13 Young Women Soar as North Florida’s First Female Eagle Scouts!

Jacksonville, Florida – On February 8th, 2021, Scouts BSA (formerly known as the Boy Scouts of America) recognized 934 trailblazing young women from every part of America as being a part of the inaugural class of female Eagle Scouts. Our very own North Florida Council celebrated 13 such young women who joined this historic class of female Eagle Scouts. The North Florida Council encompasses the 17 counties of northeast Florida: Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Clay, Columbia, Dixie, Duval, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Lafayette, Levy, Marion, Nassau, Putnam, St. John's, Suwannee, and Union.

Only about 6% of Scouts on average attain Scouting’s highest rank, which requires individuals to take on leadership roles within their troop and their community; earn a minimum of 21 merit badges that cover a broad range of topics including first aid and safety, civics, business and the environment; and research, organize and complete a large community service project.

"Eagle Scout is a designation widely valued by universities, employers, and other respected institutions around the world, and we are honored to celebrate the hundreds of incredible young women who represent a truly historic class of recipients," said Roger Mosby who is the president and CEO of the Boy Scouts of America. "In earning this rank, young people gain new skills, learn to overcome obstacles, and demonstrate leadership among their peers and in their communities. Scouting’s benefits are invaluable, and we are elated that the opportunity to become an Eagle Scout is now available to even more youth—young men and young women alike."

Young women have been a part of Scouting for decades in co-ed programs offered by the Boy Scouts of America or BSA, including Sea Scouts, Venturing, Exploring, and STEM Scouts. The BSA expanded that legacy further on February 1, 2019 when they began admitting young women into Scouts BSA. Under the new name of Scouts BSA, the program offers Scouting in single-gender and separate troops, through which young people ages 11 through 17, work to attain the rank of Eagle Scout. Since 2019, tens of thousands of young women throughout Florida and across the country have joined the organizations most iconic program.

Scouts BSA did not recognize a first female Eagle Scout. Instead, Scouts BSA officially recognized their entire inaugural Class of Female Eagle Scouts this month - February 2021, which provided young women the needed time to complete all requirements. In order to be a part of the class, these female Eagle Scouts had to complete their final board of review between October 1st, 2020 through February 8th, 2021. The young women were recognized on February 8th, 2021 as a celebration and recognition of this historic achievement on Scouting’s anniversary.

“This is a powerful moment for these young women, for all Eagle Scouts, and for our nation,” said Jenn Hancock, the BSA’s national chair for programs. “People recognize Eagle Scouts as individuals of the highest caliber, and for the first time, that title isn’t limited by gender.”

Let’s meet these trailblazing young women from the First Coast!
Grace Bunch is a 17-year-old high school senior in the Cambridge Advanced Studies Program at Q.I. Roberts High School in Florahome, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 394 in her hometown of Interlachen, Florida on February 1, 2019, and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on January 30, 2021. She has earned 34 merit badges and earned additional awards of distinction including the Messengers of Peace, the National Outdoor Achievement Award for Camping, the World Conservation Award, and the Paul Bunyan Woodsman Award. Grace’s troop leadership positions included the positions of Patrol Leader, Webmaster, Librarian, and Historian. She completed over 100 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Francis Volunteer Fire Department and Putnam County EMS community in order to better identify home addresses in her rural community for enhanced day and nighttime visibility for First Responders. Her team of volunteers identified residences without adequate 911 address visibility, placed reflective address signs on mailboxes and individual properties. She led a team of 23 volunteers both youth and adult, who assisted with her project over multiple days. Her team provided 149 volunteer service hours to complete her project to enhance the efficiency and response time to the First Responders in her community.

Olivia Foli is a 17-year old high school junior at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School and dual enrolled with Santa Fe College, in Gainesville, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 21 in Gainesville, Florida on February 1, 2019. She completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on October 6, 2020. She has earned 36 merit badges. Olivia’s leadership positions included Senior Patrol Leader, Quartermaster, Scribe, Troop Guide, and Junior Assistant Scoutmaster. She is also a member of a local Venturing Crew and Sea Scout Ship 116 in Ocala. Olivia attended National Youth Leadership Training and returned as staff the following year. She completed over 580 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the University of Florida's UF Health and Shands Hospital, where she created an outdoor activity for the pediatric hospital's new Healing Garden. Olivia worked with her team of volunteers from in five states to hand paint nearly 700 healing stones with an encouraging message, as prizes for completing the Scout Law Rock Scavenger Hunt in the garden. She led 100 scouts and adults in its completion over a 3-month period which equaled 362 total service hours.
Taryn Hoffman-Rocha is a 17-year old high school senior in the Cambridge Advanced Studies Program at Q.I. Roberts High Scout in Florahome, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 394 in Interlachen, Florida on February 1, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on January 30, 2021. She has earned all 137 merit badges and earned several STEM Supernova awards. She has attended and staffed National Youth Leadership Training, achieved Brotherhood in the Order of the Arrow, and has completed leadership programs such as Kodiak, Powderhorn, and the Summit at Bechtel Scout Reservation. She has led as one of the first young women to hold the title of Chapter Chief of her Order of the Arrow Chapter, and has served as Senior Patrol Leader. She has achieved the Pathfinder rank and will soon complete her Summit award in BSA’s Venturing program and has served as President of a Venturing Crew. She completed more than 500 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Alachua Conservation Trust where she removed invasive plant life from the Idylwild Trails at Seranola Forest Preserve in Gainesville, FL. Her team of volunteers helped maintain and clear several walking and hiking trails and removed many bags full of invasive plants in order to make the community preserve healthier and more inviting as well as to clear the land of the invasive species in order to allow for planting of healthy native plant life and trees. She led 20 other scouts and adults in its completion which equaled 120 total service hours.

Courtney Laird is a 15-year old high school sophomore at The Episcopal School in Jacksonville, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 892 in Fleming Island, Florida on February 1, 2019, and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on December 21st, 2020. She has earned 33 merit badges, completed National Youth Leadership Training in 2019, and was inducted into the Order of the Arrow honor society for Scouting in 2020. She has led as Senior Patrol Leader, Patrol Leader, Outdoor Ethics Guide, and Troop Guide. She has completed 184 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Quigley House – the domestic violence and sexual assault center which serves Clay County. On August 15th, she built a young adult library and reading area for the shelter, raising more than $3,400 in donations for the project. The new library included a bookcase filled with more than 200 brand new books, a rug, comfortable seating, tables, and reading lamps. Literature was chosen to appeal to children ages 12-17, with a focus on diverse, entertaining, and award-winning books. Her future aspiration is to become a Plastic Surgeon.
Dianna McNair is a 19-year old 2020 graduate of QI Roberts High School in Florahome, Florida and currently a freshman at University of Central Florida in Orlando, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 394 in Interlachen, Florida on February 1st, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on February 8th, 2021. She has earned 30 merit badges and was inducted into the Order of the Arrow in 2019, and was on the summer camp aquatics staff at Camp Shands in 2016, 2019, and 2020. She has led as Senior Patrol Leader, Patrol Leader, and Troop Guide. She completed 67 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Lion’s Club where she installed a double sided “Little Free Library” and “Little Free Pantry” community box. Her team of volunteers repurposed an old cabinet and installed new doors and shelves onto to convert it into a box that opens on both sides, with books on one side and food on the other. She led 16 other scouts and adults in its completion which equaled 106 total service hours.

Linda Mentz is a 15-year old high school sophomore at Eastside High School in Gainesville, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 21 in Gainesville, Florida on February 1st, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on January 31st, 2021. She has earned 24 merit badges, served on the National Youth Leadership Training staff, and has led as Assistant Patrol Leader, Quartermaster, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, and Senior Patrol Leader. She completed 447 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit Gainesville Fire Rescue, where she designed and built two bunker gear dryers out of PVC pipe. Her team of volunteers cut and glued PVC, primed and painted wood, and assembled the components to verify the dryers worked. She led 14 other scouts and adults in its completion over a two month period which equaled 98 total service hours.
Kelly Myers is an 18-year old high school graduate of Home Life Academy in Interlachen, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 394 in Interlachen, Florida on February 1st, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on October 26th, 2020. She has earned 42 merit badges and was awarded the National Outdoor Awards for Aquatics and Camping. She is an Ordeal member of the Order of the Arrow honor society for Scouting. As a Level 1 Archery Instructor, she has served on the shooting sports staff both at Camp Rainey Mountain and Camp Shands. She has led as Quartermaster, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, and Senior Patrol Leader. She completed 438 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Interlachen Lions Club where she installed bat houses to support the local Mexican Free-Tailed Bat population. Her team of volunteers built and installed three bat houses. She led 36 other scouts and adults in its completion over 3 days total 145 service hours. Her future aspiration is to attend Georgia Technical Institute to pursue a career in welding.

Marina Mitchell is a 15-year old high school sophomore and honors student at Ponte Vedra High School. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 291 in Ponte Vedra, Florida on February 1st, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on February 2, 2021. She has earned 22 merit badges and was inducted into the Order of the Arrow honor society for scouting in 2019. She attended the World Scout Jamboree in 2019 and National Youth Leadership Training in Atlanta, Georgia. She has led as Senior Patrol Leader, Troop Guide, Scribe and Assistant Senior Patrol Leader. She completed 143 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Crosby Sanctuary at the Duval Audubon Society where she led six Scouts to put together picnic tables and benches. They will be able to use this outdoor classroom for future educational programs and presentations.
Jessica Parker is a 19-year old Bartram Trail High School 2020 graduate and currently a freshman at the University of North Florida at the Hicks Honors College. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 291 in Ponte Vedra, Florida on February 1st, 2019 and completed her Eagle Board of Review on October 9, 2020. She has earned 76 merit badges and she has been a member of the Order of the Arrow since 2019 where she now serves as the Inductions Chairman for the Lodge. She has served as a Senior Patrol Leader for her Troop in Ponte Vedra and as Troop Guide for Troop 101 in Jacksonville. She has served on staff for the National Youth Leadership Training five times and on staff for both the National Advanced Youth Leadership Experience at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico as well as the Summit Bechtel Reserve in West Virginia. Jessica’s Eagle project included 184 hours of volunteer service in her community by leading her fellow scouts and adult leaders to construct 5 bee boxes for the Saint Johns County Beekeepers Association. The bee boxes have been strategically placed around the city of St. Augustine. Jessica is also a Summit Award recipient through Venturing BSA, which is similar to an Eagle Scout award, a rare feat. Her future aspiration is to become a Physical Therapist.

Olivia Pottenburgh is a 15-year-old high school freshmen with Florida Virtual High School in Jacksonville, Florida. She became a founding member of Scouts BSA Troop 892 in Fleming Island, Florida on February 1st, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on December 21st, 2020. She has earned 47 merit badges and was inducted into the Order of the Arrow honor society for scouting in 2020. She has led as Patrol Leader, Troop Guide, Instructor, Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, and Junior Assistant Scoutmaster. She completed 181 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Jacksonville Humane Society where she constructed an outdoor ‘meet and greet’ area to facilitate dog adoptions during COVID-19. After raising $3,500, her team of volunteers tilled the ground, removed debris, laid down topsoil and sod, installed a sprinkler system, dug postholes, set eight 6x6x12 posts, and hung three large 20x26 foot shade sails. Now the shelter has four 20x20 foot beautifully shaded and grassed ‘meet and greet’ areas for prospective families to meet adoptable dogs. She led 89 other scouts and adults in its completion over an eight-day period which equaled 382 total service hours. Her future aspiration is to become an Industrial Designer.
Samantha Surratt is a 17-year-old high school senior in the Cambridge Advanced Studies at QI Roberts High School in Florahome, Florida. She founded Scouts BSA Troop 394 in Interlachen, Florida on February 1, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on January 30, 2021. She has earned 45 merit badges and is a Brotherhood member in the Order of the Arrow honor society for Scouting. She has obtained the National Outdoor Achievement Award in Aquatics, Camping, and Conservation, the Messengers of Peace Award, and World Conservation Award. Samantha has worked at Camp Shands for the last three years as a Life Guard and also ran the Ecology program. She has led her Troop as Assistant Senior Patrol Leader, Senior Patrol Leader, and Quartermaster. She has completed 309 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA, which culminated in her Eagle Scout project to benefit the Interlachen Lions Club. She led the construction of three raised garden boxes with a self-timing watering system. Her team of volunteers assembled the boxes, filled them with soil, constructed a hanging irrigation system, and planted starter crops. She led over 25 other scouts and adults in its completion over a two day period which equaled a total of 325 service hours.

Eve Waskevich is an 18-year-old high school senior at Interlachen High School in Interlachen, Florida. She founded Scouts BSA Troop 394 in Interlachen, Florida on February 1, 2019 and completed her Eagle Scout Board of Review on February 3, 2021. She has earned 34 merit badges and was inducted into the Order of the Arrow, the national honor society of scouting in 2020. Additionally, she has been awarded the Messengers of Peace, the National Outdoor Achievement Award for Camping, and the World Conservation Award. Eve’s troop leadership positions included the positions of Assistant Senior Patrol Leader and Troop Guide. She completed over 40 hours of volunteer service in her community since joining Scouts BSA which culminated in her Eagle Scout service project to benefit her troop’s charter organization, the Interlachen Lion’s Club. For her project, Eve organized and coordinated the construction of four wooden benches to be placed outside the Lion’s club that will be available for community use. The benches were strategically placed to compliment accessibility to a community garden, a free little library and pantry, and near a public road which serves has a parade route during community holiday celebrations. To complete her project, Eve led a team of 17 volunteers including other scouts, and community youth and adults, who provided 118 volunteer service hours to her project which not only benefited her troop’s charter organization, but also enhances her home community.