Growing up a third-generation Girl Scout, Jennifer Bartkowski ’92 loved camping and selling cookies. She earned the Girl Scout Silver Award, the second highest award a girl can get in Girl Scouts. At Texas A&M, Bartkowski’s success was no different. She earned bachelor’s degrees in English and political science, served as the president of Alpha Phi Omega, and graduated from a master’s program in public administration with perfect marks.

After all of that, Bartkowski started a 20-year career in fundraising. In May 2014, after working with the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas for five years, she was appointed as chief executive officer.

Her success, Bartkowski says, comes in part from being a Girl Scout. One of her most vivid memories is selling Girl Scout cookies, which taught her to manage money, set goals, and talk to customers. “My leadership skills and comfort on how to do things and think outside the box actually come from the Girl Scouts,” she said. Her education at Texas A&M also served as a backbone for her success. “Standing in front of people, public speaking, making decisions, being involved in hundreds of hours of community service—I got to really hone my leadership skills,” Bartkowski said.

Bartkowski remembers exactly when she chose to attend Texas A&M. It was 1987, she lived in Austin, and was looking at possible Texas colleges to attend. Her mom took her on a campus visit to College Station, and as they walked by the Academic Building, a student greeted them with a big “Howdy!” Bartkowski was taken aback. “I felt so welcomed the minute I walked on campus,” she said. “I loved the way everything looked and how people acted towards me—I hadn’t felt that anywhere else.”

In 1988, Bartkowski enrolled at Texas A&M. As an undergraduate, she found her passion in Alpha Phi Omega, a national co-ed service fraternity.

“MY LEADERSHIP SKILLS AND COMFORT ON HOW TO DO THINGS AND THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX ACTUALLY COME FROM THE GIRL SCOUTS.”

There she realized she loved to be involved with the community, connecting resources and working with nonprofit organizations to make the world a better place.

Being in APO helped Bartkowski find her niche. “Texas A&M is a very big school, although it also feels very
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intimate,” she said. “But it only feels intimate once you find your niche, and for me it was important I found that group of people who had similar interests, values, and challenges to me.” Once she realized exactly what she wanted to do with her education, she decided to pursue a master’s in public administration with a focus on nonprofit management from Texas A&M.

During Bartkowski’s time in Aggieland, Texas A&M had the largest APO chapter in the nation. She got to lead 300 students as the organization’s vice president of service and ultimately as president. Doing so helped her build the foundations for what she does today with the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas. “It’s crucial as a student to practice your skills, like leadership, public speaking, critical thinking, decision-making, and conflict resolution,” she said. “In your career you’ll definitely use academics, but you have to know how to apply them or you will be really challenged.”

As CEO of the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas, Bartkowski leads a 103-year-old organization with over 30,000 girls striving to develop the leadership skills needed to succeed in today’s world. For instance, she leads a $13 million project to build a 100-acre science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) Center of Excellence in South Dallas. The center will be a living laboratory and classroom to encourage girls to pursue careers in STEM fields, which she said will comprise most of the job market in the future.

Bartkowski says that as the largest girl-service organization in the country, the Girl Scouts is committed to empowering girls to succeed in non-traditional careers. “We have the responsibility to build that pipeline so that our girls will ultimately be engineers, computer scientists, and physicists.”

Before being appointed as CEO, Bartkowski joined the Girl Scouts of Northeast Texas as chief development officer and led fundraising, marketing and communications. She then was promoted to executive vice president and chief operating officer, a position in which she managed operations and initiatives like the Girl Scout Cookie Program. Prior to joining the Girl Scouts, she served as senior vice president of workplace campaigns for United Way of Metropolitan Dallas, where she led a $50 million annual campaign. Also, she worked with the American Lung Association of Texas, United Way of Austin, a private start-up called Charitygift, and independently as a consultant.

She and her husband, Thomas Bartkowski ’93, whom she met at Texas A&M, have two children: 14-year-old Luke and 11-year-old Elissa. Bartkowski and her family are devout Aggie football fans who visit Aggieland three times a year to watch the Aggies play. They make the trip with other former students. In Aggieland, the group has an old Texas A&M shuttle bus from the 1990s that they bought and transformed into what she calls a “tailgating bus.” They have an RV space and have been using the bus for 11 years to enjoy themselves during game days. “It’s just a great way to introduce Texas A&M and all of its traditions to all of our kids,” she said.

Bartkowski also emphasizes that Texas A&M is like a home to her, and that she always feels excited to be back. “Even now when I drive into College Station, when I come around the corner and see the school and Kyle Field, I get this rush, these goose bumps,” she said. She also loves the traditions and connections to the school, like Bonfire, yell practice, and Silver Taps. “I also love the ‘howdy’ tradition,” she said, “because that’s how it all started.”