

Lidia Soto-Harmon
Chief Executive Officer
Girl Scouts Nation's Capital
April 13, 2019 Annual Meeting



Thank you, Faye and thank you to all of our amazing Girl Scout presenters today. It's been an incredible year for Girl Scouts Nation's Capital. We have seen marketplace competition in this market, but nevertheless we persisted! We have told our story loud and proud, demonstrating not only our strength, but also a united purpose to make girls strong.

Girl Scouts was built on solid ground. Juliette Gordon Low had a remarkable vision: to encourage girls to be courageous, confident and strong, even before women could vote or own property in our own country. Thanks to all of you, we have kept her vision alive. Our uniforms, badges and age levels have evolved over the years, but what has remained constant in Girl Scouts – are the skills mastered, service hours completed, and the leadership acquired.

Our Movement is even more important today. We are helping girls secure a fulfilling future by embracing what girls care about today. Let me share some highlights from this year.

Despite the myth that girls don't camp, or the stereotype that women don't appreciate the outdoors, we know that thousands of girls are Stepping Outdoors with Girl Scouts: 47,467 to be exact!

Our Girl Scout families utilize our eight magnificent camp properties.

Stop and think, how many other youth serving organizations have eight camp properties in the Greater Washington region alone?

In addition to troop camping, this summer over 4,000 girls will be attending sleep-away camp and over 3,500 girls will go to our Day and Evening camps run by amazing volunteers.

That is because camping is in our DNA. Can you repeat that with me? Camping is in our DNA!

We know that girls thrive in the outdoors. One of Juliette Gordon Low's first acquisition, after founding Girl Scouts was to buy Cloudlands, later renamed Camp Juliette Low in the northwest corner of Georgia. Because in the outdoors girls discover they can solve problems and overcome challenges. They learn to become better team players and build social bonds. They can explore their passions, dream big and become leaders like our Girl Scouts speakers today - Bailey, Carmen and Jaylah. The opportunity to try new things is at every turn, so taking risks becomes the norm. Even if they fail, they do so fearlessly.

Just this past summer, I thought it important to get outside my comfort zone and step outdoors like our Girl Scouts do at camp. I decided to be a part of the real Girl Scout story.

My journey took me to two of our Girl Scout high adventure camps.

I climbed 30 feet in the air to the highest point of our high adventure ropes course at Camp White Rock, and then took the deep plunge into a dark, muddy, cave with campers at Camp May Flather.

Yes, both activities required a helmet and safety gear. I took a leap of faith, and was astonished by how much these outdoor adventures taught me. Above all it taught me to be fearless.

This year, we added an additional position to our camping services department, a high adventure specialist. Her charge is to help Girl Scout troops explore high adventure activities. She is increasing our resources to include more high adventure volunteers and streamlining the process so that more troops can zip line across our high adventure ropes course, throw a tomahawk with precision and navigate the Aquia Creek in a kayak.

Because camping is in our DNA!

My goal is to ensure that we remain the best leadership organization for girls. That means keeping the G.I.R.L. in scouting (go-getters, innovators, risk takers and leaders). Because who runs this organization—GIRLS!

Girls like Alice Paul Tapper who has inspired Girl Scouts, young and old, to not be intimidated, but to be bold and brave and Raise Your Hand.

Alice observed that girls in her class were shying away from raising their hands or volunteering for school activities. She brought the issue to her Girl Scout troop, and they all agreed, Girl Scouts should have a patch for that.

Only in a girl-led organization, could a ten-year old create a movement. Today, 13,000 girls and women have taken the Raise Your Hand pledge and purchased the patch.

Raise Your Hand catapulted Girl Scouts to the national stage. Alice appeared on the Ellen Show, Today Show, CNN, and where it all started, Fox channel 5.

Alice is here today, signing her book, *Raise Your Hand*. Generously, Alice donated \$25,000, her book advance to our Council.

She also secured for our Council a \$25,000 donation from Oprah to help us enhance our Raise Your Hand movement. And then on Ellen, oh Ellen was not going to be outdone by Oprah. So, she said to Alice she would also make a huge donation. And she did...she gave Alice a check for twenty-five thousand and one dollars (\$25,001) to support Girl Scouts Nation's Capital Raise Your Hand.

Alice you are in the room, can you stand so we can all say thank you!
Alice shows us that we can take girls from being shy to being fearless.

And, it is with that same veracity, that Girl Scouts aims to close the gender gap in STEM, leadership and entrepreneurship. Because we know that the world benefits from the work of women inventors, scientist, designers, artists and leaders.

Our Cookie program just came to a close, and as Judy reported earlier, Girl Scouts sold 4.55 Million boxes of Girl Scout

Cookies. In the process girls grew in confidence, sharpened their math and marketing skills and learned how to run a business.

The largest number of Gold Award Girl Scouts in a decade, 225 girls earned the Gold Award, the highest achievement in Girl Scouts. Thanks to our former board president, Diane Tipton, this year, we are launching at the "In Your Honor" ceremony in May, a major campaign to elevate awareness of the Gold Award.

When girls build vegetable gardens to help feed their communities, when girls organize anti-bullying clubs to ensure that no child with a disability feels left out, when girls write legislation to protect our environment, we know that these girls-- these Gold Award Girl Scouts-- are GIRLS THE WORLD NEEDS!

That's our new campaign, Gold Award Girl Scouts, Girls the World Needs.

I am proud of Girl Scouts' legacy of women leaders including the record number of women just elected to Congress. 79 of the 131 female members of this Congress (60%) are all Girl Scout alums.

We know that all the women Secretaries of States, and almost every female astronaut who has flown in outer space were Girl Scouts – ALL FEARLESS.

But if we are to carry out the legacy of Juliette Gordon Low and her expectation for '*girls In Savannah, all of America and the world,*' it's important that we recruit and retain our members.

We continue to be the largest Girl Scout council in the nation, with 87,254 girl and adult members.

Today, we begin early bird. Last year, we retained 70 percent of our girl and adult members. That is one of the highest retention rates in the nation. In fact, girls who participate in troops, and are supported by service units, have an even higher retention of 77 percent. Much credit goes to our dedicated volunteers for delivering incredible Girl Scout experiences.

At this meeting last year, I asked each of you to commit to asking every girl and potential adult in your area to be part of this amazing Girl Scout journey. To support this, we created a new Fill Your Troop patch. Along with other initiatives and your support, we have done an incredible job of recruiting new girls. Let's make sure we continue extending membership opportunities to every girl.

And on that note, can I hear our membership bells?

At our August Kickoff, we awarded association 51, Ashgrove West the bell for the largest increase in the number of girls registered—185, with every service unit exceeding goal. And for largest percentage increase in girls registered –three Associations tied: Association 11, Calvert County; Association 40, D.C. East; and Association 14, Shenandoah Region. They all realized a five percent increase in girls. Let's hear those bells.

I want to thank each of you for supporting Girl Scouts. When girls are surrounded by people who believe their potential is limitless they become fearless!

It starts with one girl and grows exponentially stronger with every girl we reach. One girl like Girl Scout Brownie Madison Wilkinson who performed at Peoples Congregational's 50th anniversary of Girl Scouting. She touched my heart, and I'd like her to share the song she wrote for all of you today.