

The Kentuckiana Girl Scout Council is preparing to honor a local Senior Girl Scout, Nicollette Barreras, on May 11, with the completion of her Girl Scout Gold Award Project. This is the highest award given in Girl Scouts. The Gold Award is held in the highest regard in the same manner as the prestigious Boy Scout Eagle Award.

"I have been a part of Girl Scouts," Barreras said, "since I was a little scout with a sash, selling Girl Scout cookies."

Miss Barreras' Southern Indiana Troop 1904 has been a source of fun and inspiration for many years in her life and her Senior Leader, Cyndy Mazer has stood behind her every step of the way to achieve her Gold Award. She has also relied on the guidance of two of her mentors, her Principal Janie Whaley and her Project Advisor Bill Wiseheart. Their support was invaluable as it guided her through this process.

Barreras will be honored at Derby Dinner Playhouse with other Gold Award recipients, with a dinner and an award ceremony. Barreras' Girl Scout Gold Award project, "Tennis Tree Line-Up" will be highlighted at the ceremony. Her project was borne from a lack of shade surrounding the Floyd Central High School tennis courts and their hot metal spectator bleachers. Floyd Central recently resurfaced the tennis courts but did not have the funding immediately available for extra landscaping. Barreras attends matches to support her Floyd Central Tennis Team, as she was a member of the Girl's Tennis Team as a freshman.

"Even though I no longer play tennis for my school competitively, I still love to support my friends by attending their matches, but it was quite hot on those metal bleachers in the summer sun," said Barreras

After talking to several tennis parents, who expressed a wish for more trees and landscaping, Barreras decided to pursue an idea by partnering with past and present tennis families and supporters to make the landscaping a reality. She formulated a detailed plan to fund the needed trees through the purchase of donation bricks. Miss Barreras also rallied several local business owners, including Earth First and local Lincoln Springs Garden Center to donate soil, mulch, and rock to the project.

"Everyone was so eager to help and to see this project succeed. I am incredibly proud of all my team who helped to make this project a reality," said Barreras.

The Girl Scout Gold Award Project Handbook encourages its girls to plan, learn, build a team, and execute an approved project within a time frame, keeping track of all their progress and hours spent working on the project. Barreras' goal was to complete her project before graduating her senior year from high school, and before the girls tennis season was under way. Ideally, Barreras' first idea was to plant much larger trees to immediately shade the tennis spectator area, but because of the shallow depth of utility lines, had to opt for smaller trees initially.

"It's a little smaller scale tree than I had at first envisioned, but in two years the trees will double in size. That's exciting," said Barreras.

One of the criteria for the Girl Scout Gold Award is that each project must be sustainable. The approved project needs to be continued after the first phase of the plan is initially completed.

Since Barreras' project includes a donation brick walkway to commemorate Floyd Central tennis players, coaches and supporters, it will leave a lasting legacy for the school and a way to continue support in the future.

"The brick walkway does add a spirit of community and legacy to the tennis facility. It was a wonderful way to let people share their love of tennis with others and to honor family members and friends forever," said Chad Clunie, psychology teacher at Floyd Central.

Many FC parents, faculty, and student's names are engraved in the donor bricks, and this will offer an avenue to continue funding for any needed landscaping in the years to come. Barreras said she learned not only how to plant and maintain trees, but also how to organize a larger scale project. She had a huge lesson in money management as well, and even learned first hand how to lay a brick walkway.

"I am amazed at how very much I learned about the responsibility of executing a plan, listening to other's advice and expertise, and coordinating many steps to arrive at a goal," said Barreras. Girl Scouts offered her a great avenue to learn from so many people in business and in the private sector as well, she said.

Barreras still manages to find time to be an excellent student, be involved in Student Council, theatre, ballet, and vocal performance with her choir, as well as being a mentor with younger students both at school and at the Southeast Church Indiana campus.

"I love helping others, it gives me great joy," she said. Barreras also has worked on the Floyd Central Dance Marathon Executive Committee to raise money for the Riley Children's Hospital and helped to organize a fundraiser to sell handmade hair bands to support clean water in Third World countries through the non-profit organization, ActiveWater.org.

After receiving this prestigious award, Barreras, will go on to graduate from Floyd Central High School and she plans to attend Belmont University in Nashville in the fall. The inspiration for her life comes from many sources; her family, friends, teachers, her church youth group, and her many years in Girl Scouting. Girl Scouts has definitely been a source of guidance and encouragement to equip her to use all the necessary tools to make any project a reality! Shovels, bricks, and garden plans included!