

GUIDING LIGHT



Shirlene (Tucker) Darrell was officially 'pinned' as Island Commissioner of Girlguiding Bermuda. She will be aiming to further promote the organisation and encourage female mentors to volunteer. (Photo by Akil Simmons)

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The Girlguiding Bermuda uniform may be different, but not much else has changed in the 20 years that Shirlene Darrell has been a volunteer. She said the programme's objective is still the same and has watched dozens of young girls graduate from the Girl Guides with more confidence, independence and self-esteem.

Ms Darrell began serving as Brownie leader at St Paul AME Church in 1991 and estimates she has mentored hundreds of girls in that time span. She's been around long enough to see young girls develop into women, and has even had the privilege of looking after some of their children. "The rewarding part is seeing the girls themselves how they grow up and progress through life and how they do so well. That is the part that is most enjoyable for me.

"You see them when they are grown up and they shout out to you on the street or in the store because they recognise you. It makes you feel very good, like the programme must have had some impact in their life because they still remember me."

Ms Darrell decided to lend a hand to the organisation two decades ago after watching her daughter as a Brownie Aid. "After a few years they asked me to take on a bigger role," she said. "There was no-one else to step up. I enjoyed doing it, so I did." The long-time volunteer has now been handed a different post and was recently 'pinned' the newest Island Commissioner for Girlguiding. She is tasked with overseeing the running of the association, making sure leaders are following the agenda and girls are benefiting and having fun.

There are currently 350 girls, between ages five and 18, taking part. They are divided into units based on age. There are two Rainbow leagues, nine Brownie troupes, four Girl Guides divisions and one senior section [which accommodates girls over 14].

While Island Commissioner, Ms Darrell plans to raise awareness about Girlguiding in Bermuda and encourage people, particularly locals, to volunteer. She said: "One of the main things we are doing right now is recruiting new leaders. There are young girls that would like to be in the programme but because of the lack of leaders we are limited in terms of how many girls we can take.

"If we had five or six more leaders we could probably open up two or three more units."

Ms Darrell said many overseas workers have lent vital time to the service, but when they leave the Island "we get gaps that we have to fill". "We very much appreciate the services of expats, but are

models for the young girls coming up and it would be great for local girls to have them to learn from as well.”

She said the programme was an instrumental tool in teaching girls about crafts, cooking, camping and community service. “It teaches them values. It’s a character-building programme and they learn different skills and have fun doing so and they also help the community.

“The programme is also there for the girls to learn about themselves, their community and the world around them.” Last year Girlguiding Bermuda made special Valentine’s Day gifts for seniors at the Matilda Smith rest home. They also sang carols to hospital patients around the Christmas holiday. She said the whole organisation, headed by Girlguiding UK (GGUK), encouraged girls to donate to a different overseas charity each year, and raise funds through bake sales and doing chores for family and close friends.

Ms Darrell said it was sometimes challenging keeping the programme interesting for the young girls so they want to continue coming. But said new volunteers may be able to introduce new skills to the groups. “It’s a learn-as-you-go job. We have a programme set by the head organisation in the UK, but some people like me like crafts, other people like outdoors things like camping, so there is some room for flexibility.

“It’s a varied programme, but then again you don’t have to do any particular skill either. I would say volunteers do have to have good character as we have to do a reference check.

“But we are really just looking for kind-hearted people that enjoy being with children. You have to like young people and, seeing that we have four different groups, we find out the volunteer’s preference.”

She is hoping to inspire young people to follow in her footsteps and take the reins in the organisation.

“I would like to be remembered by the girls and the people I come in contact with, the other leaders and anyone with the organisation, for doing the very best I could and making a positive impact on everyone involved.”

For more information about Girlguiding see www.girlguiding.org.uk/. For information about Girlguiding Bermuda telephone 292-0675 or e-mail girlguides@northrock.bm.