



Press Release

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Girl Scouts from Perkins Deafblind Program will bring 'Operation Toothbrush' to Franklin Park Zoo gorillas

(Boston) - A troop of Girl Scouts who are deafblind will deliver hundreds of toothbrushes for the gorillas at Franklin Park Zoo in Boston on Wednesday, May 25 at 2:30 p.m.

Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts Troop 71984 from Perkins School for the Blind's Deafblind Program will give the toothbrushes to Zoo New England President and CEO John Linehan at approximately 3:00 pm at the indoor gorilla exhibit inside the Tropical Forest.

Dubbed "Operation Toothbrush," it's an opportunity for the Girl Scouts to engage in a unique community service project, said Barbara Mason, Education Director of the Deafblind Program at Perkins.

"Operation Toothbrush is a chance for these girls to show that physical challenges won't stop them from helping their community and learning about their world – while having fun in the process," she said.

There are eight western lowland gorillas at Franklin Park Zoo. Zookeepers brush the gorilla's teeth about once a week during regular training sessions, so there is a need for toothbrushes. The zoo has established a variety of positive-reinforcement and operant conditioning training programs that challenge gorillas and other animals to learn new things to assist zookeepers and medical staff in routine care.

Before and after they deliver the toothbrushes, the Girl Scouts will participate in a multisensory experience to learn more about gorillas. With the help of interpreters they will hear a talk about gorillas, and feel casts of the gorillas' hands and feet.

The Girl Scouts in Troop 71984 range in age from 11 to 17. All have a variety of challenges, including vision, hearing, mobility and cognitive disabilities. The troop, founded in 1999, is believed to be the only troop of Girl Scouts who are deafblind.

Operation Toothbrush is the brainchild of Brenda Furlong, a former member of the Perkins Board of Trustees who currently serves on Zoo New England's Board of Directors.

To help the Girl Scouts collect toothbrushes, Furlong sent an email request to friends. The message went viral, and toothbrushes began arriving at Perkins School from as far away as Arizona, Pennsylvania and Louisiana. One boy even sent a package of toothbrushes from Scotland. In all, Troop 71984 collected about 200 toothbrushes.

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Perkins School for the Blind, the nation's first school for the visually impaired, provides education and services to people who are blind or deafblind, including those with additional disabilities, at its Watertown campus, in local communities and in 65 countries worldwide. Learn more at www.Perkins.org.

Girl Scouts of Eastern Massachusetts serves more than 45,000 girls ages 5-17 and 17,000 adult volunteers in 178 communities across Eastern Massachusetts with the mission to build girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place. The Girl Scouts provide girls with the opportunity to

DISCOVER their world, CONNECT with and build an understanding for others and TAKE ACTION to make the world a better place. Girls are guided by committed and caring adults who make learning fun. Girl Scouting helps each girl achieve her personal leadership pathway to the future.

Franklin Park Zoo is accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). Its mission is to inspire people to protect and sustain the natural world for future generations by creating fun and engaging experiences that integrate wildlife and conservation programs, research and education. The zoo is managed by Zoo New England, the non-profit organization that also operates Stone Zoo in Stoneham, Mass. Learn more at www.zoonewengland.org.