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# Inspired by good times with Megan

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When Sharon McCarthy's daughter Megan was involved in Girl Scouts, the two spent many happy camping trips at Camp Occoneechee, one of the Girl Scout properties outside of Charlotte.

That's where the passion for Girl Scouts started that led to Sharon McCarthy's hiking fundraiser.

"Working with the girls has taught me that the best moments are frequently unplanned," she said. "Take a group of girls outside for a couple of hours and I dare you to say you do not see smiles and sparks!"

Megan recalled a camping trip in high school when her mother showed their troop how to be brave.

"The winds were blowing our camping and overnight supplies all over the place," she said. "We hadn't expected such wild weather, but my mom rallied us together and told us that we weren't leaving so we had better figure out a way to work together and improvise for better shelter."

Megan added, "I remember a sense of fear that we would all literally blow away, but also a more overwhelming sense of excitement that we got to use our brainstorming skills to figure out the best ways to create protection from the elements, and that we survived the storm!"

Sharon McCarthy's love of the outdoors has always been a perfect match with her love of the Girl Scouts. She trained Girl Scout leaders for outdoor programs, including camping, hiking and water sports with their troops.

She is a member of Hornet's Nest Council, which brings together 14,000 Girl Scouts from eight local counties. The council is currently merging with 40 other counties in central and western North Carolina.

Over the years, McCarthy has witnessed the Scouts' focus changing to leadership development in young women. The goal is to help girls discover their leadership potential.

The four main focus areas for scouting are environment; sports, health and fitness; community service; and certain academic disciplines, referred to as S.T.E.M. (science, technology, engineering and math).

McCarthy acknowledges that it is difficult for girls to continue in scouting once they reach middle school. "It gets harder for them when sports at school become more serious and there are more social obligations. But when you tell a girl that she can travel, that really captures her attention."

McCarthy has been able to travel to many destinations with her teenage scouts, including trips abroad to London and Switzerland.

"It is incredible to be able to see the impact (of traveling) every time you take the girls, seeing them doing something that they have never done," she said.

There are also programs designed to keep young women interested in scouting, including one with the Kappa Delta Sorority at Queens College. The sorority -- as a part of its national philanthropy program -- gives college tours, hosts overnights, and mentors teenage Girl Scouts in

the area. The program gives teenage girls the opportunity to learn about college life and allows them to spend time with role models.

"When someone who is not related to you cares about you, it opens another door for these girls," McCarthy said. "Girls are free to explore topics and issues in an all-girl environment with adults who protect them, but don't shelter them. All the girls get a chance to develop leadership skills, to be part of a group, to plan what they think is important, and to be introduced to things they may not think of on their own."

McCarthy said that, with her fundraiser, she hopes to inspire current Girl Scouts or those who have their well-loved sashes stashed away from years past.

"Many women spent some time in Girl Scouting as girls, whether it was for one year or 12. Girl Scouting began before women had the right to vote. Today, more than 70 percent of our American Congresswomen were Girl Scouts as children ...

"Ask a woman about a Girl Scout memory and it will most often be of an outdoor activity, resident camp, outdoor cooking or just playing games outside with 100 other girls. If a woman who reads this can reach back and find such a memory, hopefully that will inspire her to make a donation of money or even of time for helping a girl."

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