

Marcia Backiel Barber '71

graduate, scout, inspirational leader

Girl Scouting and the Ursuline philosophy go hand-in-hand for Marcia Backiel Barber. That's hardly surprising, since both were an integral part of her childhood.

Marcia grew up in Brecksville, Ohio, but remembers the daily long rides on public transportation she took to attend school at Beaumont, in Shaker Heights. It was there that she absorbed the values taught by the Ursuline Sisters. After school, on weekends and during vacations, Girl Scouts reinforced the nuns' teaching.

"I was a Girl Scout while I was growing up, through my senior year. Then I was a volunteer with Girl Scouts while I was in college," she said.

Scouting had given her a love of the outdoors and nature, so she studied biology while attending Ursuline. When she graduated in 1971, Backiel went on to "a few other things." But, when her husband got laid off and she needed a better job, she turned again to the Girl Scouts.

By then she had a master's degree in administration of organized camping and environmental education programs. That, and her single-sex education at Beaumont and Ursuline, made her a perfect fit for a job with the Girl

Scouts, first in Philadelphia in 1985, then in Pittsburgh. Since May, she has been CEO of a Girl Scout Council in St. Louis, Missouri.

"We serve 64,000 girls, and we have 17,000 adult volunteers," she said. "It's all about helping young women."

But Girl Scouts today are not the same as when she was a girl. Only about 60 percent of the girls are involved with troops, while the others are connected through other programs. A big part of her job is developing programs that help her charges become community-minded young women and preparing them to be leaders in the world. The Girl Scouts anti-violence program is one example.

"If they're not doing it (community service) as a child, they won't do it as an adult," she said. "The whole philosophy of the College and the nuns and what they impart, are all part of what I do to help the girls be community-minded. So much of the Ursuline philosophy is who I am."

The only time she works directly with the girls now is during Camp CEO in the summer, when she still takes a group camping and hiking and canoeing. She also leads by example in her own community service activities. She plays hand bells with church and community choirs and is involved with Rotary, a business group with a strong community service component.

In 2000, she traveled with a Rotary group to Mumbai, India, where they worked in one of the oldest and poorest ghettos to help eradicate polio.

"I'd like to go back, to keep on helping. A big part of being a Rotarian is giving back," Backiel said.

