Mayor's Column for the March 21, 2012 Review

Happy 100th Anniversary, Evansville Girl Scouts! On March 12, 1912, eighteen girls met in Savannah, Georgia, at the invitation of Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scouts of America. Through the decades, more than 50 million American girls and women have participated in the Girl Scout program. Today, there are 2.3 million Scouts and 880,000 adult volunteers active in the organization.

Last week I was in Washington, D.C. for the American Public Power Association Legislative Rally (I will report on the meeting in my next column). One evening I visited the Smithsonian Institution National Portrait Gallery. There was an exhibit about Juliette Low and 100 years of Girl Scouting. It included a wonderful 1887 oil portrait of Juliette by artist Edward Hughes. The original patent for the Girl Scout trefoil badge, dated February 10, 1914, and numbered 45,234, was on display.

Throughout the Gallery, portraits of women who had been Girl Scouts were identified. Some of the well-known women who participated in the Girl Scout program include Nancy Reagan, Hillary Clinton, Geraldine Ferraro, and Jeane Kirkpatrick, the first woman to serve as U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. U.S. Congresswoman Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin is an honorary Girl Scout. First Lady Michelle Obama serves as honorary president of the Girl Scouts of America, as have many first ladies before her.

That evening the Gallery hosted a book talk by Stacy Cordery, author of a new book entitled "Juliette Gordon Low." Dr. Cordery is a professor of history at Monmouth College in Illinois. Cordery indicated that she was a third generation Girl Scout, and that she was fascinated by the storage of her mother's Girl Scout uniform in the same box as her wedding gown, a statement, she felt, of its importance in her mother's life.

Cordery spoke of Juliette Low's passion for encouraging girls to become civic-minded, competent, self-confident, and sociable. Low initiated programs and training to broaden girls' experiences and developed merit and proficiency badges for accomplishments. Early programs included marksmanship, camping, astronomy, and horsemanship, as well as Morse code and first aid training.

Low wrote a manual for the Girl Scout organization. Through the years millions of girls have recited the Girl Scout Promise:

> On my honor I will try:
> To serve God and my country,
> To help people at all times,
> And to live by the Girl Scout Law.

The Girl Scout Law:

> I will do my best to be
> honest and fair,
> friendly and helpful,
> considerate and caring,

courageous and strong, and
responsible for what I say and do,
and to
respect myself and others,
respect authority,
use resources wisely,
make the world a better place, and
be a sister to every Girl Scout.

Information from local historian Ruth Ann Montgomery that includes local newspaper articles shows an Evansville Girl Scout troop dating to the late 1920s. Hundreds of Evansville area girls, adult leaders, and volunteers have enjoyed Girl Scout activities through the years.

I have many fond and long-lasting Girl Scout memories. Summer day camps at Lake Leota top my list. We made sit-upons from folded pages of newspapers woven together and shellacked to make them waterproof. There were hikes in the "woods" surrounding Lake Leota—I was intrigued by the stile crossing a fence. We slept overnight under the stars on the upper ball diamond and made coffee can stew for supper. I recall making neighborhood deliveries with a Coaster wagon full of Girl Scout cookies or nuts. I enjoyed Council-sponsored train excursions to Wisconsin Dells and the Brookfield Zoo in Illinois.

I reminisced about Girl Scouts with Sally Mauerman Reisem at a recent BASE meeting. As a youth, Sally lived in Magnolia and remembers vividly carpooling to troop meetings in town. We both recalled Helen Ward and Irene Higginbotham as our Girl Scout leaders.

I spent four years as a Girl Scout leader while living in Wauwatosa. Our focus was on providing our troop with a variety of experiences. We offered lessons of compassion, volunteerism, and leadership. We made tray favors for area nursing homes and enjoyed Christmas caroling at a local hospital. We camped at Alice Chester Center and Camp Evelyn, took nature hikes, and arranged a troop horseback ride in the Kettle Moraine. We flew balsa wood airplanes, held a style show through the Limited, visited a veterinarian, and learned about banking.

We traveled to the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago and turned our Girl Scouts loose in the FAO Schwarz Store on Michigan Avenue (a chaperone was stationed at the store entry/exit). I was touched by a Scout who told me that our Chicago trip was her first trip outside of Wisconsin. She was twelve.

I have been involved in Girl Scouting longer than I have been mayor. Scouting has been important to me, both as a Scout and as a leader. Reflecting on Juliette Low's organizational goals, Girl Scouts of the USA remains relevant today. Building experiences and leadership skills in an accepting, encouraging environment is tremendously important for girls. The Girl Scout adult leader/volunteer is a non-family

role model and mentor for her Scouts and also occasionally for Scout parents or other adult volunteers.

I recall two instances that defined "girl" experience for me. When our daughter was in elementary school, the Decker family of five always gathered for Sunday dinner at Grandma and Grandpa's house. Grandpa was a Wisconsin Court of Appeals judge and Dad was a trial attorney. There was always legal discussion during and after dinner. One Sunday our daughter asked Grandpa if only men could be judges. The question has bothered me through the years.

Third grade students in Evansville visit the mayor at City Hall. A question and answer session is part of the visit. Two years ago, a young girl asked me if only women could be mayors. The teachers and I were startled. As I thought about the question, I realized that this eight-year old had only known women as mayors in Evansville. Janis Ringhand was mayor for four years and I had been mayor for four years.

Experience is critical, and statistics show that building women leaders remains a priority. A few examples: there are 17 women U.S. Senators out of 100; there are 6 women U.S. governors out of 50; and approximately 10% of Wisconsin's 190 cities have women mayors. The judicial system is a little better. 33% of the U.S Supreme Court is female, and women are 57% of the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

The Girl Scout program in Evansville is important and I encourage community support for our Girl Scout troops. Evansville cares about our youth and the goals of the Girl Scout organization remain relevant to developing well-rounded, civic-minded young adults with leadership skills. The Girl Scout motto is "Be Prepared." Rich experiences prepare our youth. Happy 100th Anniversary, Evansville Girl Scouts!

Community Announcements

The City yard waste facility on Water Street will open this Saturday, March 24, weather permitting. The hours are 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The first yard waste curbside pick-up will be April 2-6. Do not put leaves and debris in the gutter. During spring and summer, yard waste must be bagged and placed in the terrace. Brush should be tied in bundles.

The Spring Presidential Preference and Non-partisan Office election will occur on Tuesday, April 3. Poll hours are 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Evansville residents vote at Creekside Place, 102 Maple Street.

Community Thanks

A special thanks to Allen Creek Gallery, auction item donors, community volunteers, and attendees for making the Evansville Community Partnership Chili Cook-off a successful event.

Gil and Diane Skinner made a significant contribution to Creekside Place by donating and cooking a fabulous St. Patrick's Day dinner for the March Creekside Dinner. Thank you, Gil and Diane!