



Girl Scouts taught lifelong lessons



VIEWPOINT

Rebecca Baer

Some of Indiana's most high-profile women have something in common beyond their gender and community status: They were Girl Scouts.

Local leaders such as WellPoint CEO Angela Braly, AES Corp. CEO Ann Murtlow and Purdue University President France Cordova proudly acknowledge that they spent time in this organization that also counts

the likes of former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and astronaut Sally Ride among its former members.

To some, that might seem like an interesting coincidence. I think there's more to it than that. It's not that women destined for big things join Girl Scouts; it's that things they learn in Girl Scouts groom them to achieve.

To people who have never been involved in this nearly century-old organization, Girl Scouts might mean little more than an annual purchase of Thin Mints and Samoas. Those who are involved in Girl Scouts, though, know it's about more than cookies.

It's about lessons that teach confidence, perseverance, sense of purpose, spirit of collaboration, and commitment to service. For me, it instilled the notion that anything is possible.

Many lessons led to skills that are applicable to my life and work today. Each task required starting with a clean slate, developing and executing a plan, and sometimes learning new skills. For one badge, I developed a product and business plan. For another I learned Robert's Rules of Order. That didn't seem particularly important until I became involved in student government at Ball State University and was chosen to be chancellor in my business fraternity. That led to new opportunities and connections.

Other lessons were less tangible but equally important. I remember vividly the day I sat in stunned silence as my troop leader explained to me — a girl who, even at age 10, was accustomed to taking charge — that another girl was going to lead the troop for a while. I was to follow her lead. It was a difficult exercise, but it taught me how teams work, and how, sometimes, we're called to follow rather than lead.

I also learned a lesson when I had to raise money for summer camp. I earned that by putting on my Brownie uniform and, yes, going door to door selling cookies. That experience taught me that anything is possible if you set a goal and work to make it happen. At camp, I learned to try new things and push beyond my comfort zone.

I could go on, but the bottom line is this: Girl Scouts taught me and countless other women lessons that guide our lives to this day. Whether we're moms,

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businesswomen, educators, athletes, elected officials, anything else or all of the above, the lessons we learned through Scouting serve us well.

I'm now in my 16th year of Girl Scouts. I was a Scout for 12 years, and for the past four I've led my daughter's troop. It's a role I take seriously, because I have big shoes to fill. Every time I go into a Scout meeting, take off my jacket, and sit down to work on life-shaping projects with my girls, I remember my wonderful leaders. I hope I have as much impact as they did, and that the girls in my troop get as much out of the experience as I did ... and do. •

Baer is a director of office advisory services at Summit Realty Group and a national delegate to the Girl Scout National Council Session.