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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – photos included**

**Girl Scouts promote Lake Hopatcong Trail**

*Hopatcong, NJ (June 5, 2019)* - When some Girl Scouts told residents around Lake Hopatcong to go take a hike, they meant it in the nicest possible way.

Taking their suggestion on Saturday, June 1, nearly 40 people showed up to take a walk on the Lake Hopatcong Trail with the fifth graders of Hopatcong Girl Scout Troop 96064. It was part of the girls' effort to achieve the Bronze Award, the highest honor available for their age group. The Troop's Bronze Award project focused on the Lake Hopatcong Trail system, featuring activities that made improvements and raised awareness.

"The energy they bring to their troop is amazing. Anything they put their minds to, they accomplish," said Yvonne Syto, who organized the Troop with co-leader Karen Bluestein when the girls were in kindergarten. "Days like today are an awesome reward for all the hours we've put into volunteering with this crew."

The Girl Scouts teamed up with the Lake Hopatcong Foundation to host the hike. The LHF started working on the Lake Hopatcong Trail several years ago, with the goal of having it encircle the lake. The trail will be about 40 miles long when completed, but currently winds about eleven miles through Hopatcong.

Last year, Troop 96064 adopted a half-mile stretch of the existing trail for the LHF, near the Hopatcong Senior Center, committing to keep the trail clear and clean. The girls joined a dozen other LHF volunteers who, to date, have stepped up to do maintenance on various segments of the trail.

"It's one thing to create a trail, but they require a lot of ongoing attention to keep them clean and passable," said LHF President Jessica Murphy, who was on-hand for the hike.

“Without the continuing help of great volunteers, like these Girl Scouts, our best initial efforts would be lost.”

To enhance the hike, the Troop set up displays at the Senior Center picnic pavilion, sharing pre-hike information on the history of the trail property, hiking equipment and first aid, as well as providing water and homemade trail mix.

The girls also gave people an opportunity to participate in the #KindnessForChristopher campaign by painting rocks and placing them along the trail during the hike. The campaign is designed to promote acts of kindness in honor of Christopher D’Amico, who died at the age of 10 in a boating accident on the lake four years ago.

After introductory remarks by Syto, the Girl Scouts and their guests, ranging from toddlers to septuagenarians, funneled their way from the pavilion onto the narrow, wooded trail nearby. The hour-long hike was narrated by local historian and LHF Trails Committee Chairman Cliff Lundin.

“I hope our troop will stay together and accomplish more awesome things for years to come,” said Syto. “I hope we’ll all be able to stay in contact and maintain the bonds we’ve formed through Girl Scouting.”

Troop 96064 includes: Susan Amella, Emma Francis, Elizabeth Gaudreau, Tiffany Gomez, Faith Hartman, Hailey E. Kennedy, Kiara Morrissey, Isabel Roberts, Aydan Olivia Salayko, Amélie Rose Syto, Natalie Torrise, Lillian Rahill and Hannah Reiley Willard.

For information on the Lake Hopatcong Trail and the trail adoption program, visit [lakehopatcongfoundation.org](http://lakehopatcongfoundation.org) or call 973-663-2500.

The Lake Hopatcong Foundation is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to protecting the lake environment and enhancing the lake experience by bringing together public and private resources to encourage a culture of sustainability and stewardship on and around New Jersey’s largest lake, for this and future generations. To learn more, visit [lakehopatcongfoundation.org](http://lakehopatcongfoundation.org).



Aydan Olivia Salayko of Girl Scout Troop 96064 assists guests with painting rocks for #KindnessForChristopher



Kiara Morrissey and Tiffany Gomez hand out snacks before the hike



Hailey Kennedy, Faith Hartman and Kiara Morrissey hike the Lake Hopatcong Trail



Girl Scout Troop 96064: Yvonne Syto, Natalie Torrise, Tiffany Gomez, Aydan Olivia Salayko, Hannah Reiley Willard, Amélie Rose Syto, Hailey E. Kennedy, Lillian Rahill, Faith Hartman, Susan Amella, Kiara Morrissey, Isabel Roberts, Karen Blustein Elizabeth Gaudreau, and Emma Francis