Why I will always be a Girl Scout
By Megan Hutchison, GSSJC Ambassador

I joined Girl Scouts at five years old after attending the local Girl Scout rally that takes place in September in our community. Thirteen years later, Girl Scouts is still a very important aspect of my life and has provided me with more opportunities than I could ever list here.

To be honest, I don’t remember the day I joined Girl Scouts or my first meeting or the first petal I earned on my Daisy smock. I can be told these stories, but Girl Scouts has been a part of my life for so long that I don’t really know what it’s like to start being a Girl Scout because I don’t know what it’s like not to be a Girl Scout. It’s a part of who I am and has had an enormous impact on my personality, experiences, and achievements.

My best memories come from camping trips, when my friends and I would all get to spend the weekend adventuring, exploring and learning new skills like canoeing, archery and outdoor cooking. The independence I gained and the bonds I forged with other girls are both things that helped to make me who I am today.

What has particularly impressed me about Girl Scouts, however, is the continual effort to improve the program and to fix issues that arise. Throughout the years I have seen countless leaders and volunteers sacrifice their own time and energy to gather feedback, respond to concerns and push the program to reach more girls and help more people. I have been invited to girl planning meetings, seen evaluation spreadsheets, and had meaningful conversations with adult leaders and volunteers about where I and my fellow Girl Scouts would like to see improvement. This self-awareness and strong desire to better themselves is unique amongst most organizations. It has brought me great pride, but more so it has shown me my responsibility to be aware of the issues around me and to actively look for solutions.

Girl Scouts has been a key part of my life, and it is something that I want to share with as many other girls as possible. This organization has truly shaped my childhood and will continue to affect and motivate me in my years to come, and that is why I will always be a Girl Scout.

Donate to GSSJC while back to school shopping
Before you head out to do your back to school shopping this year, check out these simple and easy ways to financially support GSSJC. Share these opportunities with your friends and colleagues!

Amazon: You can support Girl Scouts every time you shop on Amazon! GSSJC is now part of the Amazon Smile Program that donates a portion of eligible purchases to a nonprofit organization of the customer’s choice. Make sure you shop via http://smile.amazon.com/ and search for Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council to link your Amazon account to us. Your charity of choice will be listed at the top of the page while you shop and stored in your account for future purchases.

Randalls: The Randalls Good Neighbor Program donates one percent of customers’ purchases to up to three nonprofit organizations of their choice. Visit the courtesy booth at your local Randalls to fill out the enrollment form and indicate charity #519. Your account will be linked to GSSJC. You only have to sign up once!

Kroger: GSSJC is part of the Kroger Community Rewards program that donates $1 million annually to local nonprofits. Visit krogercommunityrewards.com to link your Kroger Plus Card to Girl Scouts, and a percentage of your purchase will be donated to GSSJC. You sign up once, and you’ll be a supporter of GSSJC for the a year. You can search for Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council by name or by the organizational number 83762.

Don’t forget: GSSJC is proud to be a United Way partner agency and we encourage you to support your corporation’s United Way Campaign.
Girl Scouts launches partnership with National Park Service

At the start of the summer, Girl Scouts announced a partnership with the National Park Service to launch the “Girl Scout Ranger Program,” a joint venture connecting girls with National Park Service sites throughout the United States, including monuments, seashores, and urban sites.

Through the program, girls can participate in a variety of organized educational or outdoor service projects. Additionally, Girl Scouts may design their own project that aligns with their Girl Scout Journey experience, various badge activities or a Take Action (“highest award”) project. Girls who successfully complete projects will be awarded certificates from the National Park Service and Girl Scout patches.

“Providing girls with access to the outdoors is one of the cornerstones of the Girl Scout mission,” said Anna Maria Chávez, CEO of GSUSA. “Through terrific partnerships and programs like the Girl Scout Ranger Program, we offer girls a chance to engage in outdoor activities that encourage a healthy, active lifestyle and a respect for the environment. We are proud to be teaming up with the National Park Service to help more Girl Scouts in more places experience everything the outdoors has to offer.”

Girls and troops who wish to participate in the Girl Scout Ranger Program can visit the National Park Service website to locate a park (“Find Your Park”) near their home. There, they can also explore the history of the park and learn about its natural and cultural resources. Troop leaders and parents can arrange for activities like hiking, biking, wildlife watching, and guided interpretive tours, and the Girl Scout Ranger Program will also allow girls to build their own unique park experience, earning badges and patches along the way.

Girls in San Jacinto Council can visit Big Thicket National Park, located within the Council in Beaumont. There are a total of 15 national parks in Texas. For more information on this partnership, visit nps.org.

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Alumnae Association Events

If you have questions about the events below or would like to join the Alumnae Association, please contact alumnae@sjgs.org.

Alumnae Harvest Weekend

Sept. 26-27, 2015

Fall is the best time to experience the piney woods of East Texas! Join your alumnae friends for an exciting weekend at Camp Whispering Pines in Garrison, Texas. We have a tee-pee unit, standard tents, and air-conditioned troop cabins. For those of you who prefer to stay in a hotel, there are plenty of close options that you can book independently. Cost is $35 per person. Camp accommodation, activities and meals are included. Email devrsvp@sjgs.org to claim your spot and share any dietary preferences.

Schedule:
Check in: 8:30 – 10 a.m., Saturday, Sept. 26
Check out: 9:30 - 11:30 a.m., Sunday, Sept. 27

Activities may include:
- Crafts/swaps
- Farmers’ market shopping
- Archery
- Traditional Girl Scout campfire
- Zipline through the treetops at ZipNac (Extra charge of $25 per person. When registering, please indicate your interest.)

Alumnae European Adventure to Pax Lodge and Our Chalet

Aug. 27 – Sept. 13, 2016

Calling all alumnae who love to travel! Join us as we visit two of the four World Centres – Pax Lodge in London and Our Chalet in Adelboden, Switzerland. Additional points of interest and accommodations are currently being researched. Estimated price is about $4,000 including airfare, transfers and hotel. More details to come!

In addition to visiting state parks, Girl Scouts in San Jacinto Council also have the opportunity to visit 10 camp properties in GSSJC. You can support local camps by:
- donating to camperships, which helps send low-income girls to camp each summer to develop an appreciation of the outdoors, make new friends and try new things.
- investing in camp improvements at our properties which enhance girls’ experiences. These can be designated to a particular project or property.

For more, visit gssjc.org and click on Donate.
GSSJC welcomes new board members

On June 1, GSSJC welcomed new members to its board of directors for the 2016 membership year. In their role, board members will provide guidance and expertise to the Council to help with its mission of building girls of courage, confidence and character who make the world a better place.

President of the Council, Chair of the Board
Mary Ryder

President and Chair Elect
Jean T. Janssen

Vice Chair
Delores J. Hinkle

Secretary
Betsy Kamin

Treasurer
Stephen C. Richter

Members-At-Large
Craig Allen
Lanesha Anderson
Mary Bass
Meg Britton
Jacqueline A. Dimpel, PE
Alisa Fraga-Kautzmann
S. Pilar Grantham, JD
Mayerland Harris, SPHR
J. Kent Hutchison
Corrie Jenkins
Monica Maby King, JD
Bette Branch Lehmberg, JD, CPA
Laura Liang
Cathy G. Mann
Van Martin
Kate Marx, CPA
Elena McCreery
Cassandra M. McZeal, PhD
Sharron Melton
Norma Olvera, PhD
Kathy Rapp
Dolores Zamora Richards
Melanie Rippentrop
Catherine B. Smith
Jamie L. Vazquez
Genevieve Walls
Chris Wolfe

Board Members Emeritus
Dorothy Goodykoontz
E.C. “Bud” Simpson

GSSJC celebrates most successful Success to Significance event to date

Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council (GSSJC) hosted its fifth annual Success to Significance event on April 23, 2015 and raised more than $270,000 for Girl Scout programs in southeast Texas, making it the most successful event in Success to Significance history.

The luncheon took place at the Hyatt Regency in downtown Houston and highlighted the personal and professional accomplishments of Y. Ping Sun, Rice University representative and social investor. It also featured a keynote speech by Jessica Buchanan and her husband Erik Landemalm.

In 2011, Buchanan, an American aid worker, was kidnapped by Somali pirates and survived a 93-day ordeal before being rescued by the Navy’s SEAL Team 6.

“Before Jessica was a teacher and an American aid worker, she was a Girl Scout who learned that she could make a difference not only in her community, but the world,” said Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council CEO Mary Vitek. “I know that her speech will inspire those who attend to support us in providing leadership opportunities for girls so that they can do amazing things at home and abroad.”

This year’s honoree, Sun, is the wife of Rice University President David Leebron. In addition to being a university representative, she is a member of the Shepherd School of Music and the Kinder Institute for Urban Research advisory boards; is honorary co-chair of the Baker Institute Roundtable; and hosts the “Something New for Lunch at Rice University” luncheon series. Sun has served as trustee of Texas Children’s Hospital; board member of the Asia Society Texas Center and the United Way of Greater Houston; advisory board member of Asian Chamber of Commerce, Chinese Community Center and Houston Arts Alliance; and the chair of the Mayor’s International Trade and Development Council for Asia/Australia, to name a few. Sun is also of Counsel at Yetter Coleman, and she is a Girl Scout volunteer.

“Ping has been a long-time supporter of Girl Scouts and has used her personal and professional success to make a positive investment in our community,” said Vitek. “For that she is truly an inspiration to our girls, volunteers and supporters and we are grateful to recognize her as our 2015 honoree.”

Thank you to all who joined us at the fifth annual Success to Significance this spring. We hope to see you again April 22, 2016. Details on next year’s event will be available at http://s2s.gssjc.org.
Gold Award project provides exams to 90 students

According to the American Optometric Association, approximately 12 percent of teenagers have undetected or untreated vision problems. To address this issue, Girl Scout Kianna Hawkins launched EyeCare4TeenVision, an eye health initiative that provides teens ages 12-19 access to basic eye care services by partnering with vision-advocate organizations that provide resources for vision screenings, eye exams and glasses as needed. This project earned her Girl Scout Gold Award – the highest honor a Girl Scout can receive.

“Vision care is not a component of the high school health curriculum and in most cases the only exposure teens have to eye care comes from vision screenings given during physical exams,” said Hawkins, a junior at Mirabeau Lamar High School. “So teens who don’t have access to healthcare or don’t receive regular exams have no way of knowing that their vision may be the reason behind their poor performance in school, low testing scores and inability to excel in sports or extracurricular activities.”

Through Hawkins’ EyeCare4TeenVision initiative, approximately 90 middle and high school students completed eye exams to help identify undiagnosed and uncorrected vision during World Site Day, October 8, 2014. Twelve students failed the screening and were referred to eye doctors for further assistance. They were also given access to vouchers that partially or completely subsidized costs for vision care services, including eye glasses. In addition to the screening, Hawkins held a Christmas eye glasses recycling drive which she called the Gift of Sight. The drive collected more than 320 used pairs of glasses that were donated to organizations providing vision services overseas. “I originally thought that vision screenings were the solution to the problem of uncorrected vision among students in my focus group, but I learned that the benefits of educational efforts and vision screenings are comprised by the lack of follow-up,” said Hawkins. “Almost 70 percent of the students who receive referrals do not receive follow-up eye exams and glasses.”

The Girl Scout Gold Award represents the highest achievement in Girl Scouting; it recognizes girls in grades 9-12 who demonstrate extraordinary leadership through sustainable and measurable Take Action projects. Since 1916, girls have successfully answered the call to Go Gold, an act that indelibly marks them as accomplished members of their communities and the world.

Hawkins has been in Girl Scouts since first grade and considered dropping out when she started high school due to her hectic drill team schedule, but her troop leader encouraged her to stick with it. Much to her avail, Hawkins made a commitment to earn her Gold Award.

To successfully complete requirements for her Gold Award project, Hawkins recruited eight volunteers and completed 113 leadership and service hours.

“Since I completed this project, I am more aware of the socio-economic challenges that some people face and how these challenges affect and shape peoples’ thought processes,” said Hawkins. “Now I think about solutions from a different perspective, in hopes of finding solutions.”

After graduating from high school in 2016, Hawkins will attend Howard University and major in chemistry and business marketing with a focus in brand management.

Through The Emerald Circle, GSSJC is able to award scholarships to Gold Award recipients. In 2015, 24 Gold Awardees received $30,000 in scholarships:

- **Judy Kunkel Memorial Scholarship, $3,000** – Rebecca Grekin
- **Albert and Margaret Alkek Foundation Scholarship, $2,500** – Caroline Bik
- **Robert H. and Joanne M. Williams Foundation Scholarship, $2,000** – Jacquelyn Lee
- **Mary E. Robinson Memorial Scholarship, $2,000** – Aubrie Wells
- **Ervan Chew Memorial Scholarship, $1,000** – Taylor Hicks
- **Emerald Circle scholarship and designated a Goodykoontz Scholar, $1,500** – Christin Vogel
- **Goodykoontz Scholars, $1,000** – Faith Marschke, Morgan Gable, Robyn Miles, Christine Nguyen
- **Emerald Circle Scholarships, $1,000** – Hannah Anderson, Arunika Bhatia, Caroline Cayll, Alexia Demarchos, Katherine Dodgen, Devon Grady, Hannah Kay, Ceyda Kural, Francesca Mattioli, Victoria Renouard, Celeste Tañega, Joanna Yang, Rachel Zandy and Emily Zhang.
Longtime GSSJC Volunteer Sandy Judson might not have been a member as a girl, but Sandy jumped into a co-leader role when her oldest daughter joined Girl Scouts and continued that role when her second daughter joined. That was more than 30 years ago.

Today, Sandy continues to not only donate her time, but also donate financially to GSSJC for one simple reason. “I want to see the work we do continue and be extended to more girls,” she said.

To help the Council towards that goal, she has held positions at every level of the Council from troop co-leader, troop cookie manager and service unit cookie manager to council cookie coordinator and B.I.G. Event volunteer. She is also a member of the IT and History committees and Emerald Circle. These roles continued even after her own girls graduated from high school.

Currently, Sandy leads a troop of Cadettes (grades 6-8) and still enjoys seeing the girls experience new opportunities. “You get an opportunity to help mold the girls into young adults.”

Sandy’s dedication to Girl Scouting hasn’t gone unnoticed. During the past year, she has received several awards for her efforts, including being named a Texans Community Quarterback, the 2015 Greater Houston Service Award Education Volunteer winner and will receive the Evolving Eve at the Houston Woman Magazine’s HER Awards in August.

While Sandy’s time and monetary donations go to GSSJC, she knows she’s helping make something much bigger possible. “It is a great way to invest in the future of the country,” she said. “Our girls become tomorrow’s leaders. We need people that are not afraid to speak up, have integrity and lead with their hearts as well as their heads.”

For more information on how to support GSSJC, visit gssjc.org, click on Our Council and Donate.
Louise Villejo

For Louise Villejo, Girl Scouting has been a hereditary experience. As a girl, Louise joined Girl Scouting as a Brownie at St. Peter the Apostle Catholic School – her mom was one of her troop leaders.

That’s a tradition she continued for her two daughters over a span of 11 years, serving as a co-leader for their troops. And, much like her own experience, participating in Girl Scouts as a leader was full of fun and exciting experiences. “We were able to plan, prepare and go to Our Cabana in Cuernavaca, Mexico,” said Louise. “It was a great experience for us!”

Louise also gave her time in leadership roles serving in her local service unit, helping plan service unit weekends as the program chair and serving on the Council’s Pluralism Committee. She has been a member of GSSJC on the board of directors and Executive Committee.

“I’m passionate about Girl Scouts because of the pluralistic commitment of the organization to provide girls from all parts of the community with so many incredible opportunities to learn and grow,” said Louise.

To continue showing that passion and ensuring the future for Girl Scouts, Louise plans to take part of the Council’s planned giving society (The Juliette Gordon Low Society) by earmarking GSSJC as a beneficiary in her will. “Girl Scouts help form values,” she said. “When you learn the Girl Scout Promise and the Girl Scout Law as a young girl, I think you really take those promises in as core values.”

Make a gift to GSSJC in your will. One of the simplest ways for you to make a future contribution is to include Girl Scouts of San Jacinto Council in your will. If you have already made GSSJC one of your beneficiaries, please share this with us. For more information, contact Diane Pavey at dpavey@sjgs.org or 713-292-0277.