

# Mokena Girl Scouts continuing to make a difference in the community

Harvey: Girl Scouts 'proud' of work in the surrounding community

DANNY CIAMPRONE, Editor

Whether in kindergarten or a senior in high school, there are three characteristics that Girl Scouts bestow to all of its members – courage, confidence and character.

“So give them the courage to develop confidence and to develop their character to find who they are,” said Jennifer O’Dell, leader of Girl Scout Troop 70442 in Mokena.

For the Girl Scout troops in Mokena, which are part of Girl Scout Unit 741, being a Girl Scout is not just about taking part in a wide variety of fun activities but also taking part in service projects to better the community, as well as to further develop as leaders.

“I think Mokena Girl Scouts in particular are very community oriented,” said Deborah Harvey, co-leader of Girl Scout Troop 70980. “[Girl Scouts] can expect to have opportunities to do community service, grow self confidence and have great friendships.”

Harvey said Troop 70980 has also been involved with several different organizations throughout the area.

“Locally, we’ve been involved with PAWS, My Joyful Heart, the Frankfort Township Food Pantry ... I know my troop has done stuff with the MorningStar Mission,” she said.

O’Dell said in her troop they try to get the girls involved in more community service activities starting in fifth-grade. As the troop begins to take part in more service projects, they can earn several awards, with juniors being able to earn their bronze award, cadets earn their silver award and senior ambassadors can earn the gold



Earlier this summer, eight Mokena Girl Scouts were honored with the President's Volunteer Service Award at Lincoln-Way East High School. 22ND CENTURY MEDIA FILE PHOTO

award, which is the equivalent to an Eagle Scout, she said.

“As a service unit, we try to have at least one event for the month for all the girls to participate in, on top of 1-2 meetings a month as well, just in smaller groups, and those are usually done by age,” O’Dell said.

Harvey said the leader of each troop in a unit typically determines the meeting times, but each of the girls in every troop work to obtain a variety of patches for their work in the community and for learning new skills, which can be art based, outdoor based and civic service based.

“I know in my troop we take a vote, so we try to cater the meetings to the interest of the girls, and I know other troops do that too, so it’s not just some grown up saying, ‘This is what we’re doing,’” Harvey said.

Both Harvey and O’Dell said the confidence they see develop in the girls is evident over the

years the more they participate in new experiences and civic service projects in becoming future leaders.

“I think people really underestimate kids in general, and I think when kids are out in the community doing community service work, they feel great,” Harvey said. “We’ve been together [with Troop 70980] since second-grade and they’re freshman in high school this year, and to realize that you can be out there at 8, 9, 10 years old and really making a difference in the lives of other people, and to realize your capability at such a young age, it’s just so powerful for these girls.

“They’re really proud of what they accomplish and when they realize they can do stuff they want to do more.”

Signup is available throughout the year for the Mokena Girl Scouts and financial aid is available for those who would like to join.

For more information, visit [www.mokenagirlescouts.com](http://www.mokenagirlescouts.com).

# Mokena Boy Scout troops provide lessons, opportunities year-round

Sign up is available all year to join Boy Scout groups

DANNY CIAMPRONE, Editor

Throughout the years, Boy Scout troops in Mokena have provided countless opportunities to young men, from high adventure camps to just helping to develop better leaders for tomorrow.

But it is also the intangibles that Boy Scouts provides that have become evident for local scout masters and the community.

“There are some kids that are totally shy in the beginning [of Boy Scouts] and they just kind of do stuff because they’re told, and then after a couple campouts they know exactly what to do and tell the other kids what to do,” said Bob Koch, scoutmaster for Troop 725 in Mokena. “The more they participate the more they learn, the more confident they get and then in a year or two they’re running patrol or they’re elected to a higher office in the troop.”

Tim Toepke, scoutmaster for Troop 40 in Mokena, said he sees confidence and leadership shine as well with boys in the troop as the months and years go by as they participate in various activities and leadership opportunities.

“I think the thing that separates our troop from many of the other troops is I believe Boy Scouts should be a boy lead troop,” Toepke said. “It has to be a scout led operation and that’s what we’re striving for. It teaches the young men responsibility and that there are consequences for their actions or inactions.”

Toepke said that Boy Scout Troop 40 is the oldest Boy Scout troop in Mokena, and one of the reasons for the success of its longevity is parental involvement.

“Young men succeed as long as their parents help them succeed,” Toepke said. “Mom and dad don’t need to be standing there at their shoulder and watching everything they do, but mom and dad need to be there and encourage that scout.”

Koch said one of the traits that distinguishes Troop 725 is the want

from scouts to participate in more high adventure and camping activities throughout the year, which includes going on a campout or hike at least one a month, as well as spending a week at summer camp every year in Michigan.

“Next year they have what’s called high adventure trips, which are for the older scouts, and right now we have trips on the board,” he said.

That includes a high adventure trip to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, and a canoe trip to the boundary waters.

“We want to teach them some outdoor skills and team building skills to make them better leaders,” Koch said. “They always say scouting is a game with a purpose, and the thing is when they’re out on campouts they’re learning stuff, but they don’t know they’re learning stuff.”

There are a series of principles and guidelines every Boy Scout lives by, including always being prepared, to help other people at all times and to leave no trace when it comes to becoming a future leader.

“We try to maintain to the best of our ability what the Boy Scouts of America stands for,” Toepke said.

And it is because of that tradition that Toepke has been able to see that leadership develop firsthand, including when it came to a 15-year-old in Boy Scouts who is now a senior patrol leader. Toepke recalled how on his first stormy campout, the young scout was ready to go home, and now he travels to northern Wisconsin regularly for campouts.

Meetings for Troop 40 are typically every Sunday afternoon at St. John’s United Church of Christ in Mokena, and is open to anyone in the surrounding area who wishes to join the troop.

Meetings for Troop 725, sponsored by the Mokena VFW, are held on Monday nights at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Mokena. Sign up for both troops is available year-round.

For more information on Troop 725, visit [www.mokenatroop725.webs.com](http://www.mokenatroop725.webs.com) or email [kochr@att.net](mailto:kochr@att.net).

For more information on Troop 40, call (815) 351-3537.