

## ***ANN ARBOR: Local Girl Scouts win Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, meet famed primatologist Jane Goodall***

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By Sheila Pursglove, Special Writer

Girls Scouts Rhiannon Tomtishen and Madison Vorva, juniors at Greenhills School in Ann Arbor, were among 10 national winners of the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, founded in 2001 by children's book author T. A. Barron.

The annual prize, providing winners with \$2,500 for higher education or service projects, honors 10 winners and 15 finalists, ages 8 through 18, who have planned and executed projects to make a difference in the lives of others and/or the environment.

The girls were honored for Project ORANGS-Orangutans Really Appreciate and Need Girl Scouts, launched in 2007 when they set out to earn their Girl Scout Bronze Award, requiring them to raise awareness in the community about an issue that captured their passion.

The two – admirers of primatologist Dr. Jane Goodall and her work with chimpanzees – decided to raise awareness about orangutans. These great apes, native to Indonesia and Malaysia, are endangered because of illegal logging, illegal pet trade – and, above all, deforestation for palm oil plantations.

Palm oil is used in baked goods, cookies, candy bars and cosmetics. When the girls realized that palm oil is an ingredient in Girl Scout Cookies, they launched numerous campaigns to convince Girl Scouts of the USA to make the cookies rainforest-safe. The girls initiated a letter-writing campaign, and a puzzle piece campaign where past and present Girl Scouts decorate puzzle pieces with why it is important for Girl Scout Cookies to be rainforest-safe.

The girls also launched a petition – and landed Goodall's signature.

Meeting Goodall was one of the most inspirational moments of the project, Rhiannon said.

“She gave me the inspiration to continue this project and taught me that, despite being youth, we have an enormous ability to make a difference in the world.”

Madison admires Goodall's selflessness and passion.

**From: The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes Official Website: [www.barronprize.org](http://www.barronprize.org)**

“She travels over 300 days a year advocating for peace, youth advocacy and her individual passion, the chimpanzees,” Madison said.

The teens have worked with a variety of nonprofit organizations. An online campaign with the Rainforest Action Network generated nearly 70,000 email messages sent to GSUSA; and the Rainforest Heroes badge, designed through the Rainforest Action Network, has allowed girls of all ages to show their support and take action on this issue.

The teens are also asking first lady Michelle Obama, honorary president of GSUSA, for her thoughts on the issue.

Last May, the teens, who started as Brownies in first grade and are now “Juliettes,” individually registered Girl Scouts who are not members of a troop and met with Girl Scout executives in New York City, who committed to working with on a solution.

One of the Girl Scouts’ cookie bakers has since agreed to purchase GreenPalm certificates to offset their palm oil usage and to support growers’ transition to sustainability.

“We’re excited the Girl Scouts have taken concrete action on this issue by announcing a policy, but are looking forward to continuing to work with them and their bakers to make their cookies truly rainforest-safe,” Rhiannon said.

As part of the Barron prize, the teens traveled to New York to participate in a satellite media tour with the author, taking part in interviews with television and radio stations around the country to raise awareness about the prize and about the importance of youth advocacy.

The teens plan on using a percentage of the prize money to cover the operational costs of running their project and the rest will go toward college expenses.

“We’d like to extend a huge thank you to T. A. Barron and the prize for their recognition of our work, as well as for providing us with the opportunity to spread awareness about our project and the importance of youth advocacy,” Rhiannon said.

The two Girl Scouts were also recently honored as two of seven recipients of the 2011 Brower Youth Award established by the Earth Island Institute in honor of founder and activist David Brower.

“We’d like to set an example for other young people – if you have a passion, work hard and cultivate the support of others, any goal – no matter the size – is achievable,” Madison said.

For more information, visit: <http://projectorangs.org>.