 acre camp located outside of Edwardsville that is open to both Girl Scouts and outside groups. Despite a robust hiking trail system, the main link between two primary sections of the camp had been a gravel road that was also open to vehicles. To create a safer, more convenient option for foot traffic, Walton built a 40-foot suspension bridge over Sugar Creek, which cuts through the center of camp. Her construction used pressure treated wood and steel cables suspended through posts on both sides of the creek, and includes cross supports for stability. She explained that the project was meaningful to her because it allowed her to use her interests and skills to inspire the next generation.

“My Girl Scout Gold Award project was a way for me to do my part in helping kids appreciate the outdoors,” said Walton. “I absolutely love the outdoors. I spend the majority of my time outside riding my horses and playing sports.”



She also created and installed a pair of outdoor game boards for campers to use. The brightly painted game boards – checkers and tic tac toe – were painted on slices from trees that previously needed removed at the camp and include natural objects such as rocks as game pieces. In addition, she developed a series of STEM activities for camp, like a challenge to build a weight-bearing pyramid using sticks in order to explore the role of structure shape in engineering. During the bridge dedication, which coincided with GSSI’s annual STEM Day Camp, she led younger girls through games and activities, as STEM fields are also among her top interests.

“My favorite part of being a Girl Scout is being a part of my troop’s robotics team,” she shared. “We were able to compete at the state level and be competitive while representing Girl Scouts in a good light. My team learned through trial and error how to use tools better than most adults can, and I was able to apply those skills to build my bridge,” she added.



This fall, Walton plans to attend University of Findlay to double major in animal science and English equestrian studies. After earning her undergraduate degree, she hopes to attend medical school. She believes her experiences in Girl Scouts will help her continue to be successful into the future.

“Earning the Girl Scout Gold Award is important to me because it signifies dedication,” she explained. “It sets a good example for younger girls and shows what you can achieve if you really want to.” I would recommend being a Girl Scout because of the people that are part of the community,” she added. “It might not seem important to little girls, but so many of the leaders and friends I met are also the people giving me ‘pushes’ to be the best person I can be.”



Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois (GSSI) is a high-capacity Girl Scout council serving approximately 11,300 girls and engaging 4,550 adult volunteers in 40 ½ counties in Southern Illinois. GSSI Mission: ***Girl Scouts builds girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place.*** The Girl Scouts organization is the world's largest leadership development organization for girls. In partnership with committed adults, girls develop qualities that will serve them all their lives – such as

strong values, social conscience, and conviction about their own potential and self-worth. Today's Girl Scouts not only enjoy camping and crafts; 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.