

**AAUW ROCKFORD**

# *Collaboration, local education among focuses in the 1970s*

**By Kathy Hilbert Dierstein**

**F**or members of the American Association of University Women-Rockford Branch, the 1970s continue with a variety of study groups on topics from the arts to young children.

Education has always been an emphasis, and in the '70s we worked with the League of Women Voters on a Know Your School survey of Rockford public elementary and middle schools, compiling the results in 1971-73. An AAUW branch also made a survey of local nursery schools, "Child from Birth to Six." The branch had an observer at Rockford School Board meetings; was asked to interview candidates for the Illinois Board of Education, and one of our members, Justine Wahlout, served on that board for a number of years. We also provided volunteers for Rockford School District referendums.

The branch started a volunteer bureau led by Jo Paul to provide speakers in special fields to the public schools. Called SOURCE (Service of Uncovering Resources in the Community for Education), in 1970-1971 it branched out from serving one school to the entire district, and from having only a volunteer staff to having a half-time director paid by the

Rockford School System.

Among community endeavors we supported were the Forward Rockford steering committee and several projects with LWV such as court watching. Several branch members even decided to seek appointment to or run for public offices.

The branch supported and provided volunteers for the passage of the new Illinois Constitution in 1970. In 1976 the AAUW and LWV collaborated on a new "Local Government Handbook." The branch also sponsored a non-partisan debate between US Senator Charles Percy and challenger Alex Seith in 1978, as well as an earlier debate between US Representative John B. Anderson and opponent Stephan Eytalis.

The World Affairs Council, sponsored by Rock Valley College and community groups including AAUW, hosted on topics from China to the USSR, and NATO to the United Nations. Two branch members took advantage of and opportunity from Illinois AAUW to tour China, The branch also hosted visitors from Nigeria and Tanzania in 1976.

The focus on women was emphasized by the creation of a "Women" chair at the 1975 Seattle national convention that led to monitoring Title IX (1972) in local schools.

The branch also supported passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in Congress, the top legislative priority for several years with local efforts ranging from phone calls and letters to key legislators to hosting the 1979 Illinois AAUW Convention in Janesville, Wis., taking our state convention to a "ratified state."

During the '70s, we worked on each of the Beattie Is festivals, leading to two years of "Art Walks" in 1977 and 1978. Members viewed are and visited with artists at home in Shaw Woods and Imperial Oaks. We also participate in the local Bicentennial project to build and landscape a mini-park dedicated to Rockford's Founders, which was completed with a sculpture of those founders by local artist Gene Horvath.

The branch joined forces with several other women's groups to provide a monthly television program that began as "Majority Report - The Real World of Women" and evolved into "Women Speak Out."

*Kathy Hilbert Dierstein is past branch president. AAUW-Rockford Branch is celebrating its 90th anniversary in 2019. It is a nonpartisan organization and open to both women and men with at least a two-year college degree. For more information, visit [rockfordarea-il.aauw.net](http://rockfordarea-il.aauw.net).*