

GIRL SCOUT COUNCIL OF THE NATION'S CAPITAL

ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 9, 2011

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REMARKS

LIDIA SOTO-HARMON

Thank you Diane. And thank you all for your warm welcome.

[HOLD SLIDE, Remarks by LSH]

As I was preparing for my remarks today, I was reviewing Jan's speech from our last Annual Meeting. It struck me as she said goodbye after 25 amazing years, she remarked how the show goes on...she said, and I quote, "...*but for you next year will come, there will be another annual meeting and a new Executive Director will be standing in this place.*" And here I am, in that place, to begin this journey with you. To start a new chapter in this story, that next year, will be 100 years old.

My story begins at Camp CEO this past August. I was the "acting CEO" at the time and was asked to help with camp. I'm not sure if you remember how hot it was? *<look around>* It was like 100 degrees hot *<as if this next thought is just occurring to you>* You know, at the time I wondered if this was some kind of test – spending the entire week without air conditioning, living outdoor, using latrines at Camp Coles Trip...I imagined people thinking "If Lidia can survive a week in the woods, maybe she can handle being CEO."

Well, I survived that experience – and was changed by it.

[PICTURE OF GIRLS AT CAMP CEO]

<pause reflectively> I spent time with some of the most exceptional women and teen Girl Scouts. They truly touched my heart with their compassion and joyful play.

[BACK TO LIVE]

And then the very next week was my interview with Angela Lancaster and the Search Committee at the McCormick Group.

So when I got home from camp I took a long hot shower, got a fresh haircut, and asked my family to help me prepare for the big interview. I did a Google search, made a list of some typical questions for CEO interviews, and handed them out to my husband and teenage son and daughter. I sat everybody down at the kitchen table, poured a glass of water, put on my "power pumps" and re-entered the room for my "mock" interview.

I figured it would be a good teaching moment for my kids, Tommy and Nina. If I got the job, they would learn that you need to prepare for what you want, and if I didn't get the job, they would learn that things don't always work out as you hope – even if you really, *really* want something.

Nina asked about my experience with finances, and then my college-bound son asked, “But why mami, why do you want to be CEO?” Well...I started to cry and told him, “Because I really want to be CEO!” And he started saying to me, “Well, you can't go in there and cry, CEOs don't cry, you have to look tough, you have to be confident!” And so the next day with my tears wiped away, I went in and did the best job I could.

Thank goodness, the search committee saw that we were a good match. The following Tuesday, August 24, 2010, the Board of Directors voted unanimously to confirm my appointment as the new CEO and my dream has become a reality as I stand in front of you for my first Annual Meeting in this role.

Thanks to everyone who sent notes of congratulation and guidance, books filled with advice, and so many beautiful flowers. Through these expressions I felt your support. And when I feel overwhelmed or nervous, I know that I am not alone, you are with me. Together, we will serve the girls, in this amazing council.

So, you are wondering how is our council doing? The truth is that we have not skipped a beat this year, our membership is strong, our programs are filling fast, our sleep away camps only have 74 slots left, our fall product sales was successful, our cookie sale – as you heard from our President – exceeded our budget, and visibility in the greater Washington area continues to grow.

TROOP, INCLUSION, PROGRAM AND VOLUNTEERS

A primary theme in our council's story is troops. We continue to serve as many girls as possible through the troop, the tried and true model of our founder Juliette Gordon Low. This is a deliberate strategy to focus on providing the richest experience for all our girls and retaining them into their teen years. Today, our troop affiliation stands at 94% compared to the national average of 66%. Although we paid a price for this focus, last year realizing a 3.6 % decrease in our girl membership, we are on track to not only meet, but to exceed our goal of over 63 thousand girls, a 3% increase for FY'11. [applause].

Our strong membership performance for this year actually began last May with an incredible response to our Early Bird process – we registered almost 27 thousand girls, a 4.2% increase compared to the previous year.

With the launch of GSUSA's new online registration system we experience some frustrations. However, the migration to the new system has made a significant and positive impact on our ability to capture information quickly and better serve our members.

Everything we do happens, thanks to the work that we do at the grass roots level, and the Associations are an important ingredient to our success. The much coveted Membership Bells last year went to Associations 34 and 70 – they were presented at the fall kick-off...and I have heard rumor that both bells are with us today. [wait to see if they ring bells]

Congratulations to Association 34 – *Lower Montgomery County* in Maryland and Association 70 – *Goose Creek* in Virginia.

Last year’s winners are contenders again this year but they have some friendly competition from Associations 14, 33, 42, and 60. Stay tuned.

Inclusion

But being a Girl Scout is not just about membership, it is about belonging. Our council has a strong commitment to serve girls of all abilities and lead other councils to do the same.

**[PICTURE OF Lidia, Kevin
and GIRLS FROM MEAF]**

The day of our President’s Circle Dinner, March 11th, I was honored to receive from the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation their Champion Leader Award on behalf of the Girl Scout Movement.

[SLIDE GIRLS FROM MEAF]

Two girls with disabilities, Malia from San Diego and Tina from North Carolina presented the award and I was again touched with how our work changes a girl’s life. We know that inclusion is a part of our culture. We know that when we recruit girls with disabilities we are changing the world for everyone.

In just the last three years alone, we have increased the number of girls with disabilities we serve by 300 percent. Girls in wheelchairs go hiking, and girls who are visually impaired have led our flag ceremonies.

I remember how this fall after attending summer camp, a mom shared with me, tears in her eyes, that her daughter, who has Autism, “was able to work on her socialization skills and meet new friends in a fun and comfortable environment... thanks to Girl Scouting.”

So it is no surprise that the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation tapped us to be the host of the first-ever national inclusion conference—***Keys to Leadership***, to help teach girls and adults that girls of all abilities must have an opportunity to share in the rich Girl Scout experience. Over 40 Girl Scout Councils came to Washington, DC in March to share and learn best practices. Our membership growth means that more girls are getting the opportunity to soar.

[BACK TO LIVE]

PROGRAM

So our council's story is about troop, about inclusion and about serving girls through innovative programs and enriching camp experiences. Patch programs like African Americans in Congress and Sun Safety; conferences like: Encuentro de Chicas Latinas and Your Turn to Lead, and inspiring events like the DC Stepshowcase, Girl Scout Day at the Newseum, and in camping, hiking the Potomac Woods RiverWalk or scaling the climbing wall at May Flather. These all represent the rich opportunities that our council offers girls.

GOLD AWARD

These opportunities are what inspire our girls to achieve, and for our fourth consecutive year we have over 200 Girl Scouts earning our highest award, the Gold Award. [applause]

[SLIDE OF GIRLS PRESENTING CANVAS AT Board MEETING]

And more girls are taking up the challenge of the *Girl Scout Journeys*. In fact, Girl Scout Senior Troop 3611 from Fairfax, VA, together with their troop leader Badria Kafala presented three beautiful canvases as a gift to the council at our March Board Meeting. This amazing art project was created as part of their work to complete the *Girlltopia Journey*, where girls are invited to create their vision as an art project, and then take action to make their vision a reality. For their *take action project*, the troop produced a YouTube video against domestic violence. They shared how important it was to discover, that judgment should not be based on physical appearance but rather based on your mind and good character, what matters is what each one of us has inside.

[BACK TO LIVE]

Another amazing opportunity came to us in late November, we were invited to form part of the First Lady's initiative to fight obesity in our country. Eight leaders from faith and community organizations were invited to join Mrs. Obama for a conference call at the White House to launch the program. Now, I must admit that I thought I would be in the basement of the White House somewhere but to my surprise it was in the First Lady's conference. So I walk in with my fellow community leaders and there is a table with place cards including one for Mrs. Obama. All the cards are at the table except for mine. I looked and in a very nice wing back chair in the corner, I see **my** place card on that chair. And I thought well I am sure that Mrs. Obama would not want the Girl Scouts sitting in the corner. So after she came in and greeted all of us and sat down. I carefully scooted my chair up to the table with my fellow community leaders.

[Slide with Mrs. Obama]

So you see why in this picture I am the only one that has a different chair and why I am a little lower than my colleagues. (Nobody puts baby in the corner).

But on a serious note, we are really delighted to commit to the following actions:

- We will increase awareness of *Let's Move!*, with our 4,900 troops
- We will challenge our members to earn the President's Active Lifestyle Award (PALA).
- And work on getting healthy snacks and meals at all of our day and sleep away camps.

[BACK TO LIVE]

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Adult Volunteer Development

But our story is only made possible by the adults who serve girls. We are always searching for new ways to support our adult volunteers. Last year, almost 6,000 volunteers – double the number from the previous year, took advantage of distance learning opportunities like: online training, conference calls, and home studies.

This means that adult educators now have more time to conduct in-person courses and one-on-one consultations. With the addition of 35 new volunteers joining the ranks of adult educators, we now have a total of 245 adults working in their communities to share Girl Scout information. Let's hear it for our adult volunteers *[applause]*.

It truly takes a village to support Girl Scouts. A troop might need an expert in cooking or chemistry; a teen girl may need supplies for her Gold Award Project. And so last year we launched "the Pixie List." A website, similar to "Craig's List," where you can find volunteers, offer volunteer opportunities, or swap resources. The response has been remarkable. Talent and treasures have been shared in ways we never thought possible. Like the teller at Wachovia who is now a cookie volunteer, or the U.S. Marine who is now mentoring girls in her area. Through the Pixie List, many have been re-united with the Girl Scout community and have joined the ranks of our volunteers.

Social media is the place to be, and in this past year we used it to stay connected. We currently have 2,065 friends on FaceBook, and close to 2,000 fans on our Girl Scout Rock the Mall Page, but what has been the most amazing connection recently is the outpouring of support for our Girl Scout sisters in Japan. We have hundreds of troops in our area that are making origami cranes to send to them.

[Slide Girls with cranes]

Here is Troop 1346 who made 1,000 cranes to send to Japan! And posted it on our FaceBook page. The peace sign made up of cranes was the girls' idea!

We also heard from a Daisy Troop Leader who lives in Japan, that, in an effort to help her girls cope, she discovered the "Be Prepared" patch on our website. She reached out to us and asked if it was ok if her girls earned the patch and she would buy it from us. We were delighted to give her all the patches she needed. In the midst of tragedy, technology

allowed troops who were otherwise separated by thousands of miles to be joined in sisterhood.

[HOLD SLIDE, Remarks by LSH]

Closing Section

So as I stand in front of you just seven months into this story we have great things to look forward to...with our 100 anniversary just around the corner. I am grateful to each of you for all your hard work to make our organization strong. I want to especially thank our dedicated Council staff for their partnership with our volunteers, together we are a great council. So as we begin our centennial, we honor the rich stories of our sisters, and look forward to creating new stories of success, compassion and service that will carry us into another great 100 years.

In the words of my father, "*Siempre hacia adelante, atras, ni para coger impluso*". Translated it means "*Always move forward, never step backwards, not even to get a running start!*" So let's move forward together.