

The 2017 Girl Scout Year is off to a great start! Troops are forming, activities are running and girls are already funding their Girl Scout experiences by selling Fall Products. I'm writing you today to update you on the progress of a multi-year project. This news is important to the sustainability of our Council and will help ensure that we can continue to offer customizable experiences for girls in northern Illinois.

In 2014, GSNI began a process to determine what activities and programs girls of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century want and need. This process was called the Long Range Program Study. Once the findings were clear, the Long Range Property Planning Task Force (LRPPTF), a group of volunteers, board members, consultants, and staff, originally formed in 2012, was re-convened to determine our property needs in light of the Long Range Program Study and other relevant GSNI research.

The Long Range Program Study was completed over an 18-month period. It involved research conducted by an outside firm, Horizon Insight, which included surveys, phone calls, and focus groups. Parents of school aged girls were asked about the activities that their daughters currently participate in, what activities girls would be interested in participating in if available, and what benefits parents and girls want from these activities. GSNI also looked to our own research to see what our members were saying about what we already offered and what they would like to see.

The Long Range Program Study resulted in GSNI aligning program offerings around four focus areas: Career and Interest Exploration, Travel and the Global Community, Practical Life Skills and Outdoor Activities and Adventures, to meet the needs of girls in our geography.

The Long Range Property Planning Task Force was charged with looking at all of GSNI's properties and making recommendations to the board on how properties should best be used to support the research findings.

The recommendations of this team were approved in a Resolution by the Board in September 2016 and GSNI is now beginning a multi-year project to implement the terms of the Resolution. The Board restricted funds from the sale of Pokonokah Hills in 2012 can be used to support the financing of this project.

Below is a brief summary of the resolution and the work we are undertaking. Foremost is the long term sustainability of GSNI, through relevant and customizable experiences for girls of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, within an affordable financial framework.

**The Board approved the creation of local GSNI Community Centers in place of Service Centers.**

At the heart of our growth strategy is a focus on building communities in which Girl Scouts are recognized, celebrated and needed.

It is our intention to develop a network of attractive, small, leased community centers (at least as many as current stores and probably around 1500 – 3000 square feet each), which will house a small store, accommodate some staff, be welcoming to members and potential members, and provide visibility to the community through their location in accessible retail locations.

Our members have told us that where GSNI staff are located is less important than the ability to get questions promptly answered by phone or email, and to be able to make an appointment to

have a staff member meet with them when they so need. Members do, however, appreciate the opportunity to have easy access to GSNI stores.

We currently have outright ownership of three service centers: Elgin, Sugar Grove and Freeport. All of them are old, expensive to maintain and do not meet our needs moving forward. The Board has thus approved the phased sale of these assets.

During the period over which the strategy became clear this year, a buyer approached us regarding the Elgin Service Center. We have now sold the building, but can remain in it for a further two years, while we execute our new strategy. The buyer wishes to remain anonymous at this stage.

The Sugar Grove and Freeport Service Centers will be put on the market discreetly, without For Sale signs, during 2017. The Rockford Service Center and Program Center, in which we have a 50% ownership share along with the Boy Scouts of Blackhawk Council, will remain as part of United for Youth and continue to be our Rockford home for the foreseeable future.

**Additionally, it was determined that, with our current camp usage and with the financial boundaries that inform our strategies, we have too many camps.**

The Board approved the recommendation of the LRPPTF to sell Chapman Hills Camp, as it has low usage and is located in Wisconsin, which has somewhat different regulations – and therefore cost of compliance – than our Illinois camps. Additionally, Walworth County has 3 other Girl Scout camps from other Councils, that our members will be able to access. Our ranger, Harry, has done a marvelous job of maintaining Chapman Hills in beautiful condition and we are sad to have had to make this decision.

An organization has been interested in buying Chapman Hills for several years and we are now beginning the negotiation process with them. The potential buyer is committed to retaining the natural environment at Chapman Hills. It is our expectation that we will be able to conclude the sale towards the end of summer 2017.

**The Board has approved retention of and improvements in the four Illinois camps**

On the assumption that we can continue to slowly grow our membership each year and that our volunteers and girl members are committed to supporting our camps and programs, GSNI will retain and improve Camp Dean, Camp McCormick, Mary Ann Beebe Center and Camp Far Horizons. We will do this in two ways.

By creating a Program Center at each camp, we expect to be able to provide a more interesting, fun and fulfilling year round program experience for girls at camp. Program Centers may contain activities that focus on any one of our four focus areas: outdoor activities and adventures, travel and the global community, career and interest exploration and practical life skills.

We will also be improving the infrastructure at each camp over time so that modern and comfortable accommodation will be among the overnight options and will enable greater year round use of camp and the Program Center.

The LRPPTF recognized that not all girls want to sleep at camp, so the location and accessibility of 4 camps with Program Centers around our Council geography will facilitate half day and day programs.

The Board additionally approved the recommendation that certain unused tracts of land at our camps, could potentially be sold to allow for re-investment in program or camp infrastructure.

**How you can help us with the next steps:**

We will be seeking volunteers to help GSNI determine what program and infrastructure options we should be offering at each of our camps and engaging a professional camp planner to realize our ideas. We will be accepting names and contact information of those interested from now until December 1, 2016 on our website at [www.girlscoutsni.org/propertyupdate](http://www.girlscoutsni.org/propertyupdate).

GSNI is committed to keeping you updated throughout this process. Updates about this project, and requests for help, will be found at [www.girlscoutsni.org/propertyupdate](http://www.girlscoutsni.org/propertyupdate). I will also begin updating you via email on a number of topics on a monthly basis and updates on this project will be included. Finally, we will be holding Town Halls in the spring of 2017 to further discuss the progress of where we are and listen to what you have to say.

This information was given to our staff earlier today at our All Staff Meeting. We welcome your calls or emails if you have questions on this news, but please be aware that our offices are closed for the remainder of the day today, Thursday, October 20. We will open tomorrow at 9 a.m.

Girl Scouts of Northern Illinois is dedicated to providing customizable experiences that develop independent and confident girls with the character to build a better world. The work of the Long Range Property Planning Task Force and the resolutions of your Board will help ensure we can, together, do this for many years to come. On behalf of us all, I extend a big thank you for all of the many dedicated volunteer hours of work that created this strategy and look forward to working with many more of you as we begin implementation.

Yours in Girl Scouting,

Fiona Cummings  
GSNI CEO