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Lee seniors receive top Girl Scout award

■ Volunteer also honored for 50 years with Girl Scouts.

By Kathleen Thurber
Staff Writer

When Girl Scouts Claire Nelson and Jayme Sharuner leave for college, the two will know they've left an imprint on the Tall City.

Awarded with the organization's highest honor recently, the two Lee High School seniors earned their Gold Award by organizing and implementing the first Blue Ribbon Run in an effort to raise awareness of child abuse in Midland County.

"The girls that earn their gold typi-

cally are the cream of the crop," said Janet Sloan, with Girl Scouts of the Desert Southwest. "They're also involved in their church activities, in their school."

Before being allowed to submit a Gold Award project idea, Girl Scouts must complete several patches as well as 30 hours of leadership, 40 hours of career exploration and several projects where they must investigate issues in their community, Sloan said.

Nelson said after they'd completed their community assessment, they thought raising awareness of child abuse was needed in Midland, so they set to work organizing the run.

Their troop leader and Nelson's

mother, Tricia Nelson, is part of the Midland County Child Welfare Board and said the board had talked about implementing a run or walk, but never had the time to put it together.

Having started the project in July of 2008 and finally seeing the run come to fruition the next May, Claire Nelson said the initiative was more work than they'd anticipated.

"We ended up putting in about 80 or 90 hours each to get everything done," Nelson said, adding they did everything from renting portable toilets to advertising and setting up the course.

Statewide, cases of neglect or abuse were confirmed among 10.5 children out

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of every 1,000, according to DFPS Fiscal Year 2009 data. In Region 9, which includes Midland, Andrews, Big Spring and other areas, the rate is 17.4 children per 1,000.

"The people who actually came to the walk benefited and learned about it, but also everyone who heard about it," Nelson said. "We reached probably thousands more people that way even if they didn't come out to the run."

The two seniors joined the Girl Scouts in elementary school at St. Ann's and have gone through the ranks together since, going on camp outs, earning badges, selling cookies and learning the skills they didn't realize until recently were important — leadership, problem solving and communication.

The Blue Ribbon Run took place again this year with both girls volunteering at the event that is meant to be held annually.

Nelson will attend Texas Christian University in the fall to study music education, having been a member of band and orchestra. Sharuner will attend Midland

College before transferring to Texas A&M University to study political science.

Sydnee Gatewood, of Alpine, also was presented the Gold Award. She created activity packets for adults and children to use while waiting at the hospital in hopes of minimizing their stress and boredom while they wait, according to a Girl Scout press release.

In addition to the awards given recently, volunteers also were honored, including Foster Grandparents as well as 50-year Girl Scout and volunteer Kathy Hassell.

"I like to see the growth that they make throughout the years and the independence they gained through being Girl Scouts," Hassell said of the various troops she's led from elementary school through high school.

Things have changed since she was a Scout, she said, including cookie prices and badges. But, she said, the ideals are the same as well as the leadership skills learned.

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