



Tammy H. Wharton

# Building Leaders



An Interview with Tammy Wharton,  
Chief Executive Officer, Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland

**EDITORS' NOTE** Shortly after she was named CEO, Tammy Wharton faced the challenge of merging three Ohio councils into one – Heart of Ohio, centered in Zanesville, Heritage Trails, centered in Mansfield, and Seal of Ohio, with headquarters in Columbus, Ohio. Since the merger more than seven years ago, Wharton has worked tirelessly to create one voice of Girl Scouting in the 30 counties the council serves. Under her leadership, Girl Scout participation grew by more than 3,000 girl members at its height, a remarkable showing compared to other Girl Scout council mergers. In addition to her work at Girl Scouts, Wharton gives back to the community through volunteer activities including Franklin County Children Services, the United Way, the Human Services Chamber of Franklin County, The Ohio State University Non-Profit Advisory Board, and many other organizations.

## What went into creating the Girl Scouts of Ohio's Heartland?

When I learned of the historic transformation Girl Scouts was undertaking, I knew I wanted to be a part of this monumental change. The goal was to form a new council with greater efficiencies, aligned processes, and updated programming. This would serve to make our organization and brand more relevant. We were able to take the best practices of three councils and merge them into one new, highly functioning organization.

We were making history. To ensure success, we involved staff, volunteers, community stakeholders, alumnae, and girls in the process. Committees spent countless hours reviewing best practices, writing procedures, and interviewing stakeholders to capture the incredible ideas from the many Girl Scout advocates. It became clear that the future of Girl Scouting in Ohio was tied to the success of this merger and we had to “get it right” – and I think we did.

## What were the keys to effectively merging three Ohio councils into one?

**VISION** – A clear vision communicated and embraced throughout our organization was essential to success. We stayed committed to our purpose, establishing clear timelines and defined outcomes.

**COMMUNICATION** – Clear communication was essential. We accomplished this with two-way communications with all stakeholders, sharing our progress, goals, and successes, and incorporating their feedback into decisions.

**INTEGRITY** – We were honest, fair, candid, and transparent and all councils were equally important. Some call this living the Girl Scout Law, but I call it doing the right thing.

**DECISIVE** – Sound and sometimes difficult decisions were made. These were critical to reaching our goal, and we remained laser focused on what was best for our girls and the movement as a whole.



**SUPPORT** – There were many moving parts to create the organizational structure to support this massive undertaking. Committees had experts sharing their extensive knowledge and if we reached a roadblock, I was thankful to have Girl Scouts of the USA to help us get back on track.

## How important was it for you to engage staff, volunteers, and the girls in this process?

Effective leaders recognize that engagement of all stakeholders is vital to success. Mergers are no different. While Girl Scouts offers incredible programs and services, it's the people who give so freely of their time,

talents, and treasures that make us successful. To garner support of the merger, special attention was given to engage our dedicated internal staff, our devoted volunteers, and our external constituents. By fully tapping all of our human resources and engaging them along the way, they were able to envision the newly merged council that would better serve their needs.

## How did you go about creating one voice of Girl Scouting throughout your 30-county district?

Creating one voice and rally cry can be an organizational challenge. Fortunately, we are an organization with volunteers and staff who are deeply passionate and committed to Girl Scouts. We all rally around the fact that we build leaders and there's no question that our girls are the reason we do what we do.

## What makes giving back to the community so important to you?

Our organization relies on volunteers to make our mission possible. Without them, we could not serve the girls in our 30 counties. While I have always had philanthropy and giving back in my blood, I am passionate about supporting the community that has been so good to me. Helping others as I have been helped throughout my career, drives me to give back to the community and use my time, talent, and treasures to make the world a better place.

## What is involved in planning and hosting the next Girl Scout convention in Columbus?

Since the announcement in 2014 of Columbus as the host of the 2017 Girl Scout convention, we have been partnering with Girl Scouts of the USA as well as our community partners like Experience Columbus and our sister Ohio councils to pave the way for the largest girl event in the nation. We have been planning for the better part of a year and a half. From branding and logistics, to working through the incredible girl experience, we are poised to deliver an experience like no other girl-centric community event. If you're a girl, parent of a girl, or an organization that supports girls, this is the place you want to be. ●