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16 GSNYPENN Girl Scouts Earn Prestigious Gold Award for Creating Lasting Change in Their Communities



*Editor's note: [View a short video about our Class of 2023 Gold Award Girl Scouts via YouTube here.](#)
The video and group photo of the 10 recipients in attendance at their celebration event can be used by the media.
Individual photos of most Gold Award recipients are available upon request.*

Syracuse, N.Y. (December 12, 2023) — The [Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways \(GSNYPENN\) Council](#) is proud to recognize the 16 members of its Gold Award Girl Scout Class of 2023 who invested countless hours and made a sustainable impact addressing causes they care about within their communities. GSNYPENN's most recent class turned their passions into action with projects that demonstrate the breadth of issues American teens feel are most prevalent in society today.

Recipients were recognized for earning their Girl Scout Gold Award during the 2022-2023 membership year at a luncheon in late November at Drumlins in Syracuse, N.Y. Event attendees included awardees and their families, council staff and board members. The keynote speaker was Marla Velky-Reger, LCSW-R, a Girl Scout alum, licensed clinical social worker and co-owner of Cazenovia Community Fitness.

"Our Gold Award Class of 2023 all identified the root cause of pressing issues in their communities, created sustainable solutions and took action to earn one of Girl Scouting's most prestigious achievements. I'm both inspired by and proud of each recipient. They truly embody the Girl Scout Mission, Promise, and Law, and have taken active steps to launch projects that will all have a lasting impact," says GSNYPENN CEO Julie Dale.

Since 1916, the Gold Award has stood for excellence and leadership for Girl Scouts everywhere. It is the most prestigious award that Senior (grades 9-10) and Ambassador (grades 11-12) Girl Scouts can earn. Through their work on sustainable Take Action projects, Gold Award recipients gain tangible skills and prove they are the leaders our community and the world need.

2023 Gold Award Scholarship Recipients

Sarah Rinzan of Manlius, N.Y., was named recipient of a \$10,000 Girl Scouts of the USA National Gold Award Scholarship for her outstanding community-based project Musical Lending Library. Sarah is among a group of 110 Gold Award Girl Scouts from across the U.S. who received national scholarships this year made possible in part by the Kappa Delta Foundation in addition to funds from GSUSA and its National Board.

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Four additional Gold Award recipients were selected for Council Scholarships because their projects demonstrated the highest level of the award's core standards. A total of \$10,000 was awarded thanks to funds raised in part through the council's annual Women of Distinction breakfast held each September and donors. (*Read about each Girl Scout's project in the full bios below.*)

- **Marie Hepworth Scholarship in the amount of \$4,000 to Lilac Burke of Mansfield, Pa., for their project Serving with Tioga County Pride**
Ms. Hepworth dedicated her life to supporting girl development through her 20-plus years serving as executive director of GSNYPENN Legacy Council Indian Hills and various volunteer activities in her community of Johnson City, N.Y.
- **Kelly Perkins Scholarship in the amount of \$3,000 to Katie Gorman of Athens, Pa., for her project Girls Coding Club**
Ms. Perkins, a lifelong Girl Scout and GSNYPENN summer camp staff member impacted the lives of campers and younger Girl Scouts in her community of Newark Valley, N.Y.
- **Kerrie Black Scholarship in the amount of \$2,000 to Mary Sonnen of Vestal, N.Y., for her project Young History**
Ms. Black, a lifelong Girl Scout, was a GSNYPENN Regional Support Manager for Broome and Delaware counties in N.Y. who served her volunteers with excellence and was always willing to lend a hand to her colleagues
- **Women of Distinction Donors Scholarship in the amount of \$1,000 to Maria Griswold of Oneonta, N.Y., for her project Climate Change and the Monarch Habitat**

GSNYPENN Class of 2023 Gold Award Girl Scouts
(*Individual photos of award recipients available upon request*)

Sarah Bacon

Camillus, N.Y. (Onondaga County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Veteran Gravestone Restoration

Sarah honored veterans by repairing and cleaning their gravestones in an abandoned cemetery, while also recruiting others to do the same. One of her favorite Girl Scout memories is whitewater rafting with her troop. Sarah is a graduate of West Genesee High School and currently a student at the State University of New York at Geneseo.

Lilac Burke

Mansfield, Pa. (Tioga County, Pa.)

Take Action Project: Serving with Tioga County Pride

Lilac increased their county's awareness of the LGBTQIA2+ community by creating a website for Tioga County Pride, leading a sticker campaign, reaching out to schools and libraries and helping organize the county's first annual Pride Day celebration. Their favorite memory in our leadership program was a trip to a water park, Splash Lagoon. They will graduate from the Pennsylvania Leadership Charter School and the Center for Performing and Fine Arts. They plan to attend Mansfield University while majoring in music and minoring in visual art.

Hailey Clark

Rushville, N.Y. (Yates County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Rushville Congregational Church's Website and YouTube Channel

Hailey made a difference in her community by connecting people to one another. She created a church website and YouTube channel for members of the congregation as well as others to be able to watch weekly church services. The website includes the history of the Rushville Congregational Church, which is over 200 years old. One of Hailey's favorite Girl Scout memories is camping when she was little. Hailey is a graduate of Marcus Whitman High School and currently a student at the State University of New York at Oswego where she is studying to become a family consumer science teacher and pursuing a master's degree in special education.

Leighton Eastman

Oneonta, N.Y. (Otsego County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Caring vs. Stealing Wildlife

Leighton created online resources and pamphlets to educate people on how and when to help hurt, sick or orphaned animals so they can get the assistance they need from professional wildlife rehabilitators. Her favorite Girl Scout memory is attending Camp Amahami every year and traveling to Savannah, Georgia, this past summer. Leighton graduated from Oneonta High School and currently attends the State University of New York at Oneonta where she studies early childhood/childhood education.

Tiffany Gardner

Oneonta, N.Y. (Otsego County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: A Chance to Dance

Tiffany created a series of dance workshops for individuals with disabilities to enjoy the love of dance. Her favorite Girl Scout memory is taking part in a week-long kayaking trip during the summer at Camp Trefoil and meeting many Girl Scouts from the area. Tiffany is a graduate of Oneonta High School and currently attends the State University of New York at Oneonta where she majors in early childhood and elementary education and minors in dance.

Katie Gorman

Athens, Pa. (Bradford County, Pa.)

Take Action Project: Girls Coding Club

Katie addressed the underrepresentation of women in computer science by founding a Computer Coding Club for 4th and 5th grade girls at her former elementary school. Her goal is to build confidence and interest to keep more girls involved in STEM as they transition from middle to high school. One of her favorite Girl Scout memories is a kayaking camping trip down the Susquehanna River. Katie is a graduate of Athens Area High School and is currently enrolled at Muhlenberg College where she studies computer science.

Kylie Griffin

Greene, N.Y. (Chenango County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Greene Reflection Garden

Kylie created a reflection garden to help improve people's mental health after COVID-19 and leave a positive impact on the community. She selected a quiet place for the garden where people can reflect on life. She also built a prayer box, bench and installed 288 pavers in front of her church with the help of her team. The pavers are special because people were allowed to customize them by putting a name, positive quote or image onto them.

Maria Griswold

Oneonta, N.Y. (Otsego County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Climate Change and the Monarch Habitat

Maria addressed the issue of climate change and its effects on butterfly habitats, specifically the Monarch butterfly since it was placed on the endangered species list in July 2022. Maria created a display about butterflies and climate change for the Oneonta World of Learning Children's Museum and tabled at events where she distributed free seeds and led children's butterfly-related crafts. One of Maria's favorite Girl Scout memories is a troop trip to Limekiln Lake in the Adirondacks. The troop hiked Rocky Mountain, paddled, swam, went to Water Safari and made lots of memories together.

Hailee Johnson

Endicott, N.Y. (Broome County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Butterfly Corner

Hailee created a space where students and staff could go for community resources and to learn techniques to help them with their anxiety and ease their minds. She believes that no one should feel alone when it comes to anxiety and depression, especially high school students.

Clara Macreery

Fayetteville, N.Y. (Onondaga County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Dance Classes for Children with Disabilities

Clara created a dance instruction program centered around inclusivity and each child's unique needs. Her favorite Girl Scout memory is the Mommy & Me campout at Camp Amahami. Clara is a graduate of Fayetteville-Manlius High School and currently attends the University of Pittsburgh where she studies civil engineering.

Emma Mantione

Baldwinsville, N.Y. (Onondaga County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Music Book Library

Emma created a Music Book Library at Charles W. Baker High School in her hometown. She decided to help her school district and community by collecting music books for local student use through donations gathered during school concerts, community events and from the local library. She also posted flyers locally to not only help with her book drive but to educate people on how music helps with mental health and enhances learning and recall. As part of her project, she also developed a spreadsheet that includes the list of books in the library to use for lending and replacement purposes.

Emily Morell

Oneonta, N.Y. (Otsego County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Town Pool

Emily addressed issues at her local town pool by making changes that benefit the special needs and handicapped community. Her project created more shade by adding to the existing pavilion, installing a handicap-rated bench and repainting the building. Emily's favorite memory of Girl Scouts is the roller-skating night sleepover she attended every year. Emily is a graduate of Oneonta High School and attends the State University of New York at Oswego where she is majoring in family and consumer science education.

Bella Raymond

Manlius, N.Y. (Onondaga County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Supporting the T1D CommUNITY

Bella's project aimed to help children newly diagnosed with type one diabetes and their families. Her project included creating a packet with common scenarios and advice, low-carb snacks and an outline to help others understand diabetes and how to best support them. Her favorite Girl Scout memories are ones spent with her troop attending Girl Scout camps, selling cookies and the annual Pinewood Derby. Bella is now a freshman at Nazareth University where she is a member of the field hockey team, honors program and majors in psychology with a minor in sports and entertainment management.

Sarah Rinzan

Manlius, N.Y. (Onondaga County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Musical Lending Library

Sarah improved access to musical instruments and resources in her community by creating the Musical Lending Library at the Fayetteville Free Library, where library patrons can check out instruments that were donated to the collection and use her instructional website to pursue their musical passions. Sarah graduated from Fayetteville-Manlius High School and currently studies chemical and biological engineering at Princeton University.

Isabella Shiel

Newark Valley, N.Y. (Tioga County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Nature Restoration at the Historical Society

Isabella's project consisted of renovating and refacing the trails at Bement Billings Farmstead, a historical site in Newark Valley, NY. She re-marked nearly two miles of trail and completely re-established the White Trail which had been washed out by years of flooding. Additionally, Isabella researched, wrote synopses of tree identification facts and designed and placed new informational educational signposts at 18 different trees throughout the site. The final part of her project was redoing the informational entrance kiosk. She added two sides of educational material, colorful trail maps and specimen photos concurrently interspersed with environmentally focused, inspirational quotes.

Mary Sonnen

Vestal, N.Y. (Broome County, N.Y.)

Take Action Project: Young History

Mary has loved history ever since she was a Daisy. Through her Gold Award project, and in coordination with the Town of Vestal's bicentennial celebration, she designed five signs each detailing 50 years of Vestal's history from 1773-2022 which she installed in Vestal parks. She also worked with her high school History Club to engage students in local history by cataloging artifacts from their local museum. The goal of her project was to engage the younger population and make them aware of history's impact and inspire others to learn more. Mary's favorite Girl Scout memories are the annual trips with the GSNYPENN GEMINI Astronomy Club to Cherry Springs Dark Park where she observed and camped under the Milky Way with her friends. Currently a Junior at Vestal High School, Mary is actively involved with History Club and Girl Scouts and is co-president of Tech Club, secretary of band, a member of the marching band and on the varsity swim team.

(All photos and graphics used with permission, courtesy of Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways)

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About Girl Scouts of NYPENN Pathways, Inc.

Girl Scouts is the preeminent leadership development organization for girls in grades K-12. Our extraordinary journey began in 1912 when our Movement was founded by Juliette Gordon "Daisy" Low. Today, we continue the Girl Scout mission of building girls of courage, confidence, and character, who make the world a better place. We offer every girl the chance to practice a lifetime of leadership, adventure and success. GSNYPENN is chartered by Girl Scouts of the USA to administer the Girl Scout program in 24 counties of New York and two in Pennsylvania. Learn more at gsnypenn.org.