

Ann Claire Carnahan's Gold Award: Keep Mobile Beautiful in Touch

Earning a Gold Award is not easy -- but the rewards, for yourself, your community, and your future are worth the effort.

We ask Gold Awardees to give other Girl Scouts who are considering a Gold Award Project a realistic idea of what is involved. Below, Ann Claire Carnahan tells us about the challenges and rewards she encountered while implementing her project.



Project: Keep Mobile Beautiful in Touch

Ann Claire worked with Keep Mobile Beautiful to create a website for their organization. She used social media and presentations to bring awareness to the public about the services they offer.

How did you come up with your idea? I've always been passionate about conservation of the environment and volunteering for Keep Mobile Beautiful, so when I was searching for a community need that needed addressing, I immediately spoke to the staff of Keep Mobile Beautiful, which is a local environmental not-for-profit city organization. I was expecting to work to develop some kind of educational program or another litter cleanup program, or something of the sort, but they surprised me by telling me that what they really needed was a website. I had never studied web design before in my entire life, but I wanted to help the organization in a meaningful way, so I took on the challenge and developed my project from there, around the framework of a new website.

Were you intimidated by the scale of the project? Initially, yes, I was very intimidated. I did not know anything at all about web design and construction, and I did not know where to look to learn about it. But, as soon as I started finding useful research and awesome contacts of volunteers who were willing and eager to help, I gained confidence and became more excited and less intimidated, more eager to work towards completion of my project.

How did you keep up the momentum for the project? Sheer determination. I was in charge of all scheduling and arranging all of the meetings and various steps of progress throughout the timeline of my project, so to be sure that everything was progressing as it should I had to maintain all of my contacts and make sure that my contacts were able and willing to plan and then stick to the arrangements. At times, it was difficult to keep the project moving, especially because I was creating a website that represents a city organization, so I had to work in a professional work place and juggle the staff and volunteers there and their professional responsibilities, along with the busy schedules of all of my other volunteers, which was one of the obstacles that slowed my momentum. But, I was very passionate about my issue and determined to see the project through to the end, so I kept up my contacts and maintained communication to move the process forward.

Were you ever discouraged? If so, what did you do to overcome that? Yes. Web design and construction is very slow and tedious, and difficult to learn how to do well if you have never worked in that area before. By the time I had completed my first draft of the website, I had put many hours into it and it had been very slow, difficult, and many times discouraging, but I pushed through to launch it onto the internet. And, disaster struck. The website had not been properly formatted, so it looked wrong and uneven and disrupted on different computers, depending on whether or not the computer had a Mac or Windows operating system. I was hugely frustrated and very discouraged. At first, I did not want to continue, because I felt like all of my work had been for nothing. But, I really wanted to help Keep Mobile Beautiful, and I had volunteers helping me with my project who worked professionally in web design and maintenance who were eager and willing to help me reconstruct the website and create a workable format that looked clean and neat on all different types of computers and electronic devices.

Tell us about an unexpected challenge in your project and how you addressed it. When I launched my website for the first time, it fell into complete disarray. The project that I had been working on for months, for hours upon end was a disaster and I did not know what to do or what step to take to fix it all, because I had been teaching myself how to do everything, for the most part. I could not find any kind of solution, and at first it all seemed very hopeless. But, the contacts who had been my resources whenever I had run into questions about web design and maintenance came to my rescue once more and helped me to solve the problem. And then, what had once seemed hopeless didn't seem to be such a big deal anymore. The website was quickly formatted into very clean, neat tables that were easily accessible on any computer or electronic device, and I could then move into the final part of my project, of advocacy, without a problem.

How will people benefit from this? The website I created (www.keeppmobilebeautiful.org) is a fantastic resource for the city of Mobile, and it is very easily accessed. For years to come, the website will enable a two-way easy avenue of communication between Keep Mobile Beautiful and the community of the Mobile public to further improve recycling, beautification, and litter prevention throughout the city.

How did you feel after you finished? Thrilled! I was overjoyed that the website was such a great success and that it is a powerful tool for the organization to use in communication with the Mobile public. I am excited that Keep Mobile Beautiful's need has been met, and that the website will be well maintained, and continue to grow and change over time to improve and help the organization even more, rather than just remain the same. I was so excited to have completed a project that was such a huge challenge, that I never thought I could have done before I pursued my Gold Award.

What advice would you give to other girls considering a Gold Award? I would advise girls to align themselves with a community organization that already has a need you can work towards fixing. I found that the ideas I came up with, to help Keep Mobile Beautiful would have been useless to them, but they were able to give me a jumping off point from which I could formulate a project that would really help them in the long run. Listening to the organization's needs gave me the framework I needed to construct an airtight, meaningful project. I also had the keep Mobile Beautiful Staff and volunteers there as a resource for me every step of the way for information and volunteer work to help my project succeed.

Your Gold Project made a change for the better in your community. Did it change you?

Throughout this experience, I have learned many new skills and lessons that I know will serve me later on in life as I move towards college and the professional world thereafter, of communication and leadership. Above all else, I have learned how to persevere despite the challenges that arise. When I started, I knew my project was going to be tough, but I did not anticipate just how many different, stressful challenges I would face throughout the process. The project was extremely difficult, but I knew that Keep Mobile Beautiful really needed what I was working towards so I faced each challenge head on and persevered to finish my Gold Award.