
Opinion

AAUW continues to pursue equity, equality in 21st century

By Karen Hoffman and Christine Haeggquist

Posted Oct 6, 2019 at 7:12 AM

The Rockford Branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) has participated and sponsored hundreds of activities since 1929. Through various programs and in collaboration with other community groups, we have continued from 2010 through this year to work to tell the history and achievements of women not only in the United States but throughout our international community, the women of the world.

Working with the League of Women Voters, we have helped to sponsor candidate forums during election cycles. We focused on those candidates who had challengers. Other candidates were welcome to attend. We also worked on many “Get Out The Vote” initiatives. Through our public policy program, we received “2 Minute Activist” alerts which informed us of upcoming issues at the federal level and ways that we could contact our elected officials with our concerns.

In 2010 we held a forum featuring six female judges. In 2012, we sponsored “Game Changer—the Effects of Title IX,” with representatives of local schools and colleges. In 2015 we sponsored “Elect Her,” a program that encourages women to run for office. Three members of the Rockford branch ran for various positions shortly afterward. Two who did not win their positions held a forum to speak about the unique challenges facing women candidates. In 2017 Rep. Litesa Wallace spoke to our membership concerning what it is like to be a woman and a mother while serving in office.

Also in 2017 we, as an organization, both locally and nationally, participated in the first “Women’s March” which included over 5 million participants from seven continents for the purpose of bringing attention to the issues concerning women and their rights. We have continued to march every year since and to work with other organizations in our community for the purpose of educating the public on equity and equality for women.

AAUW Rockford Area Branch continues to support women and girls in their educational efforts. In 2010 we restarted our scholarship program with one-time grants of \$500 to high school senior girls who were going into STEM fields. This past May, we awarded four \$1,000 grants to a group of very talented students.

From 2010-2019, we continued to bring attention to fair pay for women. In 2011 we provided the women of the Rockford City Council with PayDay candy bars. Men received a half a bar to show the discrepancy in wages. The following year we presented the same to the Winnebago County Board. In subsequent years we have held bake sales at Rockford University where women are charged about 22% less per item than men to reflect unequal pay.

In 2015 we hosted a “Start Smart” workshop at Rockford University. “Start Smart” and “Work Smart” are national AAUW programs that give information on wage disparity and teach interview and salary negotiation techniques. The AAUW “Work Smart” program is available free online to everyone at salary.aauw.org.

In 2018, the Rockford Area Branch had the pleasure of supporting the 75th anniversary of the Rockford Peaches Women’s Baseball Team. The AAGPBL was the inspiration for future women’s amateur and professional sports leagues and the passage of Title IX.

Karen Hoffman and Christine Haeggquist, are past presidents of AAUW. AAUW-Rockford Branch is celebrating its 90th anniversary in 2019. It is a non partisan organization and open to both women and men with at least a two-year college degree. For more information, visit <https://rockfordarea-il.aauw.net>.