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As our community emerges from 2020 into a more optimistic future, it is the perfect time to reflect on the past year and share our lessons learned from the pandemic. 2020 was a true test of grit, flexibility, and endurance; both for our staff and volunteers and for the girls we serve. Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma rose to the task, quickly implementing Girl Scouts at Home, giving maximum support to at-risk girls in Staff-Led Troops and Girl Scouts Beyond Bars, and adapting camp and other programming experiences.

In many ways, girls passed the test of resiliency with flying colors. Girl Scouts across eastern Oklahoma proved their leadership skills by undertaking service projects in support of frontline workers, essential services staff, and those hit hardest by the pandemic. Girl Scouts at Home and virtual troops meetings allowed girls to continue their badge journeys, with a total of 10,933 badges earned in fiscal year 2020!

1,839 of those badges were earned in STEM subjects such as Cybersecurity and Robotics. Girls remain hungry for STEM activities, and we worked with our community partners to ensure online accessibility to many of our wonderful STEM programs. As one of our four program pillars (along with Life Skills, Entrepreneurship, and Outdoor Adventure), STEM opportunities remain a priority for all of us at GSEOK.

Throughout the pandemic, one of our staff's most important jobs was to stay in close contact with the at-risk, underserved girls in our Staff-Led Troops and Girl Scouts Beyond Bars. Significant changes to our normal program delivery meant a shift in focus to girls' mental health, physical safety, and emotional support. Weekly troop meetings within these programs gave girls vital connection with each other and with caring adults, including therapists.

Girl Scout entrepreneurs-in-training once again exceeded expectations during the 2020 Cookie Program. Many girls, like the rest of us, learned to be flexible in creating and meeting their 2020 sale goals. Mahriya, our top seller, sold 4,444 boxes of Girl Scout cookies! Sadly, we did have to close the cookie sale early, with 1,100 scheduled booth sales remaining. This impacted both our council as a whole and our young Girl Scouts, who utilize funds from the sale as "cookie program credits" to pay for programming and other activities.

Although we had to cancel our ever-popular day and resident camps over the summer, girls found outdoor adventure in their own backyards through campout adventures shared over Zoom. Our staff at GSEOK created and mailed "Camp-in-a-Box" kits as a fun and safe alternative to usual camp experiences. We did not allow our camp sites to be dormant, however, instead opening them up to camping experiences for family units. We cannot wait for girls to return to summer camp in 2021 to see the capital improvements we have done while they were away.



Throughout all of 2020, one bright spot that shone through was the advocacy and support of our donors. The Girl Scouts community rallied around our girls via unexpected donations, pledges, and planned gifts. This generosity, along with the first Paycheck Protection Plan (PPP) Loan, helped us to keep our staff on payroll, serving our girl populations, throughout the entirety of the pandemic. It was also reflected in the action of our girls themselves.

Among the many service projects undertaken by Eastern Oklahoma Girl Scouts in 2020, a few stood out for their relevance to the year. Carrie, a Gold Award Girl Scout, implemented an ongoing suicide prevention program at her high school. Troop 2120 in Jenks gave out over 100 “blessing bags” complete with handwritten notes to nursing home residents, healthcare workers, people experiencing homelessness, and teachers. Many troops donated Girl Scout cookies to front-line health, retail, and emergency workers all across the region.

As we look forward to a return to near normalcy in 2021, we know that girls need caring adults in their lives more than ever. A year of virtual learning and Zoom friendships has taken its toll on the mental and physical health of our youth, and we are ready to resume in-person activities and connections. Although 2020 was a disappointment in many ways, we know that the lessons it taught were invaluable. We are looking ahead to 2021 with renewed energy and the sure knowledge that we are fully capable of swiftly and creatively adapting to any future challenges.

As I come to the end of my 10 ½ year tenure with Girl Scouts of Eastern Oklahoma, I want to thank you for the support you have given me. My heart remains with this organization, and I know there is a bright future ahead.

Yours in Girl Scouting,



Roberta Preston
President and CEO