

COMMUNITY

Teens earn Gold Award

By Chelsea Bengier
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Everyone remembers the age when the Girl Scouts were the coolest club to be in, the age when "Brownies" no longer referred to a warm and chocolaty treat.

Yet, for many of these kids, Girl Scouts only lasted for a few years. They moved on to other activities, maybe soccer or theater. But for Emily Jestus and Chelsea Robinson of Norton, Girl Scouts never quite ended. Instead, the lessons they learned and friends they made stuck with them as they grew up, leading them to strive for the Gold Award, a Girl Scout's highest honor.

"Girl Scouts grows with you, it fits each place you're at in your life," Jestus said. "When I was little they'd take us places and it was oodles of fun, but when you're older it teaches you how to be a leader and have a confident character."

Jestus has been a Girl Scout for ten years, starting when she was in third grade. Influenced by her mother's positive memories toward Girl Scouts and her friends' involvement, Jestus decided to give it a try.

"I knew it was a really good program," Jestus said.

However, Girl Scouts to Jestus, like many other kids, was a fun environment and not a specific goal when it came to awards. Girl Scouts provided a safe and friendly place for kids to learn and have fun outdoors.

"When I was in middle school, I told my leader that I never wanted to earn an

award because it was too much work and I just wanted to have fun," Jestus said. "I finally decided to try for the Gold Award when I started doing community service through my high school and realized how much I loved the feeling of giving back to the community."

Jestus earned her Gold Award by creating a butterfly garden at L.G. Nourse Elementary School in Norton. She knew the curriculum included insects and that each grade had the opportunity to rent butterflies. After the classes used the butterflies, they either had nowhere to go or they died. Jestus came up with the idea of a butterfly garden once Principal Catherine Luke mentioned the desire to build a new space for the community.

"Originally it was just for the kids, but as I started working with members of the community it became more of a community project that is open to everyone," Jestus said.

Jestus aims for the butterfly garden to be a family-friendly area that can be used for a variety of interests from educational purposes to a peaceful reading spot.

"The butterfly garden creates a new habitat for animals, so if people are doing a new nature project they can use the space to bring kids," Jestus said. "It is also a great edition to the school and an incentive to keep the school open."

Like Jestus, Robinson incorporated nature and community into her Gold Award

project. Her "Historical Hikes" program includes letterboxing, an activity where people hide boxes that contain a logbook and a unique hand carved stamp in a scenic location. The hiders post clues to the box's location for the hunters who search for them. Seekers must carry their own personal stamp and logbook so the box's stamp can be recorded in their logbook and their personal stamp can be inked into the box's logbook.

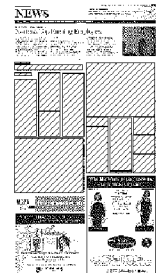
"We don't have many activities that are affordable anymore," Robinson said. "I wanted to create an activity that would be cheap to do together, would promote family bonding, and would get kids outdoors exercising."

Robinson and a group of volunteers created the boxes and stamps, scoped out the locations, and spread the word about letterboxing. Thanks to Robinson, there are now 13 letterboxes in Norton that have been frequently visited.

"I like the places that the boxes are in," Robinson said. "They are usually completely different places and off the beaten track."

Much like Jestus, Robinson's parents influenced her to join the Girl Scouts. Robinson first became a brownie in the first grade and continued to stay in Girl Scouts for 12 years. She is currently taking a break due to college.

"I know when I'm older I will start up again and get my own children involved," Robinson said. "I want to



lead a troop of my own someday.”

While Jestus stumbled into the idea of trying for the Gold Award, Robinson had aspired to achieving it since day one. With the encouragement of her family and friends, Robinson did just that.

“It has always been my goal, earning the respect of getting the award,” Robinson said. “Dad always told me about the honor of being an Eagle Scout, so I was inspired to earn the Gold Award.”

Although Jestus and Robinson have accomplished

the highest award for a Girl Scout, they both agree that the journey, built from strong friendships and community involvement, proved the most rewarding of all.

“I have gained lots of memories and the satisfaction of helping the town and giving back,” Robinson said.



Norton Girl Scouts featured left to right, Ashley Rigoli with Gold Award honorees Emily Jestus and Chelsea Robinson. COURTESY PHOTOS



The butterfly garden that was created by Emily Jestus as part of her Gold Award project for the Girl Scouts.