

L/ Life

**WOMEN'S
HISTORY MONTH**

Scout's PROMISE

Girls who feel the pull of the outdoors
find a home in the revamped Boy Scouts **E4**

Scouting America members, clockwise from front left: Daniela Aiello, Mariela Molina, Pamela Ardila, Alexa Kosinski, Gabriella Burke and Samantha Vasquez.

ACT 2

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not have considered **INSIDE**



LINDA ROSIER

BUCKET LIST

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JEFF BACHNER



GIRLS join the ranks

More than 12% of Scouting America's LI members are female

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

BY LIZA N. BURBY
Special to Newsday

Gabriella Burke enjoyed tagging along with her younger brother to his Cub Scout meetings and with her older brother for his Scout meetings in Valley Stream. So when the Boy Scouts of America opened membership to girls in 2019, she asked her parents to help her form a troop. Starting Troop 99 was a big step for the then-shy sixth grader.

Now 17, Burke said her experience in the Boy

Cub Scouts, from left, Maya Ghosh, Leela Brachio and Hana Oppenheim, of Garden City, show off their Pinewood Derby cars.

Kylie Harris posts the colors at a meeting of Scout Troop 539G in Kings Park. At top, a patch commemorates the 2019 decision to admit girls into the Boy Scouts.

Scouts of America was transformative.

"I truly don't think that I would be who I am without scouting," said the high school senior and her troop's first female Eagle Scout, the highest rank scouts can earn.

"Scouting really teaches you a lot of life skills," she said.

"Their motto is 'Prepared. For life.' I definitely think that they live up to that.

... It helped

me prepare for what I want to do, to study history on the pre-law track and work with veterans."

BOY SCOUTS GETS A REBRAND

Such endorsements are helping attract new families to an organization that has had to overcome more than just an image problem. Marking a shift toward a more inclusive and broader identity, the Boy Scouts



JACQUE GHOSH



Scouts play "Red Light, Green Light" during a meeting of Scout Troop 539G in Kings Park.

NEWSDAY / THOMAS A. FERRARA

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

of America (BSA) officially rebranded to Scouting America on Feb. 8, its 115th anniversary.

The change comes as the organization faces declining enrollment while emerging from bankruptcy and paying out more than \$2 billion to men who say they were sexually abused as young scouts. Since 2018, Cub Scouts have been made co-ed for kindergartners to fifth graders, and in 2019 BSA allowed for single-gender troops for 11- to 17-year-olds.

Now, some girls opt for Scouting over Girl Scouts, a separate organization, for reasons including its focus on the outdoors and self-reliance.

The Nassau and Suffolk Councils, the regional organizations, said they have seen a positive impact on the program in the number of girls who have enrolled, as well as the women who have become leaders. Nassau's Scouting America Theodore Roosevelt Council in Massapequa has 4,800 boys and 700 girls, a 10% annual increase in girls' participation, said Christopher Coscia, the organization's scout executive/CEO.

"The organization has also seen an increase in female adult leaders, now making up about



Giselle Cappuccio of Troop 539G makes the Scout Pledge to "keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight."

NEWSDAY / THOMAS A. FERRARA

750 out of 2,300 total leaders. It's up about 100 female leaders in one year," he said. "We've also had 16 female Eagle Scouts in those six years."

In Suffolk, of 6,500 scouts, 802 are female, marking 12.5% growth since 2018 — and 20% in the past year — according to Dorothy Young, 72, a member of the executive board and chairwoman for the outreach committee of the Farmingville-based Suffolk County Council. She said female leadership has also increased: Of 2,400 adult volunteers, 872 are female. In the past

year, she said the council graduated seven female Eagle Scouts.

However, after a burst of enrollment in 2019, Young, who will become commissioner for the country's Northeast area in May, said they lost momentum during the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to struggle to compete with kids' busy schedules. She said she has been doing outreach in Suffolk to attract children from various communities, including those who are neurodiverse or have physical needs, as well as including after-school programs in some com-



GESELLE BARILE

Steven Barile was already a Boy Scout in 2019 when his twin, Amanda, formed Troop 572G in Bohemia with the help of their mother.

munities for children who can't attend otherwise.

GIRLS' TROOPS AND BOYS' TROOPS

There is still some resistance to the inclusion of girls, said Craig Rome, the committee chair of Troop 539 in Kings Park, which he helped his daughter form in 2019 and has 33 members.

"There are still people outside of scouting who think boys should be able to experience being a boy in a Boy Scout troop. They don't really under-

stand that they're separate troops," said Rome, 52, who leads the Suffolk County Committee for Girls to help foster the creation of girls' troops.

"And there are people who are just against it on some sort of principle. A lot of the girls do put up with comments, but they persevere," Rome said. "I think the type of girl that wants to be in the scouting organization is more thick-skinned. They know that they're wearing a different uniform than what was typical

See COVER STORY on E6

They're happy campers

COVER STORY from E5

over the past 100 years, but they're doing it because they love to hike, they love to camp, they love to have high adventure. Those are things that weren't available to them before that's really good for them."

LI GIRL SCOUTS

Most girls still opt for the traditional Girl Scout experience with about 15,000 Girls Scout in Suffolk and about 15,700 in Nassau, according to the respective councils. "Girl Scouting opens the door to life-changing experiences where girls of all backgrounds and abilities can learn to lead, take risks, face challenges and be unafraid to make mistakes — where they can just be themselves," Tammy Severino, president and CEO of Girl Scouts of Suffolk, wrote in an email. "Girl Scouts is proud to offer programming that is engaging, relevant and impactful for all girls — including those we serve now, and those we will serve in the future."

Young said the best recruitment path for Scouting America comes from girls who have been around scouting with their brothers and fathers. "They have seen what the kids do and have always wanted to be a part of that," she said. "When they were allowed to join the programs, they were thrilled because now they could join their brothers, fathers and mothers at activities and events and get the recognition alongside their siblings."

That was true for Seren Lark, 17, who said though she was a Girl Scout in first grade, what she really wanted was to join her younger brother's Cub Scout den.

"I would always go camping with him on the family weekends, and I loved it. I wanted so badly to be able to do the same stuff that he was doing," said Lark, a senior at The Wheatley School in Old Westbury. "So in 2019 I begged my dad to start a troop with me. It's been an amazing experience, not only getting to learn these cool outdoor skills, but also getting to learn more about myself, growing as a leader and then also helping and watching the scouts around me grow."

Lark said the experience has been good for her relationship with her brother, Tristan, who is



Scouts Kylie Harris, left, Stina Czeisel, center, and Giselle Cappuccio practice camping skills.



Anika Davids-Gunther, center, jokes with fellow scouts at a meeting of Troop 539G in the library at William T. Rogers Middle School in Kings Park.

14, and her father, James, 58. "It's definitely brought me and my brother closer because we still see each other at events. It's brought me and my dad closer. And we go camping all the time as a family with the troop. My mom helps us with the accounting. So I feel like everyone in my family has played a role."

FAMILY FRIENDLY

Young echoed that a draw of the scouting program is that it provides opportunities for family bonding. That's been appealing to Jacquie Ghosh, of

Garden City, who has three scouts: Rohan, 7, a Cub Scout; Maya, 10, who is in a girls' Cub Scout den for which Jacquie is the leader; and Anika, 11, in Scouting America.

"Part of why we joined is because it was so family-friendly," said Ghosh, 42, a stay-at-home mom. "When you're in Cub Scouts, you camp as a family. It is a really great way for our entire family to be involved."

She noted that Anika has started helping in the kitchen because she preps food while camping.

For Maya, joining the Scouts is about friends. "My favorite thing is that my friends do it. I also want to do the Soapbox Derby next month," she said. "We build a cart that can hold someone and then we push it and see if it can go faster than the others. Last year we got first place."

Learning camping skills appeals to Isabella Folk, 12, who wrote in an email that she went through the Cub Scout ranks and crossed over to the BSA in March 2023. She's in Troop 354 in Port Jefferson Station.

"One of my favorite skills is learning lashings, which are really cool knot-tying skills to help hold two poles/wooden structures together to build towers, bridges and even rafts," she wrote.

Her mother, Natasha Gabrielsen, also has three other scouts: Calvin Folk, 7, Logan Folk, 16, and Julianna Gabrielsen, 17. She is also the committee chair for the girls' Troop 2019 in Sound Beach, which has 18 girls, three of whom have earned the Eagle Scout rank, including Julianna. "Since they needed female leaders, I felt I had to volunteer," Gabrielsen said. "As I started to actually learn about the program, I realized how amazing and beneficial it is and there's no going back for me now."

TWINS IN TWIN TROOPS

For busy families, having sons and daughters sharing the same activity can be a bonus. That worked for Geselle Barile, who has 16-year-old twins in Scouting America. Steven was already in Scouts BSA in 2019, when Amanda was drawn to what her brother was doing. Barile helped her to form Troop 572 in Bohemia, which now has 21 girls.

"It made it so much easier for us that they're both in Scouting [America]," said Barile, 60, who has been the scoutmaster for six years and is an elementary school math specialist.

But convenience was just part of it, she said. "The biggest part of scouting for us as leaders is to see how they've developed and how they can take their skills and put them into everyday occurrences."

Amanda Barile said that she likes that as a scout she gets to earn merit badges, like bugling and science. "I was a Girl Scout and we did things on our own, and I earned badges, but I wanted to go camping and hiking and learn first-aid and do all those things that boys are doing," she said.

Coscia, the Nassau council CEO, said he believes the more inclusive recent changes will serve the organization well.

"We believe the program really changes lives, and if we can welcome boys and girls into the program and get more adult leadership, it'll help sustain the program for the next 100 years."