

## **Fond du Lac Girl Scout Earns Girl Scouts' Highest Award**

Local Girl Scout Ivy Bolthouse recently earned the prestigious Girl Scout Gold Award, the highest National Award a Girl Scout can earn. The Gold Award recognizes Girl Scouts in grades 9-12 who demonstrate leadership through sustainable projects that address community needs. Bolthouse's Gold Award Project focused on menstrual equity. She created a supply and distribution chain for free feminine hygiene products to be available in bathrooms at Fond du Lac High School, as well as creating take-home bags of supplies for teens in need outside of school. In earning the award, Bolthouse demonstrated outstanding leadership, organizational, and networking skills.

The project was inspired by both personal experience and a larger view of the social impact of access to menstrual products.

"I've personally needed menstrual products at school, put money in the machines and not had them work. Products were available in the office, but that's a long walk from most school bathrooms – we don't make students walk to the office for toilet paper. Pads and tampons are no different," said Bolthouse.

Bolthouse hopes the project will open a larger, continuing conversation. Her project's fundraising efforts included creating and selling pins expressing the normalcy of menstruation. She wants people to understand that there is nothing shameful about menstruation; that it is a normal part of life. Bolthouse expressed that what is shameful is when students have to miss class time due lack of access to products.

"We have a fairly significant poverty rate in our school district based on free and reduced lunch data so getting these necessary health products can come at a real cost to our community's families. We can't treat tampons and pads as a luxury. They are not something people who menstruate can do without," said Bolthouse.

The award was presented to Bolthouse by Girl Scouts of Manitou Council, and her project supporters will hold a ceremony in early December to formally recognize this achievement. The Gold Award is a nationally recognized symbol of leadership, and shows colleges, employers, and your community that you're out there changing the world.

"Achieving the Girl Scout Gold Award shows your dedication to challenging yourself, serving your community and representing your family with respect. By achieving the highest award in Girl Scouting, you are truly part of a special group of women. You have identified a need in your community and showed the world you are more than capable to step up, lead and make a difference," said Denise Schemenauer, CEO the Girl Scouts of Manitou Council.

Completing the award's multiple requirements often takes several months or years, and requires the final project to be sustainable and have lasting impact. While Bolthouse officially completed her project in October, she plans to continue to work to keep the project going.

So far, Bolthouse has gathered more than 7,500 donated pads and tampons. Individuals, church and service organizations, and companies have donated these menstrual products to her project. The FHS Key Club is collaborating with Bolthouse to ensure the already donated supplies make it into bathrooms after her graduation. She also welcomes ongoing donations of menstrual products. You can do so by contacting [fondymenstrualequity@gmail.com](mailto:fondymenstrualequity@gmail.com). Bolthouse

has ongoing contact with district administration about ways to fund the product supply long-term.

“The concept of ‘menstrual equity’ is what has driven me. Equity means access for all who need them. Equity means the products are where students need them, the bathroom. This equity needs to drive all of us to empower our students and give them necessary resources,” Bolthouse said. “Ideally, I would like free products available in the district middle school bathrooms too. Many younger students need them as well.”

Bolthouse will graduate from Fond du Lac High School in 2019 with highest laude honors, and participates in band, theater, studio arts, and learnship in marching band pit percussions and in SAGE, the student alliance for LGBTQ+ activism. She dances at Wempner’s School of Dance, and attends Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, where she helps with music, service content, and childcare. Bolthouse plans to attend college after graduation, and intends to pursue a career in helping people, such as therapy or social work.