

Girl Scouts face March vote on consolidating chapters

By MARGARET MILLER

Two Girl Scout councils with several thousand suburban members will vote March 18 on a consolidation designed to bring the program more into line with needs of girls in the '80s.

If the move is approved, the Girl Scouts of Metropolitan Detroit, which covers Livonia, Garden City, Redford Township and part of Westland, and the South Oakland Girl Scouts will become the Michigan Metro Girl Scouts Council. The latter council includes Farmington, Southfield, Lathrup, Birmingham, Troy and part of West Bloomfield in its coverage.

The consolidation move, urged by United Community Services which disperses funds for programs like Girl Scouting and already approved by boards of directors of both councils, follows a trend that already has brought a dozen similar moves in the national Girl Scout organization.

It also follows an unsuccessful attempt a year ago to consolidate all five Girl Scout councils in the metropolitan Detroit area. At that time, after a year and a half of study, a consolidation plan was put to vote in the two councils now involved and also the Huron Valley, North Oakland, and Olitska (Macomb County) councils. Huron Valley includes part of Westland as well as Plymouth and Canton.

The plan was approved then by the Detroit and South Oakland councils and

rejected by the other three. The two involved in consolidation then began working on the plan that will be voted next month.

BETTER USE of resources and better programming for changing needs were cited as reasons for the move by leaders of both councils and the national Girl Scout organization. All mentioned rising costs, declining membership because of a lower birth rate, and changes in volunteer leadership availability. "It behooves us to look at how we can make good use of community dollars and still serve girls in the future, even if they are fewer in number," said Jean Wayman, executive director of the Metropolitan Detroit Council. "It's something we have to come to grips with sooner or later," noted Virginia Dethloff of Southfield, president of the South Oakland Council.

Mary Birch, New York center director who came to Detroit this week for an informational meeting with delegates to the Metropolitan Detroit council, called the consolidation "a very positive move because we can't operate in the '80s as we did in the '50s."

"We just need to behave differently if we are to serve girls' future needs," she added.

MISS WAYMAN mentioned cookie sales and media time as two good reasons for following United Community Services' recommendation for consolidation in the use of funds.

"The various councils hold cookie sales at different times, and there are different prices and different makers," she said. "But this just confuses the public. People just want to buy Girl Scout cookies and not worry about which council is involved."

"Similarly, there's just so much television time and the media people think of Girl Scouts and not separate councils."

Leaders agreed changes will result from the move and Beverlee Budden of Dearborn, president of the Metropolitan Detroit council, suggested that was the reason other councils had rejected it earlier.

"Our council covers both the city and the suburban areas and I think some other councils feel we have problems because of this," she said. "They are strictly suburban. We are financially sound, though."

Miss Wayman commended the two councils involved in the coming vote for their unanimous endorsement of the move.

"I think it is to their credit that they are looking toward the future, although change is difficult for these people too," she said.

TO MAKE SURE delegates are knowledgeable about the proposed consolidation, the Metropolitan council sponsored a meeting with Ms. Birch for its 264 delegates Tuesday night and South Oakland is bringing its 121 delegates to a series of three sessions.

Designer takes chunk out of the Big Apple

By CORINNE ABATT

In the campus jargon at Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1959-70, Gretchen Bellinger was known as a functional weaver.

No, she said with a smile when she was at the Design Center in Troy recently, there wasn't a course or a category by that name, but that's what she was — and still is. Only now, 10 years later, there's a firm in New York City under her name.

She designs fabrics that are sold through her own showrooms at 979 Third Ave. in New York as well as any number of fine designer studios throughout the world. The Donagha studio in the Design Center is one.

Still practical, or better yet, functional, her fabrics, all of natural materials, are of superb quality. In most instances, they are of subtle all-over color, with the barest of beautiful texture. Only now, she's the business woman-designer, not the actual weaver.

Describing her line as "fine, luxury fabrics," she said, "The structural aspects really show in the collection. It's a continuation of what I was doing at Cranbrook. There is minimal surface interest — they are flat, luxurious and quiet."

Robert Kidd was head of the fiber department at the academy at the time Ms. Bellinger was a graduate student. And what seems to surprise her is that she arrived at the point where she always wanted to be.

After completing her masters in fine arts, she took a job with an architectural firm in Chicago working with materials in the firm's interior design department.

After several other fabric-related positions with major firms, she was ready to launch her own firm in 1976. Her New York office with 18 fulltime employees is now expanding to another floor in the building on Third Avenue.

Growth has been rapid and acceptance of her fabrics heartwarming.

"All styling and coloring is done in house," she said, adding that it may take up to three years to perfect a design and color to the point where the fabric is ready for the production looms.

One of the fabrics that took several years to perfect is a sheer, woven wool with a Lurex thread that makes a grid pattern. Shades are in the off white to tan range.

The fabric is very light, sheer with a special kind of liveliness to it that comes naturally with quality wool. It is also flame proofed.

The problems that presented themselves initially find a way to combine

Lurex and wool successfully. Their tensile properties are totally different. The flame proofing was a problem because some of the chemicals produced color changes.

With all of the problems solved, the fabric has proven popular, particularly because it can be used as both a window and call covering. In fact, Ms. Bellinger is now trademarking the name Window/Wall.

THIS NEW FABRIC Ms. Bellinger said, "lets your space have a multi-life. In daylight, the Lurex doesn't show, it's just a very tailored grid."

But, in the late evening and at night, she said, it takes on a different character with a touch of glitter.

She said she considers it "quite a coup" one that others will have difficulty copying — at least for a while.

Bellinger fabrics, sold to a large extent to architects and designers and not available in retail outlets open to the public, are made to be used as upholstery fabrics, wall and window covering.

"We are seeing more and more fabric on walls," she said, "heavy silk on walls, wool on walls. The nice way to upholster (the wall) in the traditional fashion, but sometimes the fabric with an acrylic or paper backing is put on with paste."

As a wall covering, fabric was popular years ago because it was available and provided insulation. Paper came into vogue when insulation was no longer a prime concern.

Now, the fabric wall covering has come full cycle. It is more expensive than most papers, but it has redeeming characteristics — durability and maintenance.

There is fabric on all of the walls of her New York studio.

"If you vacuum fiber walls several times a year, that's all they need," Ms. Bellinger said.

All of the Bellinger fabrics come in color groups with a central theme — and it is in the names of the collections and the individual colors in each one where her flair for creativity once again shows itself.

The Pullman group, for instance, consists of durable, tightly woven wool reminiscent of the fabrics used on train seats. The color names are taken from American trains: Midnight Express, as sought, is expected, is black.

In the Carriage collection, there are names like Old Money, Blue Blood and Patrician. In the Ballet Russe collection, all the colors are named for ballets.

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