

AAUW in the 21st century

As the 21st century dawned, the American Association of University Women (AAUW) continued both nationally and locally with its mission to advance equality for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research.

Throughout the history of AAUW, members have examined and assumed positions on the fundamental educational, social, economic, and political issues of the day. We continued to do so during 2000–2009.

At the national level, AAUW received special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council. This gave AAUW a voice at UN meetings and on a variety of UN committees. AAUW expanded membership to include graduates holding an associate or equivalent degree from a qualified educational institution. This change was in response to the growing population of women who have entered economically advantageous careers with this type of education.

AAUW became a strong proponent of the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, signed by President Obama. This law makes it easier for workers to seek redress for sex discrimination on the job. Several local AAUW members heard Lily Ledbetter speak at the AAUW national convention.

At the local level, AAUW sponsored forums and meetings dealing with a wide range of topics such as war and peace, the role of the UN, roots of terrorism, equality funding for education, No Child Left

Behind, the expansion of services for the mentally ill, Title IX, environmental concerns, and the empowerment of women in other countries. We also featured programs about trendsetting women from the past, such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Jane Addams. We continued to sponsor Women in My History, a poster contest for fifth- through eighth-grade students.

AAUW members donated money to purchase new library books for schools that sent entries to the contest. AAUW provided a variety of interest groups, including gourmet cooking, book discussions, golf, public policy, bridge and art. Several AAUW members presented a program called “The Dead Ladies,” featuring the 1850 Women’s Rights Convention in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Local members also had the opportunity to watch the American historical drama “Iron Jawed Angels,” a film focusing on the women’s suffrage movement during the 1910s. AAUW has always encouraged responsible and informed voting. We sponsored election forums, often with League of Women Voters as a cosponsor. Voter’s guides, showing members how candidates felt about various issues, were distributed.

Local AAUW members raised money for AAUW national funds through silent auctions at our holiday meetings. The AAUW Legal Advocacy Fund works to challenge sex discrimination in higher education and in the workplace. The Educational Foundation provides fellowships,



grants, and awards for women, as well as money for research. We established our first STEM scholarship. We wanted teen girls to go into fields often dominated by men, such as science, technology, engineering, and math.

We’ve been able to successfully expand this scholarship program throughout the years. Thanks to the generosity of our members and the community, we now raise several thousand dollars each year and are able to offer several college scholarships to high school senior girls.

The Rockford Area AAUW’s purpose continues to be to contribute to AAUW’s branch, state, and association goals. We seek to initiate positive change in the community by supporting equality for all women and girls, as well as lifelong education. As part of our mission, we’ll be sponsoring Work Smart on Sept. 28.

This program is open to the community and offers women help with salary negotiation. Please visit our website at rockfordarea-il.aauw.net for information and registration.

Katy Paterson is a 50-year AAUW member. 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.