



Lindsay Pugliese and Zoe Rizzo at a recent Scout meeting.



Six of the seven girls from Scouts BSA Troop 1150 who are working toward their Eagle award. From left: Katelyn Hanifan, Brianna Conlon, Lindsay Pugliese, Jasmine Lutz, Zoe Rizzo and Bridget Brady.

Unflappable: As Boy Scouts, These Girls Are Earning Their Wings

Story by ELLEN WILKOWE
Photos by KAREN FUCITO

When 17-year-old Lindsay Pugliese of Sparta embarked on her Eagle Scout project, she—yes, she—wanted to lend a hand at the Alpine Elementary School where her mom teaches first grade.

So, at the suggestion of her mom, she began collecting, rocking chairs, putting her passion for art into play, fixing and painting them and reading them for the kindergarten and first grade classrooms.

"I really love art, so I was excited about having a new project to work on," she said. When finished, she will have donated nine chairs.

Lindsay is one of seven girls in the all-female Scouts BSA Troop 1150 of the recently reorganized Boy Scouts of America, who is working her way toward the coveted Eagle Scout award and rank. The others are Bridget Brady from Byram, Emily Brothman from Newton (who is away at college), Brianna Conlon from Sparta, Katelyn Hanifan from Andover, Jasmine Lutz from Byram and Zoe Rizzo from Stanhope.

Pugliese joins hundreds of girls and young women across the nation who have become members of the Boy Scouts of America. The organization announced in 2017 that it would allow girls to join the two younger-age programs, first recruiting girls into the Cub Scout Program in 2018.

In February of 2019, Boy Scouts of America rebranded the program for 11- to 18-year-olds, previously known as Boy Scouts, to Scouts

BSA, after opening up the program to girls. Troop 1150 was chartered on February 1. It, along with Troop 150, which is an all-boys troop, and Pack 150, which is an integrated boys and girls Cub Scout pack, are all chartered to the Sparta United Methodist Church. There are almost 90 participants in all three units.

"They all joined on the same day," said Scoutmaster and Bridget's father, Bob Brady, of the girls working toward the Eagle Scout award. His other daughter, 13-year-old Brianna, is also part of the Scouts BSA.

"I remember the date of the decision to allow girls in: October 11, 2017, my daughter's 10th birthday."

A lifelong decorated Scout, Brady jumped at the opportunity to provide his daughters with what he describes as "the single most defining character of my childhood, besides my nuclear family."

When the program became available to his daughters, he stepped up to the plate. To date, Troop 1150 boasts 32 girls from a half dozen towns in two counties and two dozen adult leaders.

On a recent chilly Sunday evening, the troop gathered for their weekly meeting outside at the Sparta United Methodist Church. With the firepit lit, the flags raised and the oath recited, the meeting was underway. The girls took center stage and the groupups moved off to the side.

"They run their own meetings," said Brady, then joking: "We just sit back and drink coffee."

Or, perhaps, be called upon to take part in a scoutmaster conference to assess a Scout's readiness for the next rank. On this night,

the Scout at hand was Abigail Wolkow, 11, of Bedminster, who had to appear before three committee members.

For Abigail's father, Howard Wolkow, a lifelong Scouter, the trip from Bedminster to Sparta is worth the positive impact Scouting has had on his daughter as she navigates the "tough times" of sixth grade.

"These are an exceptional group of young women, who are actively leading each other," he said.

Exhibit A: 17-year-old Brianna took her position as patrol leader and lined the girls up behind a blue line in groups of three for a trial run at a two-person freeman's carry, part of a first aid training exercise.

Upon completion, Brianna checked in with each of the groups.

"Did you figure out what was wrong?" she asked. "Did you resolve the problem?"

In a group consensus, the Eagle Scout candidates credit the BSA for providing leadership opportunities that they were otherwise not afforded.

"This is very leadership oriented," said Zoe, 16. "You can take charge."

In another commonality, the girls also boast at least one sibling or father who are Scout members.

This is not to discount the Girl Scouts, to which Zoe, Jasmine and Bridget belong as well. There are just differences that are balanced out through the Scouts BSA, they said.

"In Girl Scouts, everyone is the same age," said Bridget, 15. "In Boy Scouts, the ages are 11 to 18." All three are working toward the Gold Award, the highest award given in Girl Scouts.

The outdoor opportunities in Scouts BSA are a given, especially with monthly camping excursions. The group recently camped with their families at Mt. Allamuchy Scout Reservation and is looking forward to camping in November sans families in Pennsylvania.

Next summer, the group is planning a trip to the Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico, complete with a 75-mile backpacking trip.

While the girls focus on their leadership posts, Brady stands behind his own leadership team, touting a "ton of experience" between the mostly Eagle Scout contingent of dads—and one mom, Assistant Scout Leader Pat Hawkins.

Despite having no children presently involved in the program, Hawkins believes strongly in the organization, particularly in its ability to provide and mirror a real-world experience in terms of collaborating with several age groups.

"When you apply for a job, they don't divide you by age," she said. "Here, any ages are welcome. It's more like real life."

Regardless of age, Scouts move through the ranks, Brady said.

During the pandemic quarantine, the group carried on, connecting by what else? Zoom.

"Our motto is *Semper Paratus*," said Hawkins. "We are flexible. We made it work."

The online meetings allowed members to earn merit badges required to maintain leadership positions and get them to the rank of Eagle Scout.

Jasmine, 15, conducted one such meeting in the form of a Zoom cooking class. Other online merit badges include computer programming, pulp and paper, coin collecting, robotics, and mining in society, to name a few.

The troop also participated in mock debates online, said Brady.

With meetings having resumed in person and outside, the troop is looking forward to camping in Pennsylvania.

In the meantime, they will continue to work toward their Eagle Scout award and rank.

Each Eagle Scout project has contributed to the communities where the girls reside.

When the pandemic hit, Bridget mobilized to assist SCARC Inc., which operates group homes for adults with special needs. Bridget collected CDs, movies and art supplies, and assembled kits for residents in the group homes.

Residents of Stanhope now have little free

libraries for neighborhood book exchanges, thanks to Zoe. (For her Gold Award project, Zoe installed a butterfly garden at Reverend Brown School in Sparta.)

Meanwhile, future visitors to Wallkill Valley Rail Trail will be afforded an assist to their birdwatching and hiking adventures courtesy of Brianna, who plans on building little libraries and stocking them with nature guides.

Katelyn, 15, of Andover, embarked on several landscaping projects for the Johnsonburg Swamp Preserve in Warren County, focusing on indigenous plants, including wild strawberries, alpine orchids and smooth sumac, to name a few.

Brothman, 19, finished the basement of the Andover Borough firehouse, cleaning, organizing and doing light construction work, including painting. She is among the few first-time Scouts (boys and girls) who joined at an advanced age and is being given two years to complete the Eagle program.

Jasmine of the Lake Lackawanna section of Byram spruced up her beloved beach with benches and landscaping.

Her mom, Jennifer Lutz, who is also a Girl Scout leader, attests to the change in her daughter since she joined the Scouts BSA.

"I've seen a side of her come out that I didn't think existed," she said. "This has taken her to the next level."

According to Lutz, her daughter joined the Scouts BSA shortly after witnessing her brother complete his Eagle Scout project. "She went to one meeting and came back and said, 'I want to be an Eagle.' She was so into it."

So, what does the male contingent think of all this?

"The boys questioned it at first," said Brady. "But after camp this summer in Branchville the difference didn't matter. They were all Scouts, all friends and hanging out."

"It gives the girls a good opportunity," said Matt Hanifan, older brother to Katelyn who is currently a leader with Troop 1150.

After 90 minutes, the weekly meeting



Brianna Conlon and Jasmine Lutz lead Troop 1150 in a first aid training exercise.

concluded, the fire was extinguished and the troop dispersed, gathering under the pavilion for some socializing before heading out. The other roles in their lives awaited. The leadership role, however, has transcended to all other aspects of life.

"Scouts has done so much in terms of personal growth for me," Lindsay said. "I tend to be pretty reserved in school, but in Scouts I had a comfortable place where I not only met my best friends but was given an opportunity to lead. This has made such a huge difference in my confidence, and I am so grateful for everything I have learned."



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