



# Discover

a community publication

Girl Scouts get hands-on STEM experience

Summer 2025

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girl scouts   
of wisconsin  
southeast



# Taking Empowerment to New Heights

“Being on an active military base as a civilian is hard to do, so there was no question that my Girl Scout troop were going to attend this rare opportunity,” said troop leader, Becky Benjamin.

“This was a win-win for so many reasons—Girl Scouts were exposed to new skills in a novel setting, got behind-the-scenes access to the inner workings of a military base that may spark future interests, created special bonds with their Girl Scout sisters, and saw strong female leaders in the military. Count us in!”

In mid-April, more than 100 local Girl Scout Juniors through Ambassadors had an exclusive experience on base at the 128th Air Refueling Wing. Girl Scouts had the chance to tour a KC135R aircraft, discover where the boom passes fuel to other jets, see equipment used on missions, and explore aspects of cybersecurity. Girl Scouts ended the day with once-in-a-lifetime memories, Cybersecurity Basics and First Aid badges, a special 128th Air Refueling patch, practical skills in how to keep information safe online and how to administer assistance to others in crisis, and connections with more than 30 members of the military in various roles on base.

“This event included a ton of exciting activities, and the day was full of new experiences for me,” reflected Girl Scout Cadette Noelle. “We got to see an opening flag ceremony on base. We saw equipment used in a life raft in case of an emergency. Crew members of the 128th explained all the different parts of the plane including the radar and communication equipment. We got to sit in the cockpit and speak to two female pilots, and we got to actually lay in the boom operator area! We practiced how to create super secure passwords for online safety. We practiced CPR, worked on safely wrapping wounds and creating a sling, and learned how to properly administer an EpiPen. I think I want to be a doctor, so it was great to learn and practice so many first aid skills.”

“We were excited to help ignite the passion for learning different skills, broaden perspectives, and help grow the younger generation. We wanted to create a connection



*Girl Scouts spent the day building confidence in emergency response and learning about cybersecurity.*

between Girl Scouts and members of the military. We hoped this event could put a face to the military and offer the human factor—where Girl Scouts could engage with people who are doing this important work and understand how we are part of the broader community,” stated Chief Ali Saffarini. Chief Saffarini has been in the Air Force for 22 years and has been serving on the 128th base for the past 18 years.

“What resonated with me were the feelings of empowerment and the alignment of values between the military and Girl Scouting. It was powerful seeing the girls interacting with the female aviators and witnessing firsthand that women can do great things, break society norms, and achieve extraordinary success. I was also struck with the parallels in values—in both Girl Scouting and in the U.S. Military, we value contributing to a greater cause, trying our best at everything we do, and serving ourselves and each other with integrity. This event was rewarding to me



**Through unique partnerships, Girl Scouts are creating lifetime memories, gaining practical skills, connecting with role models, and exploring future career paths.**

and the other members of the military who volunteered to share their experiences with this group of young leaders,” said Chief Saffarani.

“My favorite community outreach is this weekend. It is a joy to witness Girl Scouts introduced to the base for the first time,” shared General Zuccaro, who has been present at every Air Refueling Wing event with GSWISE. “Girl Scouts is an important youth organization that teaches many of the same core values as the Air Force. I enjoy revealing that you can have a civilian career and a military career at the same time.”

“At the 128th Air Refueling Wing event, it was impressive to see so many female leaders in important roles. Talk about female empowerment,” said troop leader Becky, a Girl Scout alum who has led her daughter’s troop for the past six years. “I love Girl Scout events because it allows me to bond with

my daughter and the troop in new ways, and I learn right alongside them! It is important to have our troop experience activities that offer role models to the girls.”

For Girl Scout Noelle and her troop leader mom Becky, the 128th Air Refueling Wing event wasn’t just special because of the unparalleled access to a military base. This event held more significance, as Becky’s father retired from the 128th as a chief master sergeant after serving there for 30 years.

“Growing up, I had been on that base before, but Noelle never had. That base is so near and dear to my family and holds so many memories, so I wanted my daughter to see where her grandpa worked and share that connection with her,” shared Becky. “It was such a meaningful experience for us on so many levels!”



*Girl Scouts earned their First Aid badge and Cybersecurity Basics badge at the annual event.*



*Girl Scouts had the unique opportunity to explore military aircrafts first-hand.*

# Passion and Perseverance Make Gold

Gold Award Girl Scouts don't just imagine change—they make it happen.



*Gold Award Girl Scout Alexandra received the 2025 GSUSA Gold Award Scholarship for her Little Free Pantry project.*

Through confidence and compassion, Gold Award Girl Scouts like Alexandra H. help improve real-world problems as today and tomorrow's leaders. To earn the Gold Award, Girl Scouts in 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grades spend 80+ hours identifying an issue, working with local leaders to address the problem, and taking action that leads to measurable change.

For her Gold Award project, Alexandra H.—a 4<sup>th</sup> generation Girl Scout who thrived as a Girl Scout Daisy all the way through high school as a Girl Scout Ambassador—addressed the growing issue of food insecurity in Oconomowoc. She created a Little Free Pantry at Lions Park to provide an accessible, 24/7 food resource for families in need.

"I had two jobs in high school and competed in track, cross country, and downhill ski racing, but it was important to make time to earn Girl Scouting's highest honor and leave a mark on my town," explained Alexandra, who recently completed her first year of college at Valparaiso University in Indiana, where she is studying nursing and running Division 1 cross country and track. "When I was younger, I volunteered with my family and went door-to-door collecting food items for a local pantry. It struck me that the individuals receiving food items needed a car to get to the food pantry, they had to have proof of identification, and the variety of food items was limiting. I remember thinking it wasn't totally accessible. Later, when my troop was working on our Bronze Award, we built a Little Free Library. So, I piggy-backed off these ideas for my Gold Award."

Alexandra partnered with the Oconomowoc Lions Club, First Congregational UCC Church, and the Oconomowoc Junior Woman's Club to organize food drives and establish ongoing support. Through these efforts, Alexandra built and stocked the pantry with over 1,000 donated food and hygiene items. She also raised awareness about food insecurity by publishing a guide in the General Federation of Women's Clubs News & Notes to inspire other communities to start similar initiatives. This project made an immediate impact, allowing families to access food without barriers. To ensure

sustainability, Alexandra's church continues to hold monthly food collections, and the community has embraced the "take what you need, leave what you can" model. Alexandra's effort set the foundation for long-term support, both locally and beyond.

On her journey to the Gold Award, Alexandra practiced resourcefulness, tenacity, and decision-making skills, giving her an edge personally and professionally.

"With my hectic school schedule, I needed to use my time management wisely, ask for help, and delegate. I also had to get comfortable pivoting as needed, like when I had to pause the installation of the Little Free Pantry due to frozen ground. Throughout all the twists and turns, so many people supported me and no one ever gave up—I am so proud of how the project evolved while also keeping its original integrity intact."

Now, Alexandra is a Lifetime Member who continues to use her Girl Scouting experiences in her current and future endeavors. "My favorite Girl Scout badge to earn was the first aid badge. My troop picked badges to earn, and I chose to help lead my sister Girl Scouts in an activity to get CPR-certified, where we also made first aid kits and had a nurse and EMT as guest speakers. That experience helped spark my interest in nursing as a career path and reinforced my passion for helping people and bringing joy to others. Girl Scouting builds strong women who can accomplish anything."

Alexandra recently received the GSUSA Gold Award Scholarship, which recognizes one outstanding Gold Award Girl Scout per council for their leadership. Recipients use the scholarship toward tuition, fees, books, and supplies to continue their education.

You champion Girl Scouts like Alexandra as they advocate for others, develop resiliency, and make an impact on communities they care about.



# Making Their Voices Count

On March 8, more than 500 Girl Scouts from across Wisconsin—including more than 115 local Girl Scouts from GSWISE—stepped into the heart of state government at the annual Girl Scout Day at the Capitol event in Madison. Held during National Girl Scout Week and on International Women’s Day, this event empowered Girl Scouts to understand their civic rights, explore the legislative process, and witness the real-world impact of active participation.

“It was powerful to join such a vast girl-led presence with Girl Scouts from other Wisconsin councils for this special day,” remarked GSWISE troop leader, Karen Bitzan, who attended this event for the first time with six Girl Scouts from her granddaughter’s troop. Karen, a dedicated Girl Scout volunteer for the past 40 years, led her daughter’s troop through high school and now helps lead her granddaughter’s troop who recently bridged from Girl Scout Juniors to Cadettes. “There are so many things happening in the world today that our girls are exposed to and impacted by, and this purposeful and educational event provided a positive example of how girls can come together and make their voices heard. Girl Scouts saw and heard from women in prominent leadership positions in our state’s Capitol, practiced making a difference in both big and small ways, and felt how there is strength in numbers when you raise your voice on issues you care about with your Girl Scout sisters. I could talk about the power of Girl Scouting for a week or two straight if there was time!”

Through conversations with elected officials and hands-on experiences, Girl Scouts learned about democracy while actively engaging in it. Girl Scouts wrote to elected officials, designed their own flags, asked thoughtful questions to a panel of Wisconsin’s leadership, explored the state’s history in the awe-inspiring Capitol building, and earned the Democracy badge for their grade level. One fan-favorite activity of the day was an interactive voting experience, where Girl Scouts cast ballots on youth-centered issues using real voting machines. Girl Scouts ended the day with a high-energy march around Capitol Square with advocacy signs in hand—a powerful demonstration that democracy is not just something to learn about, but something to actively participate in.

A special proclamation declaring March 9-15 as Girl Scout Week in Wisconsin was issued by Governor Tony Evers and presented to Wisconsin Girl Scouts at the event by Lieutenant Governor Sara Rodriguez. Lieutenant Governor



*Through hands-on activities, meetings with local legislators, and a Capitol Square rally, Girl Scouts explored civic engagement during Girl Scout Week.*

Sara Rodriguez—a Lifetime Member, a troop leader, and a recent speaker at the GSWISE Highest Awards Celebration—reflected on the profound influence of Girl Scouting and how it impacted her own journey.

“It was wonderful to see so many girls spend the day exploring more about advocacy, discovering how they can help their communities, and learning something new,” reflected Lt. Governor Rodriguez. “I never thought I would run for office, but it was my time to serve. I became Lt. Governor because I wanted to serve the people of Wisconsin and do what I can to better our great state. Our Girl Scouts are doing just that! They are finding the best ways to serve their community, developing new skills to help them grow, and learning the importance of being a leader. Girl Scouts are the next generation of young female leaders, and with them, I know our state—and beyond—has a bright future.” Your support encourages more Girl Scouts of all ages to make their voices count and become informed, engaged young citizens ready to take on the world.

**Supporters like you encourage more Girl Scouts—of all ages—to embark on unique Girl Scout opportunities that make their communities fuller and brighter.**



# Why We Give: A Blossoming Partnership

Komatsu—a global company that uses innovation and community connection to create advanced machines and integrated technologies that address societal needs—is no stranger to Girl Scouts. Supporting local Girl Scout programming since 2002, Komatsu has evolved their contributions over time to address present needs, shifting to support STEM programming in 2021. Last April, Komatsu employees from their sustainability committee and their family members hosted their first-ever volunteer opportunity with GSWISE. Over 40 Girl Scouts attended their Tree Promise event, where they made paper seed balls and paper bead keychains, learned how to plant a tree at home, and earned a Tree Promise badge.

“We aim to invest in things that make our city great; we partner with organizations that make our communities more well-rounded, offer cultural experiences, and shift support to address current community needs,” shared Cathy Stagmer, Manager of Social Responsibility at Komatsu and Girl Scout alum. “We have a lot of female staff who feel their own sense of power in inspiring the next generation, so the spirit of this event was to help young girls find their passion in STEM. The skills that Girl Scouting promotes—like confidence, independence, a sense of exploration, community connection, and wanting to take care of our earth—are all values Komatsu holds, so this event and partnership align so well.”

Komatsu recently received the Community Support Certificate at GSWISE’s Celebration of Volunteer Achievement for their thoughtful volunteer opportunities and environmental-focused contributions within the Girl Scout community. Cathy hopes to continue looking for ways to grow the partnership, including possibly offering a badge or leadership activity to do with girls in the future that includes Komatsu employees speaking on their careers that involve forestry and STEM.

“I love to see how some Girl Scout traditions have continued since I was a young Girl Scout. It’s also heartening to see how Girl Scouting has evolved to address societal needs,” explained Cathy. “Girl Scouting provides unique opportunities for girls to develop leadership skills and pursue new interests and experiences that help empower them in male-dominated spaces. My involvement over the years has been so inspiring.”

Dedicated partners like Komatsu help shape our community’s young leaders in the growing STEM and environmental sustainability spaces.



*Supported by Komatsu volunteers, Girl Scouts joined together to plant, protect, and honor trees with the Girl Scout Tree Promise.*



# Here's a Peek at What GSWISE Has Been Up To



Three lucky Girl Scouts explored leadership while shadowing CEO Ana Simpson for the day through a “CEO for the Day” experience.



Nearly 100 GE HealthCare colleagues volunteered to help prepare GSWISE camp properties for summer camp.



11 Girl Scouts earned a summer trip to Disney World by selling 2,025+ packages of Girl Scout Cookies.



GSWISE recognized 324 Bronze, Silver, and Gold Award Girl Scouts this May at our annual Highest Awards Celebration.



This summer, Girl Scouts explored careers in the emergency services field, learning from EMTs, police officers, and firefighters.



## Calendar of Events



**September 13-14:**  
Girl Scouts Love State Parks



**October 1:**  
Membership Year 2026 Begins



**October 1:**  
Fall Product Program Begins

# girl scouts of wisconsin southeast

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Dear Girl Scout Friends,

Summer is wrapping up – and we are gearing up for back-to-school season. For Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast, the new school year is a time of celebration. Daisies begin to earn their petals as they learn the values of the Girl Scout Law, Junior and Cadette troops start to map out their Bronze and Silver Award projects, and high school Girl Scouts step into leadership roles, often serving as role models for their younger Girl Scout sisters. The new school year also kickstarts plenty of unique fall programming, where Girl Scouts can discover new interests and skills in safe spaces.

Girl Scouts can explore life skills and STEM at events like Fly Girl, where they learned about first aid and cybersecurity essentials (pages 2-3). They can also dive into democracy and civic engagement, like Girl Scouts did during our annual Girl Scout Day at the Capitol (page 5). Girl Scouts had the opportunity to connect directly with legislators, test out a ballot machine, and rally around Capitol Square (page 5).

At this time, Girl Scout Seniors and Ambassadors are often working on their Gold Award projects, which bring measurable and sustainable change to community issues. Gold Award Girl Scout Alexandra is a shining example of the power of the Gold Award (page 4). She demonstrated

leadership, resilience, and integrity while bringing a food pantry to Okauchee. We're proud to share that she received GSUSA's annual Gold Award Scholarship.

Of course, these opportunities would not be possible without the generous support of individuals and organizations in our community. Dedicated partners, like Komatsu, help shape our community's young leaders by bringing them unique experiences, like Komatsu's Tree Promise event (page 6).

As school kicks off, I want to say thank you. With your support, there's no limit to what Girl Scouts will create and discover.

Yours in Girl Scouting,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ana Simpson".

Ana Simpson  
GSWISE Chief Executive Officer



Ana Simpson, CEO