



McCracken, McAuliffe, Are Girls Scouts Who Shine With Hope During Challenging Times

by Loretta Graham
July 21 2020 9:11 AM





If you're looking for signs of hope in these challenging times, look no further than teenagers who are leaders in our communities. I had the opportunity to meet 18 remarkable Gold Award Girl Scouts in early July. Traveling from town-to-town in southern Illinois, I visited the homes of this year's award recipients. I presented them with their Gold Award, put a sign in their yard and posed for pictures. Being around these girls assured me we can look forward to a brighter future.

The 18 Gold Award Girl Scouts have shown exceptional dedication to improving their communities and world. To earn a Gold Award, a Girl Scout in grades 9 to 12 tackles an issue that is dear to her. Her actions drive meaningful and lasting change in their communities and beyond.

I visited with Gold Award Girl Scout, of Edwardsville. Colleen McCracken addressed the lack of awareness about Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS), a disorder of the autonomic nervous system affecting one in 100 teenagers. The disorder is often misdiagnosed. Colleen is aware of the challenge misdiagnoses cause because she herself has POTS.

Colleen educated current and future healthcare professionals about POTS with presentations throughout Edwardsville. A kinesiology professor at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville heard Colleen's talk then added a unit on POTS to future classes. The Edwardsville City Council proclaimed October Dysautonomia Awareness Month and Colleen gave a speech to the council.

"I have had other POTS patients who have seen my advocacy work reach out to me for advice and in gratitude," Colleen says. "Through my Girl Scout Gold Award service, I have learned how to make an effective presentation to educate people and how to make a difference in their lives."

For example, Sydney McAuliffe of O'Fallon organized [Fitness Fairs](#). Sydney had gotten into great shape and loved how she felt. Knowing many children and teens do not exercise enough and are obese, Sydney decided to share her knowledge of the impact of exercise on our mind and bodies. She organized two Fitness Fairs, one for Girl Scouts and one for the public.

"I am mentally stronger than I originally thought," says Sydney. "I was able to complete my project with few issues, and I learned I am capable of managing big events with a lot of different things going on at the same time."

I am so proud of our Gold Award Girl Scouts. If you have a Girl Scout consider encouraging her to continue through high school. I know, they are busy with sports, debate and whatever. So are the 18 award winners. I encourage you and your daughter because when a girl stays in Girl Scouts to earn her Gold Award, she receives a head start on the path to success.

As parents, teaching our children values is one of our most important jobs. Girl Scouts learn kindness and generosity as they serve the community. I look forward to seeing this year's Gold Award Girl Scouts put their values into action.

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois serves approximately 9,000 girls and engages 3,500 adult volunteers in 40.5 counties in Southern Illinois. **Join Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois today! Adult volunteers and girls in K-12 are welcome. Call 800-345-6858 or email customercare@gssofsi.org.** GSofSI is a not-for-profit organization supported by various United Ways throughout the region.

