

Cerritos Girl Scouts revamp library for Long Beach City College's child development center

By Nadra Nittle, Long Beach Press Telegram
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LONG BEACH >> Last summer there was no shortage of books at the [child development center](#) on the Pacific Coast campus of Long Beach City College.

"We felt like we had thousands and thousands of books," recalled Stacey Smith-Clark, the center's manager.

In fact, there were several hundred. Because the books weren't gathered in a central location, however, none of the staff knew just how many books the center had. Enter Girl Scout Troop 1403, based in Cerritos.

For the past year, the girls in the troop have collected the books scattered throughout classrooms in the center and organized them into a library that the children there can check out. Launching the library entailed creating a computerized catalog of books as well as building bookshelves and sewing bean bags and pillows that the children at the center can use to relax on.

For their yearlong effort to create the library, which celebrated its grand opening on Friday, Troop 1403 received the [Silver Award](#), given to girls in grades 6 to 8 who have shown that they're dedicated to improving their community. The honor is the highest a Girl Scout cadette can receive.

"I think it is a big accomplishment because it was a lot of work, but it was fun too," said troop member Bryce Andrus, 13. "We learned a lot."

Bryce was once a student at the center herself and her family has remained in contact with the staff there, which is how the troop learned about the need for a library.

Most of the girls had little experience with woodworking and sewing prior to their work on the library, according to Gayle Watts, Troop 1403's leader and Bryce's grandmother. Watts is a seamstress and her husband is an experienced woodworker, but she said that the cadettes built bookshelves and sewed pillows for the center on their own.

"They did all of the work, and we assisted them," Watts said. "We had sewing machines around the table. I showed them how to do it and then they did. They made nine 18-inch pillows and three large 4-foot-wide and about 4-inch-deep pillows. I had girls who had no idea how to sew, who were afraid to touch the machine, but they were all very accomplished when they finished. They made beautiful cushions."

They also learned to use power tools to build bookshelves for the library and install them. To get the lumber needed to make the shelves, the cadettes asked for donations from businesses such as Ikea and Lowe's.

"It was a big project," Watts said.

Smith-Clark expressed gratitude for the troop's work on the library. She said it gives an opportunity for children at the center to bring a variety of books home with them.

"The children and their parents can go and check out books and use it like a real library," she said. "Over 50 percent of them are low-income and living in poverty. Most of the parents may not have transportation or the means for their kids to have a library experience."

Troop member Rayne Wilson, 12, said the remodeling project required the cadettes to be prepared and organized. While it took a couple of months to make furnishings for the library, inputting the names of the more than 400 books peppered throughout the center took up most of their time over the past year.

"This definitely was very fun," Rayne said.

Winning the Silver Award for their work delighted the middle school student.

"I was happy and excited," she said.

Smith-Clark was stunned when she saw the finished library, which also includes a rug and picture frames.

"It's incredible. Everything is just beautiful," she said. "It really speaks volumes."

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