

Equality For Girls

SCOUTS LEARN LEADERSHIP, GOLF AND MORE

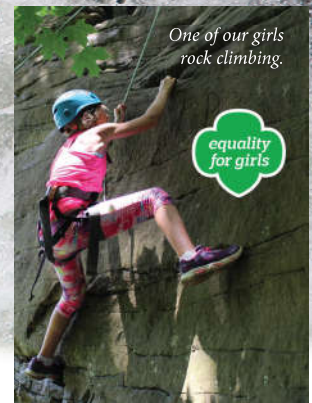
BY ANDREW DOMINO

Girl scouts from different regions on a whitewater rafting adventure trip.

Kalamazoo Region troop that took a trip and explored Mammoth Caves.



One of our girls rock climbing.



In the spring, Girl Scouts sell cookies. In the summer, they head to camp. But that's not all Girl Scouts in southwest Michigan can do, said Jan Barker.

Girl Scouts Heart of Michigan, the organization covering the Kalamazoo area, is launching what it's calling the equality campaign this year. Barker, the chief executive officer of Heart of Michigan, said the goal is to go beyond the stereotypes of Girl Scouts and even young women outside of scouting.

"Everyone knows incredible leaders are born out of the Boy Scouts program," Barker said. "The same applies to Girl Scouts."

A NEED FOR MORE

The Heart of Michigan council includes 34 Michigan counties, from Kalamazoo to Ann Arbor, and north to Lansing and Saginaw. It includes about 25,000 members.

Girl Scouts are between the ages of 5 and 18, moving into different levels of the program as they graduated into new school grades. The highest award for a Girl Scout is the Gold Award, though Barker acknowledges that the insignia and requirements for Girl Scouts aren't as well-known as their male counterparts. To earn a Gold Award, girls have to work on projects in media awareness and social advocacy, among others. Another area that many girls are interested in is science

and technology, Barker said. It's one that's had less focus in the Girl Scouts — and in the U.S. in general. "We want to teach decision making, team building, and leadership skills," she said. "Girl Scouts is the place where girls learn how to advocate for themselves and others."

AVAILABLE ACTIVITIES

The Source, a listing of 2017 events available to Girl Scouts in Michigan, includes arts and craft projects, cooking and other traditional scout activities. But there's also a new press corps, where scouts can write and publicize their own media releases. One program leads girls on a tour of the Michigan State University Federal Credit Union to see the day-to-day activities of a business. A "puberty workshop" encourages mothers and daughters to talk with social workers, health care professionals and one another. Wall climbing and white water rafting is planned. And summer Camp Merrie Woode in Plainwell is adding archery and rifle shooting to the list of options.

"We want girls to know about golf, because (business) decisions are made on a golf course," Barker said.

The idea of equality for girls isn't just to get Girl

Scouts trying things they're asking for, things outside the "traditional" list of activities for girls. It's also to put them in charge. In June, Barker and scouts will be headed to Savannah, Georgia, to visit the birthplace of Girl Scouts founder Juliette Gordon Low. The journey there and back will be planned by the scouts, Barker said.

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"They get to practice skills like planning a route and planning meals," she said. "They learn how to share their gear and make decisions — someone wants to eat seafood, but someone else is allergic."

Scouts will also start to lead their own activities in camp, and develop the skills to talk with adult leaders about what they want to be able to do and learn.

So far, the equality for girls program is a creation of the Heart of Michigan group, after discussions with Girl Scout leaders, parents and girls themselves. Barker said she hopes a positive response will result in the equality program being copied across the country, or at the very least attracting more attention to the scouting program here in Michigan.



You can see more of Andrew Domino's writing at www.dominowriting.com