



## **Girl Scout volunteers do more than dole out cookies, crafts, camp songs**

Contrary to popular belief, being a Girl Scout volunteer in greater LA is not just for moms of daughters. Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles (GSGLA) volunteers come from all walks of life and occupations, bringing something new and fresh to the world of Girl Scouting every time. Calling all moms, dads, grandparents, recent grads, lawyers, doctors, and rocket scientists! Everyone can be a Girl Scout volunteer, no matter how much time you have or your level of Girl Scout expertise.

**For some inspiration, here are current stories of some of our volunteers in greater LA. To be put in touch with these volunteers for potential interviews or profiles in a specific city in greater LA, please contact Melanie Larsen, GSGLA Communications Manager, [mlarsen@girlscoutsla.org](mailto:mlarsen@girlscoutsla.org).**

### **Michelle Merritt & Regina Barry**

#### **Troop Leaders in Compton**

Michelle Merritt has been a **Girl Scout member and volunteer in Compton for a whopping 41 years**—through sickness and in health. She started as a Brownie and Junior Girl Scout and then promptly started her own troop as a teen. The number of lives she has touched in her community since then is countless.

When she speaks of the girls she's had in her troops, Michelle beams with pride. **One girl earned her PhD in psychology; another is an entrepreneur and owns a successful childcare center in Compton; one has just become a fire inspector.** The list goes on.

Michelle is currently a service unit manager—a volunteer who oversees a cluster of troops in a specific location, in her case Compton/Lynwood—and she leads her own multi-level troop of 70 girls (Troop 943). Her grown daughters serve as co-leaders.

**With Michelle's help, her 19-year-old daughter Regina Barry leads the Daisy Girl Scouts (kindergarteners). Regina has Asperger syndrome**, a form of autism—and Girl Scouting has helped. "When Regina was a Girl Scout, all the other girls accepted her and she made wonderful friends," Michelle said. "Working with younger girls again helps Regina's self-esteem. They absolutely love her!"

When Regina was in high school, she earned Girl Scouts' highest award, the Girl Scout Gold Award. **Only six percent of eligible Girl Scouts nationwide earn the Gold Award.** To earn it, Regina organized an **autism awareness walk** in her community. **In April 2015, she will again host the walk—this time on a larger scale with support from the City of Compton.**

Regina's accomplishment follows a strong history of service and leadership in her family. **All of her sisters—Rashida Lakey-Benjamin, Kris Williams, and Brittney Batiste—received their Gold Award as well; the oldest, Rashida, was the first girl in Compton to "Go Gold."**

The City has been supportive of Michelle's troop and the girls' numerous service projects like handing out care packages and food to the homeless and volunteering at the senior care center, among other activities. Last year, the troop made Mayor Aja Brown an honorary Girl Scout.



Michelle took a short break from volunteering when she was diagnosed with breast cancer. After she beat it, she returned a few years later. Just this spring, she was **diagnosed with lupus, but she does not let that stop her.** “**Girl Scouts is the drive that keeps me going. Even when I’m having a tough day, the girls are there to pick me up,**” Michelle said. “They keep me feeling young.”

Michelle and Regina help the girls understand their health issues: They have **hosted breast cancer and autism awareness workshops**, and this year Michelle says she plans to add lupus awareness to their busy schedule of activities. Why? “Because Girl Scouts is about making the world a better place,” Michelle said.

## **Ginny Brideau, Rachel Proffitt, Sarah Ellquist, Helen Clarke**

### **Troop Leaders in Downtown Los Angeles**

Ginny Brideau is an admitted busybody. On top of her demanding job—**vice president of a public affairs firm**—she is also a mom, Girl Scout troop leader and service unit manager overseeing a cluster of eight Girl Scout troops in **Chinatown and Downtown Los Angeles (DTLA)**, where she resides.

What started out as a desire to be a troop leader for her daughter two years ago ballooned into hosting a multi-level “rainbow troop” for any girl age 5 to 17. Truly living out the “once a Girl Scout, always a Girl Scout,” Ginny’s been able to recruit co-leaders, parents, and other civic-minded volunteers to help lead the **more than 40 girls in Troop 16155**. “There are plenty of women who grew up in Girl Scouts who urgently want back in to the organization that helped shape their careers,” Ginny said. “So I submitted a press release to a Downtown LA blog and found two out of my three amazing co-leaders—none of which are moms besides me!”

Rachel Proffitt was living in DTLA’s arts district when she saw Ginny’s request for volunteers: “I saw how **downtown was becoming revitalized** with more families and working young couples. I thought why not influence the lives of girls growing up in this part of town?” Rachel works as an **occupational therapist and runs a USC research lab that develops customized video games for stroke rehabilitation**. “A lot of our girls in the troop come from **single parent families/families below the poverty line**, and I hope that I can be a role model for them as they start looking toward college and careers,” Rachel said. “The all-girl environment and the activities we do help shape them into competent, courageous, and successful women.”

Sarah Ellquist, **an urban planner by day and a rock musician by night**, also responded to Ginny’s blog post. She leads the kindergarteners in the troop. “**Even at five years old, life can be complicated and emotions complex**. I love catching up with the girls at every meeting, and being an ear for them to vent or brag, express sadness or joy,” Sarah said. “It makes me think back to that age. I was a military kid. With every troop came instant friends, exciting challenges and a chance to express myself—no matter where we moved.”

Helen Clarke contacted Girl Scouts of Greater Los Angeles as a way to put down roots and **engage with her local community after relocating from Scotland** (where she was a Girl Guide.) She was connected with the DTLA troop, which turned out to be a perfect fit. “The girls in the troop take charge of every activity,” Helen said. “Recently we earned the **Home Scientist badge**, and their curiosity and



engagement made me realize that we might have some **Nobel Prize winners in our midst!**" Her troop also **created a Construction badge, which they are excited to begin this year.** "Providing girls with a safe environment to explore their ideas and have adventures is vital, and I am honored to be part of an institution that provides this experience for girls," Helen said.

## **Ted Oyama**

### **Adult Educator in Greater Los Angeles**

When asked why he volunteers as an adult educator for Girl Scouts—that is, **training adults and older girls on specific outdoors and life skills**—Ted Oyama boils it down to simple math: "My daughter benefitted from being a Girl Scout for 12 years, I figure **I owe Girl Scouts at least 12 years of service.**"

Ted is currently on year five and doesn't just lead trainings—he's **organized major events like Girl Scouts' 100th anniversary camporee** and more. He has also served as a service unit manager, overseeing several troops in Downtown Los Angeles and Chinatown, for more than six years.

He holds trainings for girls and adults in **CPR, first-aid, backpacking, hiking, woodcraft, Hawaiian ribbon lei-braiding, and some STE[A]M (science, technology, engineering, art, math) activities.** One specific memory stands out for him: When he helped two girls earn their Backpack badge by teaching them skills and suggesting the girls themselves train adults in map and compass work. **The girls ended up teaching 40 leaders camping skills on a weekend trip** and, though timid at first, they were successful.

"Years later, one of the girls wrote about that experience for her essay when applying to Stanford. She was accepted and is now pre-med," Ted said. "This shows how we as trainers can affect the lives of girls in a way not imaginable. **I was only trying to help them earn their badge and yet this created a memory that remained all of those years afterward.**"