

American Heritage Girls: The Contagious Passion of Jesus

When Patti Garibay gathered her fellow mothers around her kitchen table in 1995, determined to create a faith-based community for their daughters, she had no idea their group would multiply four-hundredfold.

The original faith-based scouting organization is turning the big 2-0, culminating in a celebration at Anderson University June 24-26.

Now, two decades later, 40,000 American Heritage Girls are celebrating life and liberty, redefining scouting into faith and service. While that thought is nice, their impact is startling.

In the last year alone, AHG performed 6,000 hours of community service. Garibay says most of their alumnae choose service-oriented projects at ministries and nonprofits. As for the churches that sponsored the troops, Garibay says they have seen their memberships increase, as well.

"When people see the red, white and blue uniforms, they know we have a bias for action in His name," Garibay says. "American Heritage Girls is countering the culture; our girls do things upside down, do them the way Jesus would have done."

The organization is built on biblical values and challenging the culture. Garibay and a group of mothers started the community when the Girl Scouts of America added an asterisk to their promise in 1993, allowing the pledges to replace the word "God" with whatever she personally believed. For AGH, it's not about the "girl power" that culture is promoting, but God's power.

"Our philosophy is biblical and timeless," Garibay says. "It's

important for girls to look for their identity in Christ and understand that through Him all things are possible.”

Through this, the girls are charged with leadership projects that enable them to stand politically and culturally for Christ. The most sought-after badge is the Respect Life patch, which focuses not just on the unborn, but the elderly and differently abled, as well.

For the girls, the projects and the patches are much more than merit badges.

“What I did was a great thing, but I wanted people to see God and not me,” says AHG Hannah Howarth. “If you are ever going to begin the Stars & Stripes project, I want to tell you that it is a rewarding thing, and it builds you as an individual. There may be days that you may feel tired, but know that your hard work is paying off. ... You will be able to learn what your strengths and weaknesses are, and it allows you to see where your skill might fit into your future job/career. ... AHG has helped me better understand service. Service is a way of showing God’s love to others. If I help someone, but have no heart in caring for them, then the service was worthless.”

The passion is contagious, and the older girls are responsible for mentoring the younger ones. These relationships encourage the girls to stay in the troops rather than letting go at a certain age, cultivating a continued passion for serving God.

–Jessilyn Justice