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## Older Scouts bring wisdom, commitment to organizations



Celeste Davis, leader of Troop 1923, helps Scouts including Aiyana Black, 5, left, and Lilly-Ann Betegon, 9, during a meeting at Simpson United Methodist Church in Amityville. Credit: Newsday/Steve Pfost

**By Donna Kutt Nahas**

[Special to Newsday](#)

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In 1984, after Mitchell Steinberg's son joined the Cub Scouts, the youth organization needed volunteers. The Setauket resident and podiatrist, then 37, agreed to lend a hand carpooling boys to a few events. Within three years, he found himself helping to lead a Boy Scout troop in his hometown, eventually becoming its Scoutmaster. Four years later, when Steinberg's younger son joined the ranks, the elder Steinberg was still active with the troop.

"I stayed on," he said of Suffolk County Council of the Boy Scouts of America. "They needed volunteers and I started doing some things and before I knew it, I had a uniform on and there you go ... My older son is now 46 and my younger son is 42. I've been doing this for a long time without my kids in the troop, for sure."

In 1997, Celeste Davis of Amityville, then 40, became a Girl Scout leader when her daughter joined the Daisy troop, the initial level of Girl Scouts. “When I was a Girl Scout, my mother was not able to be a Girl Scout leader,” said the administrative clerk. “I wanted to do it for my daughters.”

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As her daughter advanced through the Scouting ranks, Davis’ younger daughter also enrolled. The elder Davis stayed put.

“This is my 25th year [with Girl Scouts of Suffolk County],” said Davis, whose [two daughters are now in their 20s](#). “For me, it’s my love of Girl Scouting that has kept me.”

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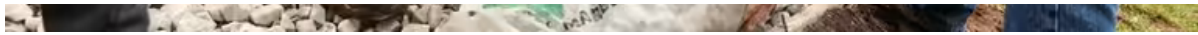
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Davis, now 64, and Steinberg, now 74 and a grandfather of nine, whose two sons are Eagle Scouts, the organization’s coveted highest rank, and eldest grandson is a Boy Scout, are still serving as the Scoutmasters of Boy Scout Troop 70 in Setauket and Girl Scout Troop 1923 in Amityville, respectively, long after their children have aged out of the youth programs. They join other dedicated longtime Scouting volunteers who, despite the demands of work and family, continue to contribute time and energy to help mold the next generation of Scouts.





William Buckley Jr., left, Tobin Fanning-Hughes and Scoutmaster Andy Johns work on an Eagle Scout project at the Long Island Science Museum. Credit: Newsday/Steve Pfof

## Across generations

The Massapequa-based Theodore Roosevelt Council of the Boy Scouts of America and the Suffolk County Council of Boy Scouts of America in Farmingville along with the Garden City-based Girl Scouts of Nassau County and Girl Scouts of Suffolk County in Commack each rely on roughly 3,000 to more than 4,000 volunteers. Both nonprofit organizations employ a skeleton staff and each serve from 7,000 to nearly 11,000 enrollees.

Experts say volunteering for a youth organization like the Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts can be “especially beneficial if it’s in line with a person’s values and beliefs.”

“When you are giving to these types of organizations, you are also connecting to the next generation in that community and to like-minded people in your area who are committed to that same goal,” said Kimberly Alba, clinical psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health’s Child Division at the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University. “It [volunteering] also increases a sense of community and relationship-building among adults who volunteer, and it helps to strengthen the person’s sense of purpose and role in the community and society at large.”

C. Andrew “Andy” Johns, 62, identifies with the mission and vision of the Theodore Roosevelt Council. The Port Washington resident joined Troop 97 in Manhasset when he was 11 years old, attaining Eagle Scout status at 18 in 1977. Soon after, he signed up to serve as assistant Scoutmaster of the same troop he joined as a child. Forty-four years later, he is still a Scoutmaster, but of Troop 7 in Port Washington.

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“Scouting has meant the world to me,” said Johns, the father of three grown sons who rose through the Boy Scout ranks to become Eagle Scouts. “It did so much to prepare me for my life as an adult that I wanted to give back.”

Johns, a retired chief financial officer for media and technology companies, says he volunteers with Boy Scouts up to 80 hours a month, from guiding the youth through community service projects and securing the troop’s participation in parades to lending a hand at award banquets and supervising camping trips.

During the pandemic lockdown, Johns said he met virtually with his troop of 60 Scouts, ages 11 to 18. But when Zoom-fatigue set in, he held meetings on the grounds of the United Methodist Church in Port Washington, which sponsors the group. The boys came armed with headlamps and flashlights so they could see in the dark and brought collapsible camping chairs to sit on.

“We pivoted to keep the program going,” he said. “We made campfire cooking tripods, learned Scouting skills, like how to use a map and compass, and played games.”

For Johns, the rewards of volunteering are watching youth grow into mature young men of character. “Scouting gives them an anchor, especially for some youths who may be troubled,” he said. “As they grow, they are taking on additional leadership responsibilities. Parents sometimes comment, ‘My kid doesn’t listen to anyone, but they’ll listen to older boys.’ They learn from each other and not just Scout leaders.”



Troop 1923 leader Celeste Davis works in the garden at Simpson United Methodist Church with Mia Romanyszyn. Credit: Newsday/Steve Pfost

### **'How can I help?'**

While some volunteer leaders have no personal connection to Scouting, many others are introduced to the youth organizations when their children, grandchildren or nieces and nephews become participants. “You take your son or daughter to a pack meeting and say, ‘How can I help?’ Those are dangerous words,” David G. Hunt, president of the Suffolk County Council of Boy Scouts, said with a laugh.

He explained that some who remain lifelong volunteers after they have followed their children through Scouting during the teenage years and age out at 18, do so because of a special allegiance and dedication to the organization.

Sharon Cannarella, 61, of West Islip, says her service to Scouting is a calling. In 2005, she signed up to volunteer with the Suffolk County Council of Boy Scouts as a den leader when her son enrolled in Cub Scouts and as a troop leader for Girl Scouts of Suffolk County when her daughter became a Brownie. For more than a dozen years, she relished helping Scouts reach their full potential. But in 2018, the buyer for a dental manufacturer decided to work in an administrative role for the organization. As district commissioner, she spends four to six hours each week troubleshooting problems at the troop, pack or den level.

“When the kids start in first grade, they are so malleable. But by the time they finish, they’re standing tall, a flag goes by and they salute it. To see that is to see a miracle happening,” Cannarella said. “You see these kids grow in knowledge and confidence. I feel I was important to someone, to a kid.”

Both youth organizations say male and female volunteers, who are 18 and older, are welcome. There are no minimum or maximum number of hours volunteers are required to log each month. Nevertheless, both organizations have set hours for mandatory training and require volunteer candidates to undergo criminal background checks.

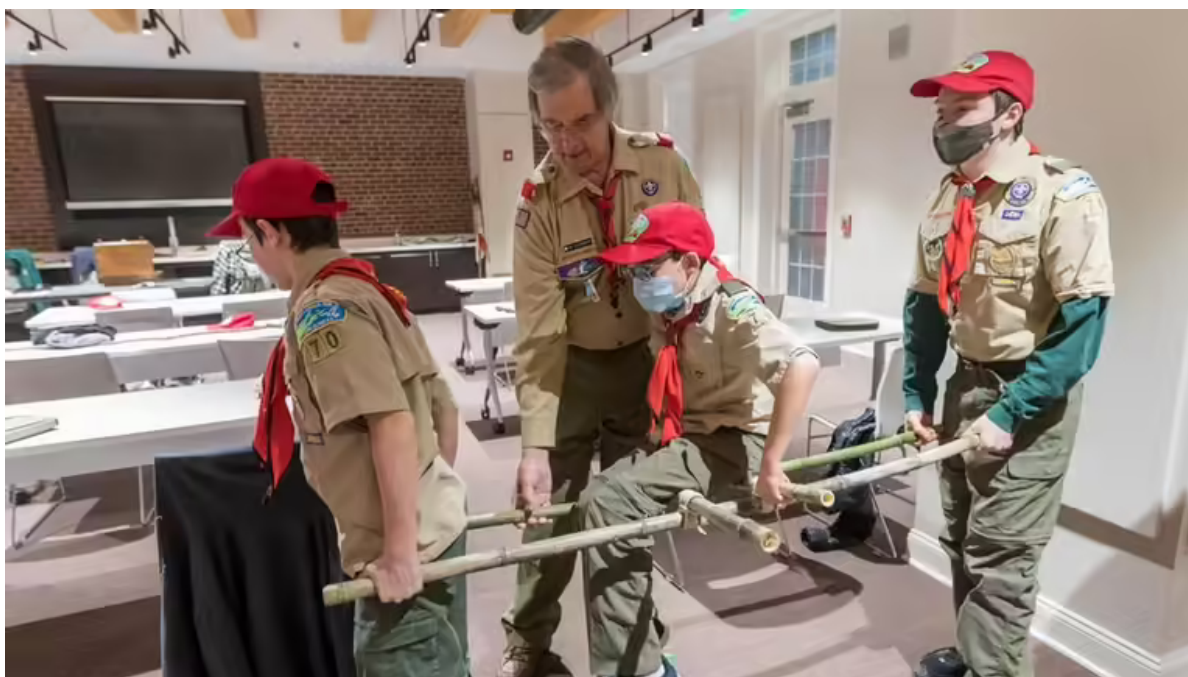


Scouting leaders say volunteers should be committed to the ideals of Scouting and set a positive example as a role model. “You need to be reliable and consistent,” advised Scoutmaster Steinberg. “You need to be committed to what you are doing. You can’t be spotty.”

Girl Scout volunteers are required to attend a three-hour basic training, “which is mostly virtual,” said Denise Ingenito, chief community impact officer of Girl Scouts of Nassau County. “Additional training is offered for activities like camping trips or for volunteers who interact with girls with special needs.”

For some positions in Boy Scouts of America, which accepts boys and girls ages 5 to 21, training can be taken online while other roles require “multiple-day” sessions. Every volunteer must enroll in a “youth protection” program, said Hunt, the president of the Suffolk County Council of Boy Scouts. Volunteers for both organizations are also required to pay a nominal annual membership fee.

Boy Scouts of America volunteers can work directly with youth in such traditional roles as Scoutmasters for troops, den leaders for Cub Scout packs and merit badge counselors, teaching a range of skills like fire-building and first-aid, or helping with administrative tasks.



Troop 70 Scoutmaster Mitch Steinberg helps David Preis, left, Will Latham and Gavin Plume hone their lashing skills at a troop meeting in Setauket. Credit: Barry Sloan

## **Benefits of mentoring**

Girl Scouts also offers several volunteer opportunities, from troop leaders and cookie program managers to outdoor training volunteers and mentors for the Gold Award, the highest achievement in Girl Scouts.

Fifty-something Fatima Perry is committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of girls. When the South Floral Park resident was 33, she pitched in as a “cookie mom” for the Girl Scouts of Nassau County, helping her daughter’s Brownie troop sell Girl Scout Cookies. “Then I started helping out with snacks and got more involved,” said the mother of five and graduate student in social work.

Perry, a Girl Scout herself for eight years while growing up in Manhasset and Hempstead, became a Scout leader in 2012 for Hempstead Troop 1134, girls 12 to 18 years old. A decade later, she still leads the same troop and serves as a Gold Award mentor.

“My responsibility is to keep the girls safe, help plan the activities for the year and to have a little fun and learn,” said Perry, who spends about 10 hours a week volunteering. She also leads the youth in community-service projects like sending holiday cards to nursing-home residents and organizing a food drive for a local church.

While she enjoys the adventure of introducing her troop to new experiences, she sometimes struggles to keep the teenage girls engaged. “Girls are finding themselves at that age,” she said. “That’s the biggest challenge, to keep them wanting to come back.”

Stony Brook’s Alba says adult mentors play an important role in the lives of teens at a time when they are striving for independence. “They [mentors] help them navigate the many changes that are happening during the developmental stages,” she said. “They give them nonjudgmental space where adolescents can express themselves to discuss ongoing stressors at school or with peers.”

To Perry, the rewards of leading the troop outweigh any challenges. “They [these girls] are paychecks from the heart,” she said. “Our children are our future, and we have to invest in them. It’s so nice to see these young ladies bloom.”

## 5 questions for potential volunteers

Kimberly Alba, clinical psychologist in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health’s Child Division at the Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University, recommends these five top questions to ask yourself before you volunteer:

- What activities or experiences leave me feeling invigorated or energized?
- What skills do I want to grow during a volunteering opportunity?
- What can I offer and how do I envision my role?
- What core values do I want to pass down to future generations?
- How much time can I commit? “A short-term trial will help you determine if you would like to extend it,” she said.

To volunteer for Girl Scouts of Nassau County, visit [gsnc.org](https://gsnc.org); for Girl Scouts of Suffolk County, visit [gssc.us](https://gssc.us). For the Theodore Roosevelt Council of the Boy Scouts of America or the Suffolk County Council of Boy Scouts of America, visit [beascout.org](https://beascout.org). Scroll down to “Become a Leader” and type in your ZIP code to see a list of volunteer opportunities in your area.

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