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Scouts' mission to help girls reach potential

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They're more than cookies and camp songs.

Today's Girl Scouts offers programs to help girls build skills, promote community service, and help them reach their full potential in an organization made up of mostly volunteers.

It's a worldwide organization that boasts 2.7 million girls in the United States, dating to 1912.

Locally, the Great Rivers Girl Scout Council counts 60 paid staff

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and 8,500 volunteers in an organization that balances its focus on impacting girls' lives with running a nonprofit business.

"Our volunteers have to be managed to get the results with girls, the same as paid staff do," said

Barbara Bonifas, CEO of the Great Rivers Council, which was honored as one of 13 finalists in the Courier's ONE Awards.

"You're presenting a different face of nonprofit," she said. "It's such a wonderful thing to hear people saying nonprofits add big value to the community."

The local council has undergone changes in the past couple decades.

"Eighteen years ago, we were threatened with losing our funding because we weren't doing what we were supposed to be doing," Bonifas said. "We had to transform the organization and get it on track with our mission. We are very mission-focused."

The Girl Scout mission: to build girls of courage, confidence and character, who make the world a better place.

"What the nonprofit has to do is make a difference in girls' lives and keep the business in business," said Nancy Dawes, immediate past board chairwoman.

"The policy helps ensure the board has gone through the process, in terms of how the business is run," she said. "As long as the CEO stays within the principles,



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Barbara Bonifas, CEO of the Great Rivers Girl Scout Council, said the mostly volunteer organization is becoming more results-oriented.

we don't need to get into the day-to-day details. That allows the board to focus on the girls and where our organization is heading."

Girl Scouts offers sports skill-building clinics, career mentoring, world travel and cultural exchanges, among other programs appealing to girls today.

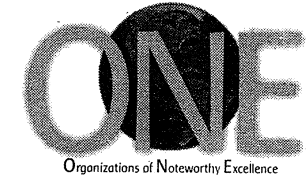
And keeping this business in business is a challenge.

"We have core processes and enabling processes, kind of like

the foundations in a building," Bonifas said. Within the core is recruiting, training and evaluating volunteers.

The organization lays out its expectations and steps back.

"They don't manage by saying do it, and we'll tell you if you don't," Bonifas said. "As part of that, they invite volunteers to give input into those goal statements. What should we be doing for girls?"



2006 ONE Award Category Winner **PEOPLE**

The winners were chosen through a rigorous process, against objective criteria modeled after the Baldrige National Quality Award program.

Great Rivers Girl Scout Council

Description: Offers programs that help build girls' courage, confidence and character.

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