

Gene Yamagata

He Wasn't a Scout, But He Believes in Scouting's Power



Top: Gene and Allyson Yamagata, who live in Las Vegas, have started what they hope will be a lifelong relationship with the Scouting movement. Their support for Scouting joins their work with the Yamagata Foundation, which benefits Pacific Islander and Asian students at the University of Hawaii, among other causes. Above: Gene Yamagata during his high school years.

When he was growing up on an Idaho farm as the youngest of five siblings, Gene Yamagata never got the opportunity to experience Scouting. After a highly successful business career, Yamagata married late in life and didn't have children of his own to participate in the program.

But today, the co-founder of Forever Living Products Japan, an exporter of aloe vera-based products from the United States to Japan, is an enthusiastic supporter of Scouting. Among other things, he has backed important leadership development initiatives at the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve in West Virginia.

"I've always had a good feeling about the Scouts," Yamagata says. "As a young boy, even though I was not able to go to any Scout meetings or functions, just the little bit that I knew was attractive to me. I knew it was an organization for developing young men and women in an area where otherwise they would not be given opportunity."

Yamagata has a particular appreciation for the power of

mentoring youngsters. After graduating from high school, he was asked to participate in a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. That process connected him to mentors who encouraged him to go to college and set his sights beyond working on the family farm.

To Yamagata, Scouting's ability to help young men and young women similarly expand their horizons is part of the movement's appeal.

Some of Yamagata's family members have had extensive experience with Scouting. His nephew, Rick Nitta, is a board member of Yamagata's philanthropic foundation and also the father of four sons, all of whom are Eagle Scouts.

Nitta serves as a district chairman of the Las Vegas Area Council and says his uncle has found Scouting supports his personal and business values.

"To learn to be self-reliant and to grow a business is very important to him," Nitta says.

Yamagata's first direct connection to Scouting came not long ago, after a chance encounter led him to learn about a new Scout troop in the Las Vegas area. This troop was being formed

entirely of boys who were refugees from Thailand. As the descendant of Japanese immigrants, Yamagata has a soft spot for helping immigrants, Nitta explains.

Yamagata began assisting the troop with small donations, which grew over time. Recently, as a result of his involvement, he was invited to a court of honor at which 12 members of the troop were recognized for achieving the rank of Eagle Scout.

"He was so impressed by the quality of these boys and the progress they'd made," Nitta says. "It just added to this overall feeling that he was doing a good thing here."

When Yamagata got the opportunity to help support the Summit Bechtel Reserve's leadership development program, the decision came easily.

"We did some tours there and saw what a wonderful



facility that is, and one step led to another," Nitta says. "Everything kept adding and building to say Scouting is a great leadership development program."

In addition to the way Scouting helps youngsters develop leadership capabilities, Yamagata likes the way it encourages them to develop a sense of morals.

"I have always had a high regard for doing the right

thing," he says. "I think if a young man or woman goes out in the world and is able to focus on doing the right thing and working hard at it, that is one main ingredient that would make them successful and able to enjoy life."

After missing out on participating in Scouting as a boy, Yamagata is making up for lost time today. He attended the 2017 National Jamboree at Summit Bechtel

At the 2017 National Jamboree, Gene and Allyson Yamagata stopped to greet members of the contingent from Japan.

Reserve, and he's having a good time remaining involved with the program.

"The experiences I've had so far have been very positive," Yamagata says. "I've enjoyed all the relationships and communications I had with Scouts."

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GENE AND ALLYSON YAMAGATA are active philanthropists, supporting a number of causes, including those related to immigrants, entrepreneurship and people with hearing impairments. As an entrepreneur, the descendant of immigrants and a brother to three hearing-impaired siblings, Gene has a personal connection to all those causes.

"For me, I'm especially drawn to youth opportunities," Allyson adds. She serves, for example, on the board of a local religiously affiliated school in Las Vegas. The Yamagata Foundation supports internships for Pacific Islander and Asian

students at the University of Hawaii. It also assists an academy creating opportunities in the Philippines.

Against that backdrop, Scouting seemed like a natural fit. "When the Boy Scouts came up, that was a great opportunity to help the organization along," Allyson says.

As a bonus, the Yamagatas found Scouting's values fit comfortably with their own personal standards. "What the Scouting program does for young boys is tremendous," Gene says. "It makes them realize the value of being an honorable young man."

Although the Yamagatas have become

involved in Scouting relatively recently compared to some supporters, Allyson says they now envision a long relationship with the movement.

"We've always thought highly of the Boy Scouts and how it builds integrity, valor, self-esteem and confidence," she says. "They become well-rounded and multi-skilled adults, and it's very inspiring to see that. So we're on board with everything."



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