

Rita Schaefer Is Honored With Girls Scouts Hearts Of Gold Award

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GLEN CARBON – Distinguished volunteer Rita Schaefer from Belleville has been honored with the annual Heart of Gold Award by Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois. This prestigious award recognizes the tremendous long-term impact a volunteer has had on girls and adults in his or her community through Girl Scouts, and it is the highest award a Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois adult volunteer can earn.



Rita is a shining example of a lifelong Girl Scout. She has spent 50 years with the organization, more than 30 of which have been in a volunteer capacity. “She is the first person to step up and say, ‘Adults do not age out of this program; I’m still here!’” said

Donna Aaron, a fellow Girl Scout volunteer who nominated Rita for this award. Rita has proven this to be true. From being a troop leader for all five of her daughters' troops, to a day camp volunteer, to a recruiter, Rita has held numerous volunteer roles over the years and shares her love for Girl Scouting with those around her.

"I have so much admiration for Rita and hope I can continue to build the friendship with the leaders and volunteers in our service unit as she has," said Jodie Herbstritt, another fellow Girl Scout volunteer who endorsed Rita for this award. "With all the roles Rita has done – and is still doing – it has created stronger, confident Girl Scouts," added Jodie.

"Rita was my troop leader for about eight years," said Nicole Jensen, Rita's daughter. Nicole recalls the number of extended trips her troop had the opportunity to experience – including California, Hawaii, and the Bahamas – thanks to the dedication of her mom. "Rita was a major factor in enabling girls to go on extended trips. She donated her time and patience to help earn money to afford up to 20+ girls on each two-week trip. Without Rita, many of the girls in our troop wouldn't have been outside of the Metro St. Louis area, including in their current adult life. Any girl who had the benefit of being in Rita's troop is a better person for it," Nicole stated.

Rita's peers can't stress enough the impact she has made on Girl Scouting – and them – over the years. From the willingness to help with anything that needs done, to sharing stories, to singing songs, Rita has instilled the value of Girl Scouting in countless volunteers and girls for decades. Thank you, Rita, for having a Heart of Gold.

Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois serves over 6,150 girls and engages nearly 3,000 adult volunteers in 40 counties in Southern Illinois. **Call 800-345-6858 or email customercare@gsfsi.org**. Girl Scouts of Southern Illinois is a not-for-profit organization supported by United Ways, businesses, and individual donors throughout the region.