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Garden State Scouts Earn Their Way to Puerto Rico

Popcorn Fundraiser Sparks Leadership, Teamwork, and Unforgettable Adventures

Westampton, NJ [August 24, 2025] – Garden State Council’s Troop 7151 B & G and Venturing Crew 21 ranked among the nation’s top ten popcorn sales campaigns, using their success to nearly fully fund a leadership, culture, and adventure program for 30 Scouts and leaders in Puerto Rico. Along the way, participants built real-world skills in inventory, sales strategy, customer engagement, and goal setting, all with support from expert advisors.

“Popcorn creates possibilities,” said Patrick Linfors, Scout Executive of Garden State Council. “The unit built the plan, raised the funds, and represented our council and community with pride. Popcorn sales provide much more than funding—they launch life-changing opportunities.”

Fresh off their transformative week at Camp Guajataka in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico, these Scouts are launching a new popcorn season with the same energy and commitment. Their experience proves that preparation, teamwork, and effort pave the way for extraordinary adventures. To support the Garden State Council’s 2025 Popcorn Campaign and help more Scouts access life-changing opportunities, please contact the Garden State Council at: <https://www.gardenstatescouting.org/about/contact-us/>

Jerry “Mr. Bak” Bakanowsky, founder of the Premier Scouting Family—which includes Pack 1721, Troop 7151 B & G, and Crew 21—leads the council’s highest-performing popcorn campaign. His program focuses on real-world skill-building. “Popcorn fundraising builds confidence, communication skills, and the resources to explore the world,” said Bakanowsky.

The trip also carried deep personal meaning for the Ramos family, who joined the council after relocating from Puerto Rico. Mara Ramos, a registered leader and mother of a Cub Scout in Pack 1721, prepared the group with Spanish basics, cultural context, and authentic Puerto Rican food from a local restaurant. She translated adult training materials and supported every aspect of the journey.

“At Camp Guajataka, every moment brings connection,” said Ramos. “Scouts build friendships, experience nature, and grow in ways that stay with them forever.”

While on the island, Scouts earned merit badges in kayaking, sustainability, leatherworking, and more. The Venturing Crew explored the region through hiking, snorkeling, and visits to natural and cultural landmarks. A shared dinner and celebration with local Scouts sparked lasting friendships. The Garden State units plan to welcome their new friends from Puerto Rico to the Poconos to experience snow for the first time.

Preston English, one of the council’s top popcorn sellers, raised nearly \$19,000 last season and continues to set ambitious goals for future Scouting trips like this.

“This trip shows exactly how Scouting prepares youth for life,” said Bakanowsky. “They empower Scouts to grow as leaders, take initiative, and reach beyond what’s familiar.”

Parents quickly saw the transformation.

“Sending my teens on this trip brought incredible growth,” said Jessica Schmitz, mother of Brenna (Crew 21) and Logan (Troop 7151). “They returned with stronger confidence, greater independence, and a deeper appreciation for the world around them.”

Jaden Gonzolas, a member of Venturing Crew 21, shared his favorite part of the experience: “The views, the beaches, the people—I created amazing memories. I’m excited for what’s next.”

“Puerto Rico was full of unforgettable experiences,” said Ryan Wolf, a fellow member of Venturing Crew 21. “We snorkeled with turtles and even saw an octopus, swam in a glowing bioluminescent bay, and hiked to a waterfall deep in the forest. When our van broke down, local neighbors jumped in to help—it turned into a moment of kindness none of us will forget. We tried new foods like shark kabobs and limber, explored historic sites, and spent evenings at camp playing cards and laughing together. It was a trip I’ll remember forever.”

About the Garden State Council

The Scouting America Garden State Council is chartered to provide comprehensive support and programs for Scouts across South Jersey. Serving communities in Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Salem, and parts of Atlantic counties, the council offers a range of Scouting programs, including Cub Scouts (grades K–5), Scouts BSA (ages 11–17), Venturing, Sea Scouts, and Exploring (all co-ed, ages 14–20). Through engaging activities that emphasize outdoor adventures, leadership development, and community service, the Garden State Council prepares youth to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes by instilling the values of the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

For more information, visit www.gardenstatescouting.org.



The Garden State Council Scouts and leaders enjoy a scenic hike to a waterfall in Puerto Rico.



Venturing Crew 21 explores the beaches of Puerto Rico.



Scouts from Garden State Council's Troop 7151 B & G and Venturing Crew 21 at Camp Guajataka in San Sebastián, Puerto Rico