

TL Girl Scouts visit firehouse, courthouse

Meet strong women as role models who fight fires and bring justice

By MARJORIE BEGGS

SCHOOL MAY BE the place for learning, but summer activities taught the Girl Scouts of Troop 62084 some invaluable lessons — they can grow up to be firefighters or judges, independent and strong, share skills and activities, and have a lot of fun as kids, even if they live in the Tenderloin.

The troop formed three years ago, the TL's first in 20 years, and now has 18 members: 5 Daisies, kindergartners and first-graders; 9 Brownies, second- and third-graders; and 4 Juniors, fourth- and fifth-graders. About a third of them live at Glide's family housing building at 125 Mason St., where they meet every other Friday evening to do arts and crafts and plan community projects and field trips.

The aim of the Girl Scouts of America, founded in 1912, is to "bring girls out of isolated home environments and into community service and the open air."

Six Brownies and Juniors back in July took BART to visit Lt. Cynthia Rickert, head of the Fire Department's Airport Station 1, and her crew. The girls got to walk in a firefighter's shoes, literally, trying on boots and turnout coats, felt the power of a spraying hose, cruised along in a fire truck.

The firehouse trip had a couple of goals, says Karli Mullane, the Girl Scouts of Northern California's S.F. volunteer press rep. Navigating BART helps the girls get comfortable taking public transportation, an essential skill for inner-city kids. Seeing female firefighters and a woman commander broadens their



GIRL SCOUT TROOP 62084

Troop members, from left, Helen L., Keira V., Maya M. and Lydia L. try on heavy firefighter turnout coats helped by Lt. Cynthia Rickert, head of Airport Fire Station 1.

sense of possibilities, and watching airplanes take off and land from down on the runway is just plain thrilling.

Another important lesson, says troop leader Nancy Johnsen, could save lives: "Lt. Rickert taught the girls not to be afraid of firefighters. In a home fire, children naturally hide — and when firefighters come to the rescue in full turnout uniform and helmet and speak through a mask, they seem like monsters, adding to the child's fears. So she put on her whole garb, then asked the girls to give her a hug or a high-five to prove she wasn't a monster."

Next trip, in August, TL troop members joined 26 scouts from other San Francisco neighborhoods and met with Chief Magistrate Judge Maria-Elena James, another role model. In chambers at U.S. District Court in the Federal Building, Judge James helped them hold a mock trial — Goldilocks vs. The Three Bears. The jurors found Goldilocks guilty as charged for eating the bears' porridge, sitting in their chairs and sleeping in their beds without asking.

Scouting and knot-tying go hand in fist. At one summer meeting, the girls

learned some classic knots, then connected the ropes and got a lesson in Double Dutch, a jump-rope game that requires cooperation, coordination and persistence. One or more players jump in as the holders turn two long ropes in opposite directions, like egg beaters. The game may have originated with ancient Phoenician, Egyptian and Chinese rope makers at seaports, but today is an internationally popular urban sport that includes tournaments and competitions.

"To help people at all times" is a Girl Scout motto, and that includes helping each other. Junior and senior high school-age scouts from a Sunset neighborhood troop attended TL troop meetings to plan menus for an early June overnight trip to Girl Scout Camp Ida Smith on the southeast end of Lake Merced. At the campout, they taught the younger girls how to build a fire, recognize certain plants and retire an old flag.

For information about troop membership or volunteering, contact Nancy Johnsen, njlw9046@yahoo.com, (415) 336-9046. ■

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