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a community publication

Local Girl Scouts journey to the heart of democracy

Summer 2026

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girl scouts 
of wisconsin
southeast

Girl Scouts Find Their Voices in Washington, D.C.



“Experiencing Arlington National Cemetery deepened my respect for our nation’s heroes and everyone who maintains our freedom.”
– Girl Scout Elizabeth

“I want to be President of the United States. Maybe it will take some time, but I believe that this trip will always be a landmark, an important factor to my path towards presidency.” – Girl Scout Azul

For 50 high school Girl Scouts, a trip to Washington, D.C. was more than famous landmarks. It was a chance to see democracy in action, explore the history of our country, and imagine themselves as leaders shaping its future.

The journey began months before the bus left Milwaukee. Through monthly pre-trip meetings, Girl Scouts earned their Democracy badges, built friendships with fellow travelers, and learned from government leaders, including Lt. Gov. Sara Rodriguez, Wisconsin Supreme Court justices Rebecca Dallet and Janet Protasiewicz, Mayor Shawn Reilly, and Kisha Buford from Racine Mayor Corey Mason’s office. By the time they arrived in the nation’s capital, they were ready to connect what they had studied with the places where history, policy, justice, and civic responsibility come to life.

During the trip, the Girl Scouts visited Mount Vernon, Georgetown University, the U.S. Capitol, Arlington National Cemetery, Lincoln, Vietnam, Pentagon, and Martin Luther King Jr. memorials, and more. They explored multiple Smithsonian museums, including the National Museum of African American History and Culture. Plus, they stretched their comfort zones through cultural dining experiences at Jaleo and Immigrant Food, learning how food can tell stories of culture, migration, and community.

For many girls, the experience was deeply personal. Girl Scout Azul H. reflected that the trip helped her connect her own voice and ambitions to the nation’s democratic ideals.

“I want to be President of the United States,” Azul shared. “Maybe it will take some time, but I believe that this trip will always be a landmark, an important factor to my path towards presidency.”

She was able to snap a picture in front of the U.S. Capitol wearing a “Future President” shirt.

“At that moment, I felt as though my skin color, gender, background – all of it didn’t matter. I was a girl with a dream and a passion, ready to go down that rocky path. It all starts with a picture in front of the U.S. Capitol.”

Girl Scout Elizabeth Z. found meaning in the memorials and the sacrifices they represent.

“Experiencing Arlington National Cemetery deepened my respect for our nation’s heroes and everyone who maintains our freedom,” Elizabeth said. At the Korean War Memorial, she was struck by the words, “Freedom Is Not Free,” a message she carried with her throughout the journey.



Girl Scouts had an inside peek at the U.S. Capitol.



Girl Scouts enjoyed an evening exploring the National Mall.



Girl Scouts adventured around George Washington’s Mount Vernon.

When you support Girl Scouts, you support life-changing experiences where Girl Scouts can deepen their perspectives, build new friendships outside of their schools, and reflect on leadership and service.

Stepping Up, Speaking Out, and Supporting Students



GSUSA Gold Award Scholarship recipient Kate shares her Gold Award project: Free to Succeed.

Through confidence, compassion, and a commitment to helping others, Gold Award Girl Scouts like Kate M. turn real-world challenges into lasting solutions. To earn the Gold Award, 10th-12th grade Girl Scouts spend 80+ hours identifying an issue, working with local leaders, and taking action to create measurable change.

Kate discovered that many students at St. Francis High School struggled to keep up in class, to maintain attendance, and to have high self-esteem because they didn't have access to essential materials. In response, Kate created the "Comfort Corner," a discreet space where students can access free school supplies, hygiene products, and snacks throughout the day.

Already, the Comfort Corner has helped hundreds of students, with thousands of supplies distributed. St. Francis High School's National Honor Society has committed to maintaining the space for years to come.

Throughout her project, she partnered with community organizations including the St. Francis Lions Club, St. Francis Common Council, BP/Citgo, Children's Hospital, St. Francis Recreation Department, and Project Concern to collect donations and sustain the initiative. She also raised awareness by speaking at local events and organizing school-wide supply drives.

"The most important lessons were to overcome the fear of failure and to ask for what I needed. It taught me that individuals of all levels, including friends, family, school superintendents, the school board, local clubs, and even the mayor, are willing to help if you are brave enough to ask," reflected Kate.

Kate also strengthened key skills in leadership, time management, and public speaking.

"Earning my Gold Award taught me that I'm more capable than I thought and that doing things that make me nervous make me stronger," said Kate. "Thanks to the public speaking required for my Gold Award, I am better able to make my voice heard."

Kate recently received the 2026 GSUSA Gold Award Scholarship, a national \$5,000 scholarship awarded to one Gold Award Girl Scout from each council for their leadership and service. She was also awarded one of Greater Milwaukee Foundation's inaugural Dorothy M. Mundschau Scholarships – the \$10,000 Community Impact Leadership scholarship.

"These scholarships mean that I can attend UW-Milwaukee," said Kate. "Seeing how much my Girl Scout Gold Award project helped people made me realize that advocating for others is where my heart lies. I hope to become a school social worker to continue helping kids in the future."

When you invest in Girl Scouts, you champion girls like Kate as they find their voice, build confidence, and create positive community change.



Girl Scout Kate received the Young Woman of Distinction award.

From Girl Scout Alum to Community Changemaker



Girl Scout alum Brooke McArdle participated in GSWISE's "She Will" campaign, hosted at Mt. Mary University.

Before serving as Interim Deputy Chief of Staff at Mount Mary University, Brooke McArdle discovered her voice and passion for service as a Girl Scout at Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast.

As a Girl Scout, Brooke experienced more than fun camp days and new friendships – she found a community that believed in her.

"They recognized strengths in me that I didn't always see in myself and encouraged me to pursue opportunities that challenged me to grow. Through their support and belief in my potential, they helped me develop the confidence, resilience, and leadership skills that shape who I am today," reflected Brooke.

As she progressed in Girl Scouts, Brooke earned her Gold Award, designing and building an Interactive Sensory Play Wall at a local camp. During her project, Brooke found her strength in advocacy work.

"Girl Scouts changed the trajectory of my life." – Girl Scout Brooke

"Through the Gold Award process, Girl Scouts gave me the confidence to become a changemaker, to advocate for others, to challenge assumptions, and to stand firm in my convictions, even when doing so meant going against the tide," said Brooke. "It taught me that leadership is not about fitting in; it is about using your voice and talents to create positive change for others."

Brooke's leadership continued to develop when she served as a Girl Board Member. At just 17, she had a seat at the table, learning about governance, finance, and organizational operations while contributing her perspective as a Girl Scout. The experience affirmed a lesson that has stayed with her: leadership is not defined by age or title, but by the willingness to contribute authentically.

Today, Brooke embodies that lesson through her work at Mount Mary and her service on GSWISE's Board Development Committee. For Brooke, giving back is an act of gratitude to an impactful organization and a commitment to ensuring future generations of girls find the same confidence, belonging, and courage to lead.

"Girl Scouts changed the trajectory of my life," Brooke said.

Now, she is helping make sure that same opportunity remains possible for every girl in our community.



As a younger Girl Scout, Brooke spent summers at Chinook Program Center.



Brooke earned her Gold Award working on a project focused on inclusivity at summer camp.

Why We Give: Washington, D.C. Learning Journey



Girl Scouts explored Georgetown University, with a special look at the university's founding documents.

This summer, 50 high school Girl Scouts traveled to Washington, D.C. for an immersive learning journey – at no cost. Donors made this opportunity possible because they believed deeply in what the experience could spark: curiosity, confidence, civic understanding, and a vision for the future.

For Herb Kohl Philanthropies, the journey continues Senator Herb Kohl's legacy of welcoming students to the nation's capital and helping young people gain a front-row seat to civics in action.

"We want to connect the classroom to the real world and bring civics and government to life for young people," said JoAnn Anton, president and CEO of Herb Kohl Philanthropies. Herb Kohl Philanthropies provided anchor support for this initiative, helping lay the groundwork for a program strengthened by the contributions of additional dedicated donors.

"We want to connect the classroom to the real world and bring civics and government to life for young people."
– JoAnn Anton, president and CEO of Herb Kohl Philanthropies

Anton also added that travel helps students build confidence and "the opportunity to see yourself there— wherever there is."

Rob Henken, executive director of the Herzfeld Foundation, recognized the alignment between the trip and the foundation's commitment to education and civic improvement.

"There's no better way for young people to enhance their understanding of what goes on in Washington, D.C. than to go and visit," he said. "An added benefit would be inspiration for talented young people to pursue careers in public service."

PNC Foundation recognized the opportunity for girls to develop teamwork, patience, and listening skills.

"Well-rounded, educated students bring more to the workforce, the education system, and our community," said Molly Schweiger, vice president, client and community relations director at PNC.

Support from the Herb Kohl Foundation, Herzfeld Foundation, PNC Foundation, and a private donor did more than fund a trip. It helped Girl Scouts afford the opportunity to travel independently, to practice civic engagement, to take responsibility, and to create lifetime memories.

Philanthropy events are bringing our community together to support the leadership, confidence, and future of Girl Scouts across southeast Wisconsin.

This summer's inaugural Breaking the Grass Ceiling Golf Tournament welcomed golfers, partners, and friends around a shared belief in opening doors for girls. The day was more than a tournament. Guests enjoyed female PGA-led clinics, a fun scramble, and mission-focused networking.

Girl Scout Ambassador Elizabeth shared her golf journey through her Gold Award project that expands golf access for other girls. Thank you to generous sponsors and community partners, including Jenny and Chris Bartlow, BizTimes Media, Radio Milwaukee 88.9, Microsoft, Baird, Heartland Funds, and Devon Norwood, for creating a warm foundation for future years.

This fall, join us for She Will: A Legacy of Leadership Celebration on September 24 at Discovery World, where we'll enjoy a dessert-first evening and Girl Scout leadership stories. Then, October 16–18, join Camp Rewind at Camp Silver Brook to relive childhood camp magic.

Whether you attend, invite a colleague or company to sponsor, volunteer, or give, your support helps open doors for more than 13,000 Girl Scouts as they build skills, confidence, and leadership experiences they need to learn, lead, and succeed.



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



Girl Scouts had hands-on training in emergency services careers at CampHERO.



GSWISE kicked off summer with a family-friendly Sizzlin' Summer Fun event at Camp Alice Chester.



Gold Award Girl Scouts from across the state met Governor Tony Evers and explored the Capitol.



This year's top Girl Scout Cookie sellers enjoyed a special reward: a cruise to the Bahamas.



Calendar of Events



September 24:
She Will: A Legacy of Leadership Celebration



October 1:
Fall Product Program Begins



October 16-18:
Camp Rewind



December 21-31:
GSWISE Offices Closed

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Dear Girl Scout Friends,

This summer, Girl Scouts of Wisconsin Southeast celebrated a season of new older girl adventures, scholarships, and impactful service.

For the first time, GSWISE took 50 high school Girl Scouts to Washington, D.C. on an immersive learning journey, where they explored civic engagement, history, responsibility, independent travel, and new friendships (page 2-3). Experiences like this are made possible by generous partners like Herb Kohl Philanthropies, Herzfeld Foundation, PNC Foundation, and other private donors (page 6).

We also celebrated multiple scholarships, including the Girl Scouts of the USA Gold Award Scholarship, awarded to local Gold Award Girl Scout Kate (page 4) for her project establishing accessible resources and support for local students. Congrats, Kate!

Working toward the Gold Award not only creates lasting community change, it helps Girl Scouts discover their leadership potential and deepen key life skills. Girl Scout Alum and Board Development Committee member Brooke McArdle had a chance to share how this experience impacted her and shaped her current career trajectory (page 5).

We can't wait to celebrate this legacy of leadership and our future generations at She Will on September 24 at Discovery World. This unforgettable evening will celebrate impact while creating meaningful opportunities to invest in girl leaders. We'll see you there!

Yours in Girl Scouting,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ana Simpson".

Ana Simpson
GSWISE Chief Executive Officer



Ana Simpson, CEO