

# AMHERST BULLETIN

## Girl Scouts earn 'Silver Award' for efforts

By [Phyllis Lehrer](#)  
Staff Writer

Published on July 27, 2007

Selling cookies and clothing and collecting cans earned enough cash for eight Girls Scouts to perform a service project in Puerto Rico under the auspices of CORALations, a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving, restoring and researching coral reefs.

It also put them in line for a silver award, the second highest honor in Scouting.

Four members of Troop 549 in Amherst discussed the project and their years in Scouting at an informal slide show of the trip at the home of troop leader Janet Daisley. She, along with three other moms, accompanied the girls on the five-day trip last month.

While the island is a tropical paradise, this was not a vacation. The eight slept in one tent on the beach and ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches every day. It was hot and the shower broke, they said.

Yet they were enthusiastic about what they had seen and were committed to making a difference. Slides of the girls snorkeling underwater offered a glimpse of the project. They placed Reef Balls, concrete blocks, on the ocean floor in an effort to restore the coral off the island of Culebra, which is a ferry ride off the north east coast of Puerto Rico.

"We saw a lot of dead coral; it's depressing. It struck us (that) we need to protect this so it doesn't happen," said Kathryn "Katy" Peake, 14.

"Pollution is killing the coral. You step on it crumbles," said Pilar Jefferson, 13.

The trip included a visit to a rain forest, learning about the plants and animals and the culture.

Debbie Sicilia, who is from Puerto Rico, was responsible for the idea. Sicilia, who is an assistant troop leader and accompanied the Scouts, said she heard about an endangered turtle project. However, they were unable to connect with that organization and selected the coral project instead.

It took the Scouts two years to raise the \$8,000 for the trip. "We sold over 1,000 boxes of cookies," said Courtney Milne, 14. The biggest seller: Samoas.

"We wrote letters to business looking for sponsors," said Hilary Andler, 14. In addition Harcourt Inc., an educational publisher provided a \$2,000 matching grant, Daisley said.

They collected clothes and sold them to consignment shops, collected bottles and cans. "We recycled everything," they said.

They also held bake sales at the Amherst Regional Middle School, where all completed eighth-grade last year and will be at the high school in the fall.

These Scouts are the new generation.

"We don't wear uniforms; we're more laid back," said Courtney. The Scouts, who meet twice a month, hear programs about women entrepreneurs, organization development and visit biology labs at Smith College.

Ayodele Bond, Kyle Bond, Katherine Soper and Laura Figueroa are also members of the troop but were not present at the slide show. The other Scout leaders are Sue Milne and Jen Soper.

While they did attend the Scouting Camp Lewis Perkins, camping is not their thing. "One time we tried it on our own. It rained. We got lost in the woods," said Pilar.

"We didn't panic but said never again," according to Katy.

They have been Scouts and friends for a long time. All joined when they were five- or six-years old. The main reason: fun.

"My best friends were in Scouts and I was left out so I joined. It's really fun," Courtney said.

All are busy with other activities: Pilar dances with the Amherst Ballet. Courtney swims with the Tritons. Hilary is captain of the field hockey team while Katy plays ultimate, soccer and does cross country.

The community can hear about the restoration project and view the slide show in the fall when the Scouts present a program at the Hitchcock Center for the Environment. That and writing a report of what they learned are the last two steps to the Silver Award.

And they are thinking ahead to the Gold Award that also requires a service project. On their radar screen: either gathering medical supplies for an American Indian reservation or traveling to New Orleans to help rebuild the city, according to Katy.

On the home front, their community service includes working at Not Bread Alone, collecting clothes for the Amherst Survival Center and cleaning the salamander tunnels off Henry Street.

"You get to meet people in the community and help out. It's not hard to do good stuff with friends," Courtney said.

To see the project, visit [www.CORALations.org](http://www.CORALations.org).