



Annual Meeting: April 8, 2017
Remarks from the CEO
Lidia Soto-Harmon, Chief Executive Officer

Thank you, Faye.

I have to say, today has been so inspiring. Listening to the stories of our remarkable G.I.R.L. speakers, I am reminded of what girls can achieve when they have support and encouragement.

In February, we held two leadership conferences in Virginia and Maryland for Latina girls, called *Encuentro de Chicas Latinas*.

Encuentro is very close to my heart, and I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet some amazing young women who have high hopes for their future.

We asked the girls to write down their dreams, and they shared how they wanted to help others and be change agents by working in a hospital, traveling the world and joining the army.

One girl said she didn't care what she would be, as long as she was on top!

I love this quote shared by the girl on the right. She wrote, "*Be a pineapple. Stand tall, wear a crown, and be sweet on the inside.*"

Meeting these girls, I was reminded of our responsibility to get them on the path to becoming confident, strong and empowered to reach their full potential.

At Girl Scouts, we believe in the power of every G.I.R.L. That's why we're here. It's up to us to help girls explore their passions, dream big and become leaders.

And that starts with those we serve right here in our communities.

We know the best way to support our girls is by maintaining a strong Council.

We took a hard look at our operations and made the decision to realign our Council staff and create a structure that would better support our volunteers and members.

As some of you may know, we transitioned to 6 regional membership teams, geographically based throughout our Council.

We invested in 4 new membership specialist positions and another membership area manager to improve workloads and spread goals equitably. Now, membership specialists are responsible for 3 to 4 Service Units, or on average, 1,500 girls. We know that the more we support the adults serving girls, the more girls we can reach.

We also integrated membership initiatives into each of our six teams, providing resources in those hard-to-reach communities. I'm delighted to report that three of our new hires are all bilingual, which is already helping us engage the Latino community.

We wanted our staff to be even more responsive to you, our members. Thanks to Volunteer Systems, our new technology, we are improving our customer service. Staff now create and manage cases that better track your inquiries and respond in a timely manner. In fact, we have closed over 29,000 cases to date.

And it's working! Today, we remain the largest Girl Scout Council in the country with over 86,000 members and a 67 percent retention rate of girls.

We are also currently over 800 girls registered to date as compared to last year at this time. This is such great news!

We owe this success to you, our dedicated volunteers and members who share time, talent and treasure with our girls. You are the superheroes who keep our Movement growing.

Can I hear the membership bells?!

At our August Kickoff, we awarded the coveted membership bells to those Associations who successfully increased the number and percentage of girls registered. I'd like to give another shout out to those Associations now.

One of our top Associations had an increase of 20 percent—that's 225 girls! Where is Association 40 - DC East? Are Sylvia Bryant and LaVerne Brown in the house?

With a 22 percent increase—that's 127 girls—we have Association 23 - Northern Prince George's County! Would Sandy Crowley please stand up?

This year, we have six Associations in the running for the membership bell. Associations 53; 34; 60; 40; 52 and 33. Make some noise!

Remember, your support will be more important than ever in the coming year. At our last Annual Meeting, we mentioned that membership dues will increase to \$25 beginning this coming Girl Scout year, which starts with early bird renewal this month.

The national membership dues ensure our Movement has the resources to support our mission by developing girl programs and investing in new technology. In fact, I just returned from the Girl Scouts CEO Summit, and I'm very encouraged by some of the amazing programming that's in store for all of us.

I can tell you that your feedback has been heard! GSUSA is hard at work making Journeys more user-friendly for leaders, with shorter, easier-to-follow modules. There are four new Journeys in the works: three STEM-related Journeys and one focused on outdoor skills. In addition, there are several new badges scheduled for release this summer on topics including engineering, robotics and the outdoors. We continue to learn more details and look forward to sharing with you.

We know this dues increase will be challenging for some of our members. We want you to know the board is fully committed to helping make sure this is not an impediment for our girls or adults. Thanks to SHARE, every girl and volunteer who needs financial assistance will be helped. It's our mission to make sure every girl who wants to be a Girl Scout can fully participate in this life-changing leadership experience.

And that includes being in the outdoors!

I'm reminded of a story about our founder. Juliette Gordon Low was once asked what girls should do in Girl Scouting, and she replied, "What do the girls want to do?"

Well, our girls want to get outdoors.

Last year, nearly 50,000 of our members participated in outdoor programs. Just like our G.I.R.L. Elizabeth, girls had the chance to try new things, test their limits and seek out challenges through incredible outdoor experiences. We were excited to see many girls taking advantage of the new Girls' Choice outdoor badges—in fact, over 10,000 have been earned so far!

We can't wait for sleep-away camp season this summer. We have over 3,800 girls already registered, putting us at 93 percent capacity.

Thanks to the generosity of several donors, our camps will stay beautiful for girls to enjoy. We are installing air conditioning in two lodges at camp Coles Trip and Potomac Woods; replacing the roof at Camp Brighton Woods; improving the waste water facility at Camp Winona; and winterizing a bathroom at Camp White Rock.

But the most exciting news of all...we just built an amazing high-ropes adventure course at Camp White Rock in Capon Bridge, West Virginia—also thanks to a generous donor. Let me tell you, this is going to be thrilling! Girls will navigate their way through a figure-eight high ropes course, finishing with a 300-foot long zip-line through the trees and over Girl Scout Run Creek.

Girls asked for adventure, and we are delivering. Girl Scout Juniors through Ambassadors will begin using the course this fall. Head to our website for more information. I can't wait to zip-line myself!

It has also been a very delicious year for Cookies!

In honor of 100 years of girls selling Cookies, we added a brand new cookie to our lineup: the Girl Scout S'mores. And customers can't get enough! The S'mores cookie was in demand, accounting for 9.5 percent of our total Cookie sale.

Because of all the excitement, we're having an amazing cookie sale. As you heard in Jeri's report, girls sold 4.4 million boxes this year!

Thanks to G.I.R.L.s like Mychal-Jael, troops earned over \$3 million in proceeds to support their Girl Scout activities and good work in the community. We know they couldn't have done it without your help. If you volunteered to support the Cookie sale this year, thank you.

And if you ate more than a sleeve of cookies, clap louder!

Girls in our Council aren't just learning entrepreneurial skills. Through amazing experiences in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), G.I.R.L.s like Sophia are discovering from a young age that a career in STEM can be for them, too.

In our Council, our girls earned 63,000 STEM badges last year.

We are also partnering with local organizations to bring more STEM programming to our girls. We teamed up with the Maryland Center for Women in Computing to pilot a robotics program for Brownies and Juniors. It was incredible to watch the girls learn how to work together and solve problems—and, as you can see from the photo, have fun!

I can't wait to see what amazing STEM projects girls from our Council display at our Maker Day event. We hope you'll join us on May 6 at NOVA Annandale Campus.

This summer, we are offering fun opportunities for you to connect with Girl Scout friends—all while raising funds for SHARE! Once again, you can purchase discount tickets to HersheyPark, and a portion of the proceeds will support Girl Scouts.

We also teamed up with our friends at the Washington Nationals to present Girl Scout Day at the Nats on Saturday, June 10. When you buy discounted tickets, \$5 from every ticket sold will support SHARE! Let's make some noise!

We highly encourage you to attend with your troop or with your families. The more tickets we sell, the more opportunities girls will have to participate in fun activities on the field. You can visit our website to learn more.

Before I close, I'd like to share a quote from Malala Yousafzai, an incredible education activist and the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate. Malala said, *"I raise up my voice not so I can shout, but*

so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.”

All girls deserve equal opportunities to succeed in life.

By supporting girls on their path to becoming go-getters, innovators, risk-takers and leaders, it is my hope that they will create positive change in our community, our country and around the world. And it all starts with the work you do to inspire our girls and to encourage them to follow their dreams. Thank you.