


BONFIRE

San Jose Branch



BUILDING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE AAUW BRANCHES

Don't Forget to Save the Date!

Join us for an inspiring afternoon with AAUW CA President Charmen Goehring. Discover how The Four Pivots, AAUW's DEI Strategic Plan, the 5-Star Program, and the National Strategic Plan come together to advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy!

Special Speaker

Charmen Goehring, M Ed.
AAUW California President



RSVP Now:



Join us on
Saturday
Sept. 20th,
2025



From
1:30pm - 3:00pm
Doors open
at 1:00pm



WG United Methodist
Kohlstedt Room
1420 Newport Ave,
San Jose, CA 95125

RSVP link: <https://bit.ly/aauwsjsep2025>

programs@aauwsanjose.org

President's Corner**Tynka Dees**

I hope you are all enjoying summer! I feel very fortunate to be among a group of women and men who value empathy and equality. When I come to a meeting or an interest group you all give me a positive vibe to keep on going. We are stronger together. Please take care of yourself and your family, and be kind to yourself.

As a reminder, our National Civility Policy is to be used when discussing this issue or really any issue coming up in our future. Sadly, we live in an era of incivility in politics that spills over into many interactions where people may have a difference of opinion. These policies should be put into practice in every meeting you may attend. I ask everyone to use the same guidelines in our emails. They include:

- Be empathetic - try to see the other's point of view.
- Be an active listener - make eye contact and pay attention.
- Be respectful and not condescending.
- Be curious and open to learning.
- Repeat points back to show understanding.
- Find common ground - we all have much more in common than we have differences.
- Be patient - reaching common ground needs conversations over time.

If you are setting up a Zoom meeting and a code is required, the Zoom code will be sent to me in an email. However, the person who needs it is not identified. If you make the request, please text me at 408-464-3524 so that I can get the code to the person who needs it. Thank you.

We are changing the dates of the coffee/conversation. It will not always be the last Saturday of a month. The next one is September 6. We have a wonderful program on September 20 when our California President will come to speak to us.

We are still looking for someone to help with our newsletter, the Bonfire. Thank you to Elin Bolt for her many years of wonderful work! We also need a "web master." Our paid intern is helping a lot but we really need this position. Or it could be a duo if two of you are great at web design.

I hope every volunteer is able to find your sense of purpose in the time you give to the Branch this year!

SAVE THE DATE: Oct. 4, 2025
Fall Gathering/event

Where is all the Dorris Miller money going?

Ad hoc Communications Committee, Diane Trombetta

Are you unsure how the Dorris Miller bequest is being used to improve communication of our mission, increase Branch visibility and strengthen ties to our local community? Are you wondering what changes we've made in intra-Branch communications and event/program planning?

Go to the Members Only section on our website (password on p. 13 of the Directory). Under Member Resources you'll see a Power Point summary. Or click on [Communications/PR Ad Hoc Committee Report](#). Or read the "Quarterly Report" (contact Diane or Michele) summarizing 9 months of work. Still have questions? Email Diane Trombetta tddtaug@yahoo.com or Michele Bertolone michele@boldblue.net

Coffee and Conversation July 26, 10 am-noon

Meet some of our scholarship recipients and chat with old and new friends.

Save the Date: Coffee & Convo Saturday, September 6, 10 am-noon

Guests Welcome!

Renee Sommerfeld



Reserve time on your calendar for our next casual get-together for members and those interested in our programs and interest groups! We will gather at Headquarters on Saturday, September 6, 10 am - noon, and enjoy coffee, tea and other goodies. Learn about our 501(c) (3) Community Action Projects, fun and informative events and ways we can all advocate for women's education and pay equity. Reconnect with members you haven't seen in a while and meet new friends. Prospective members are especially welcome!



Long time member **Grace O'Leary** passed away peacefully at home on Saturday, June 28, 2025. Grace taught in the Milpitas School District, where her passion for education was matched only by her devotion to empowering others. For over six decades, she was an active member of the American Association of University Women, tirelessly working to create scholarship opportunities for women and championing gender equality. She also gave her time and talents to Sacred Heart Community Service, Project Linus, Holy Spirit Church and the California Retired Teachers Association.



Spotlight on Charlotte Mackay

Ruth Dusan

Charlotte is another wonderful, kind person to get to know. I met her while participating in one of our many group sessions. Here's her story.

How did you discover AAUW San Jose?

Charlotte Mackay: One of my closest friends and former classmate at the University of Michigan was a member of the branch. Often she would talk about the activities and the friends she made in the branch.

How long have you been a member of AAUW?

I had joined the National AAUW in 1994. At the time, I wasn't aware of the branch. I became a branch member in July, 2002.

What do you like most about being a member of AAUW?

First of all, meeting and becoming a member of a group of women with similar backgrounds and experiences. Second, the range of interest groups and chance to learn and share with others.

Is there anything else we can do to improve membership experience? I can't think of anything.

What would you like members to know about you?

I retired from the VA Medical Center as a Clinical Specialist in Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing. My BSN is from the University of Michigan and MS from UCSF. My volunteer activities include SJCLO/ AMT (1982-2008), Cartoon Art Museum (1984-present), Schulz Museum (2002 - present). I am interested in Humor and Play in healing and in alternative/ holistic healing modalities and concepts.

How would you like to be remembered?

As appreciative of the many gifts, such as caring, friendship, support, sharing, that I have received from family, friends and others in my lifetime and I was a Piscesian to the end.

Public Policy Update from AAUW National

A Big Broken Promise to America's Students and Women

Peg Carlson-Bowen, Public Policy

“Congress passed a bill [on July 3] that will go down in history not as a beautiful promise fulfilled — but as a big broken promise to America’s students, working families, and especially to women. From early learning through graduate school, this bill deals a devastating blow to educational opportunities in America. It slashes financial aid, eliminates vital student loan programs, and channels public dollars into private voucher schemes — all while doing nothing to ensure that participating schools uphold civil rights protections. This bill makes drastic cuts to Medicaid, threatens reproductive freedom and the health and economic security of the very people who rely on education as a path to a better future. For AAUW, this is personal. We are the nation’s largest non-institutional founder of women’s graduate education. For more than 140 years, we’ve fought to open the doors of higher education to all women — not just those who can afford it. And we know the truth: when women lose access to education, they lose access to opportunity, economic security, and equity.” More at: [A Big Broken Promise to Americas Students and Women](#)

In spite of the present setback, consider words from Rebecca Solnit: “They want you to feel powerless and to surrender and to let them trample everything and you are not going to let them. You are not giving up, and neither am I. The fact that we cannot save everything does not mean we cannot save anything and everything we can save is worth saving. You may need to grieve or scream or take time off, but you have a role no matter what, and right now good friends and good principles are worth gathering in.” Belonging to AAUW San Jose is more important than ever: fighting for justice and equity together.



Neighbors Helping Neighbors Thank you for your Community Support

Mary Jane Vitkovich and Bobbie Baker, NHN Co-chairs



Photo caption: Genevie Concha (from Family Supportive Housing), Mary Jane Vitkovich, Bobbie Baker, Jeanette Bumagat (from Front Door Communities)

On June 2 Neighbors Helping Neighbors held a very successful gathering of members to mingle and support two of our community partners: Family Supportive Housing and Front Door Communities. Representatives from each agency spoke about the many services they provide to our economically challenged neighbors. A big round of applause to our members who generously donated twin bedding, cleansers, travel sized lip balm, tissues and sunscreen to the agencies to take back to their respective non-profits. Hope to see you all at next year's event!

Archives Committee Wraps Up

Diane Trombetta tddtaug@yahoo.com



On Friday, June 26, Rebecca Fong and Diane Trombetta presented 8 boxes of precious Branch documents to History San Jose. They will be archived and preserved forever. The boxes contained everything from Board agendas from 2000 to 2024 to newspaper articles and scrapbooks from the '60's. Thank you, Rebecca, for leading this effort and to fellow committee members Bernice Redfern, Barbara Gilbert and April Halberstadt. Now it's up to YOU! Please put 2024-25 materials to be archived in the marked bin in the left rear corner of the office (not the sunroom). If you need the archiving guidelines please contact Diane at tddtaug@yahoo.com. Let's preserve our history for future generations!



No Beach Reads for the Busy Gifts for Teens Committee!

Cheryl Markman, Gifts for Teens

Every year buyers for Gifts for Teens search stores and on-line sales for useful and interesting gift items for the recipients of our bags. Additionally, many of the items that go into the bags are wonderful donations of teen-loved products from some very generous big-name companies. Examples include three pallets of sweatshirts; two pallets of Thrive Causemetics; a load of fragrant Lush products; two pallets of tee-shirts; three carloads of school supplies; boxes of sports teams' excess tee-shirts and fun team memorabilia including from the San Francisco Warriors, Giants and 49ers.



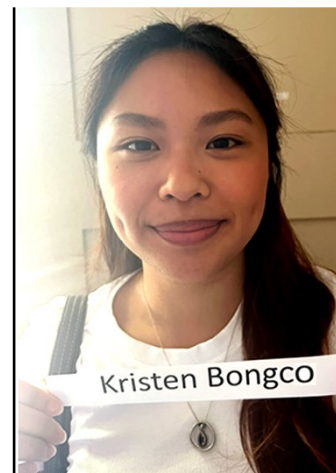
On multiple days all summer long the 15 committee members prepare the thousands of items for the action-packed bag-filling days in September and October. Tasks include sizing and rolling casual and nicer tee-shirts, packaging panties for the girls and boxers for the boys, rolling girl's leggings and boy's sleep pants, separating and sizing 3000 socks and matching colorful hand knit scarves with knit hats and gloves. Other tasks include packaging together earbuds and power banks, repackaging cosmetics into brightly patterned zippered bags for the girls and grouping and packaging personal care products and school supplies for both the girls and the boys.

The committee donates these many work hours shopping all year round, prepping items in the summer months and over-seeing the bag-filling operations in the fall, all to have the much-appreciated gift bags ready for distribution in December. As has been reported previously, the teen recipients are so very grateful for the joy these gifts bring to their sometimes otherwise not-so-joyful holidays. Anyone who would like to share in the joy, please contact Elaine Benoit at ebenoit99@yahoo.com to join the Gifts for Teens committee.

An Update on Kristen Bongco, A Former Local Scholarship Recipient

Cheryl Markman

Kristen Bongco received an AAUW Local Scholarship in the spring of 2024. She graduated Summa Cum Laude from San José State University (SJSU) with a Bachelor of Science in Advertising and a minor in Graphic Design in May 2025.



While at SJSU, Kristen served as President and then as a mentor for her Advertising Club. Under her leadership, the club grew by 50 members, raised approximately \$2,000, and increased its Instagram following by an impressive 115%—reaching 27,000 profile views. Over her four years of involvement, she planned and executed a successful networking event attended by about 100 students and nine industry professionals. The club was also recognized with the "Collaboration of the Year" award for university-wide organizational events. She also helped to recruit 18 guest speakers, coordinate 17 advertising agency visits (locally and in New York), organized 13 socials, 10 workshops and 8 partnerships with other SJSU and outside organizations such as Adobe and Figma.

Post graduation, Kristen continues to work as a Graphic Designer for the SJSU Student Union. There, she manages social media and designs promotional materials for major events such as concerts, comedy shows, and more. She has also taken on freelance graphic design work and field marketing "gigs," which she explains is helping to brand market their product by being outside/in another location to draw people in. One such example involved working with **Caliwater**, Vanessa Hudgens' cactus water brand. She set up a large display with bean bags and cactuses, providing samples and facilitating games outside of Safeway, all of which encouraged people to go inside and make a purchase.

Meanwhile Kristen is applying for more long-term positions within the fashion and/or entertainment fields. She has visited New York a few more times for advertising and work, helping her to make connections and further her professional development.

In her free time, Kristen is learning Brazilian Portuguese in hopes of one day becoming a polyglot and fostering relationships worldwide. And just for fun she is learning how to play chess!



An Update on Julia Ocher, a 2-Time AAUW Scholarship Recipient

Cheryl Markman

Julia Ocher received an AAUW Local Scholarship in 2023 and 2024. When she received the first scholarship she had just applied to the Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) program for Graphic Design at San Jose State University, which takes five years to complete, adding a year of schooling. Noting that only 24 people were accepted into the program her year, she was very nervous and unsure of herself and her abilities. But looking back Julia says that applying to this program was the best decision she could have made. She has learned so much, made strong connections with her peers and professors and developed confidence in her own skills that she didn't have before. Julia is very grateful for AAUW and how these scholarships have allowed her to further her education in the design world.

Throughout the program Julia has learned many forms of graphic design. One of her favorite projects was to create branding for a fictional conference focused on a recent technological advancement. For her hypothetical conference, Julia chose the topic of vertical farming, creating an animated poster, personalized name tags and a 3D sculpture. Another project she enjoyed was to create a bus-stop poster based on a graphic design topic of her choosing. She chose the golden age of illustrated books as her focus. These projects and others have allowed her to explore the limits of her creativity and expand her design skills. The culmination of all of her design work will be featured in her class's senior show. After graduation Julia plans to seek a job in the graphic design field. Although not set on anything just yet, she notes that she would love to work in advertising or poster design.

In her free time Julia loves to refine her fine art skills by drawing and painting. She has been experimenting with oil painting, a different medium than the acrylic paints she usually uses. She

The Cosmos and Quest to Discover Extraterrestrial Life

Cheryl Markman

Our guest speaker in May was Dr. Jill Tarter, Chair Emeritus of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) Research, and a key player in developing some of the world's most sophisticated signal detection systems.

Dr. Tarter noted that there are over 5000 planets in our universe. Missions in our solar system are actually looking for ozone, an indication of the presence of life. SETI researchers are looking for signs of extraterrestrial technology, which would infer intelligence.

Dr. Tarter emphasized that SETI is NOT:

- Investigating UFO's or alien abductions
- A religion or cult
- Politically correct

Rather, SETI is:

- A suite of scientific explorations and experiments designed to answer the question "Are we alone?"
- Practiced by very pragmatic individuals
- Potentially a multi-generational exploration with no predictable time for an outcome
- "Very important!"

Dr. Tarter explained that the right experiments are both active (physically going there; OK for our solar system, not for stars, which are too far away) and passive (remote sensing of distant environs; encouraging those with access to data to consider anomalies they find and conduct systemic searches).

Posing the question "How likely is it that searches will succeed?", Dr. Tarter offered that in 1951 "The probability of success is difficult to estimate; but if we never search, the chance of success is zero," which is still true. She noted that any technology we encounter will be more advanced than ours, ours being 100 year-old technologies in a 10 billion year-old galaxy. To date, over 100 separate searches have been reported including directed (sky surveys or targeted searches), commensal (piggybacking on previous searches), and data mining. SETI has focused on sky surveys or targeted searches, but with no success so far. "We need a better telescope!" Dr. Tarter noted that SETI's biggest challenges are Radiofrequency Interference (from orbiting satellites) and our own technology (GPS and satellites). But they will keep trying!

For the post-program survey results, click on bit.ly/may25res.



We Welcome Our Newest Members

Claire Campodonico

Many thanks go out to Shelley Powers, Marion Meyers and the Mahjong interest group, who are bringing in new members in an amazing way

CAROL D. ROSS was referred by member Michele Bertolone. Carol attended UCLA and received an Executive MBA from Pepperdine University. She enjoyed being a member of the AAUW Branch in Glendale in the past and recently noticed our HQ while visiting the library next door. Having worked in fields including the International Education Foundation and as CFO of Southern Law School, Carol is now retired.

JESSICA TORRES matriculated at Santa Clara University. Earning degrees in Web Design and Computer Science Engineering, she is currently employed as a Web Designer. She heard of AAUW through an acquaintance. She is eager to help the Branch update its Gifts for Teens website. Jessica's photo appeared in an earlier issue of The Bonfire.

JUDITH BORLASE is a dual member with the Los Gatos-Saratoga Branch. She earned a BA in Psychology from Cal State University in Long Beach. She has retired from her career in teaching. She was referred by her friends Margaret Bard and Diana Taylor. Judith's hobbies include rose gardening, bird watching and traveling.

VEENA PILLAY joined through the National website. She earned a BA in South Africa and an MA at San Jose State University. She is employed as a private tutor. Member Marion Meyer encouraged her to join. Veena enjoys traveling, reading, playing Mahjong and meeting people from different cultures. She suggests that we host a high tea each month.

SUZETTE SMITH joined through the National website. When we can obtain detailed information about her, it will appear in a future edition of the Bonfire.

SUSIE WOODFORD also joined through the National website. She has studied at De Anza College, American College of Education and the University of Nevada in Reno. She enjoys her career as a Clinical Nursing Coordinator and Instructor. She learned of AAUW through her Mahjong group at the Jewish Community Center. Susie looks forward to promoting education for women in marginalized populations.

Continued on page 12



CAROLYN BOOKER, a resident of Saratoga, studied at Morgan State University in Maryland and at West Valley College. She is now retired from her career in Medical Coding and Billing. She learned of AAUW from friends at the Jewish Community Center. Carolyn has long volunteered helping senior citizens in her community.

OLYMPIA PISTALU studied at Cal State University-Fresno and at Cal State University-Hayward. Although she is an active Realtor, she does not do any personal marketing. Rather, all her work is done by referral. Being an active alumna of the sorority Phi Mu, Olympia understands the importance of sisterhood and philanthropy. She also has a background in hospitality.

BETH SCHMIDT studied at the University of Virginia earning a degree in Nursing. Since her retirement she has enjoyed volunteering at Hospice of the Valley as well as at Catholic Charities. Beth learned of AAUW and its mission at a Mahjong class at the Los Gatos Jewish Community Center. She looks forward to joining our Book Discussion group.

JOYCE ANN KOLLER studied at Northeastern University and at the State University of New York in Stony Brook. She has retired from a career in teaching. Joyce is a graduate of the two- year Mindfulness Meditation Teacher Certificate Program. She is also a Reiki Master. She heard of AAUW from her friends.

PAMELA ELLINGTON graduated from San Jose State University. She has retired from her career at Intel where she specialized in tax and corporate HR benefits. She has been a member of the 100 Women Charitable Foundation since its inception. She chaired various committees there including making recommendations for funding women's and children's organizations.

August 2025

Submitted by Tynka Dees, Calendar Editor

Please check with the organizer whether the meeting has changed and will be ZOOM or in person. **The most up to date calendar is always on our website.**

Sun Aug 3	9-10:30 am	Weekend Walkers (RSVP Judy Burt)
Tue Aug 5	9 am-1 pm	Gifts for Teens in basement packing (Elaine Benoit)
	10-11 am	German Conversation ZOOM (RSVP Barbara Snyder)
	1-4 pm	Film Fans Time to Be Determined (RSVP Nancy Wheeler Linda Snashall)
Wed Aug 6	5:30– 6 pm	AAUW Board Social Time (Tynka Dees)
	6-7:30 pm	AAUW BOARD Meeting Hybrid (Tynka Dees)
Fri Aug 8	10 am-1 pm	Duplicate Bridge (RSVP Lida Kluzek)
Sat Aug 9	6:30-9:30 pm	Couples Dining (RSVP Valerie Merklin)
Sun Aug 10	9-10:30 am	Weekend Walkers (RSVP Judy Burt)
Mon Aug 11	9 am-1 pm	Gifts for Teens in basement packing (Elaine Benoit)
	6:30- 9:30 pm	Light Gourmet (Cheryl Markman)
Tue Aug 12	9 am-5 pm	Board Training
	10-11 am	Conversacion Espanol ZOOM (RSVP Barbara Snyder)
	1-3 pm	Mahjong (RSVP Shelley Powers)
Wed Aug 13	11 am-1 pm	Art Appreciation (RSVP Jan Bartolotta)
Thu Aug 14	1-4 pm	Bridge 2nd Thursday (RSVP Bobbie Eckerman)
	1:30-3:30 pm	Archive Committee (RSVP Diane Trombetta)
Fri Aug 15	10 am-1 pm	Bridge (RSVP Lida Kluzek)
Sun Aug 17	9-10:30 am	Weekend Walkers (RSVP Judy Burt)
Mon Aug 18	6:30-9 pm	International Gourmet (RSVP Jan Bartolotta)
Tue Aug 19	Noon-1 pm	French Conversation ZOOM (RSVP Barbara Snyder)
	1-3 pm	Mahjong (RSVP Shelley Powers)
	3:45-5:15 pm	Membership meeting (Membership@aauwsanjose.org)
Wed Aug 20	11:30 am-3 pm	Program Planning (RSVP Ruth Dusan)
Thu Aug 21	6:30-8 pm	Mystery Lovers (Sharon Shephard)
Fri Aug 22	1:30-3 pm	Local Scholarship (Beth Redmond)
Sun Aug 24	9-10:30 am	Weekend Walkers (RSVP Judy Burt)
Mon Aug 25	11am-12:30 pm	Building and Properties Committee (buildings@aauwsanjose.org)
Tue Aug 26	10-11 am	Italian Conversation ZOOM (RSVP Barbara Snyder)
	1-4 pm	Bridge 4th Tuesday (RSVP Bobbie Eckerman)
	1- 3 pm	Mahjong (RSVP Shelley Powers)
	7-8:30 pm	Great Decisions PM ZOOM (Sharon Shephard)
Wed Aug 27	12:30-1:30 pm	Lunch Bunch (RSVP Cheryl Markman Sueann Snow)
Thu Aug 28	1:30-3:30 pm	Archive Committee (RSVP Diane Trombetta)
Sun Aug 31	9-10:30 am	Weekend Walkers (RSVP Judy Burt)

San Jose Branch BONFIRE

Published monthly except for July by AAUW

San Jose Branch. 1165 Minnesota Avenue,
San Jose, CA 95125-3324

President: Tynka Dees

BONFIRE Editor: Sonia Wright

Editorial Staff: Elin Bolt Copy Editor; Tynka
Dees, Calendar Editor; Jan Giroux & Cheryl
Markman, Proofreader; Barb Purdy, Layout
Editor

Distribution: Nancy Wheeler & Linda Guyer

Change of Address: Renee Sommerfeld

BONFIRE ARTICLE SUBMITTAL RULES: The sole
purpose of this publication is to convey the
association's business to membership. Only
articles and announcements related to Branch

San Jose Branch

1165 Minnesota Ave., Suite 100

San Jose, CA 95125-3324

Phone: 408 294 2430

Email: www.aauwsanjose.org

August 2025

AAUW BONFIRE San Jose Branch *Established 1909*



AAUW Members

Volunteer & Help Pack **Gifts for Teens Duffle Bags & Totes**

Gifts for Teens needs your help. Several shifts still needs volunteers. If you are available, please consider helping Gifts for Teens. You do need to be on your feet for 3 hours. There will be a break halfway through the shift. These are the shifts that are available this fall. All of our packing days are on Saturday. They are:

September 13 - 1pm to 4 pm. - 5 volunteer spots.

September 20 - 1 pm to 4 pm. - 5 volunteer spots.

October 11 - 9 am to noon. - 5 volunteer spots.

October 11 - 1 pm to 4 pm. - 5 volunteer spots.

October 18 - 9 am to noon. - 5 volunteer spots.

October 18— 1 pm to 4 pm. - 5 volunteer spots.

If you are able to help, please email me Barb Purdy. barbnpurdy@gmail.com



Empowering Women Since 1881

See the San Jose Branch Website at www.aauwsanjose.org for more information.