



September, 2025

New look. New format. Branch news in just a few clicks.

Welcome!

It's been long overdue since we took a look at our newsletter and see how we can do better and use new technology to make information get to you faster than ever before.

Your NEW Bonfire

- At the bottom of this email, if you see "View Entire Message," click for the rest of the newsletter.
- More up to date information.
- Less text, easy to scan.
- Find what you are most interested faster.
- Clickable links to get more info fast.

Upcoming Events

SEPT. PUBLIC SPEAKER SERIES

Building Inclusive & Sustainable AAUW Branches

Date: September 20; 1:30 to 3 pm

Location: WG United Methodist Church Kohlstedt Hall

Register Now for This Free Event: <https://bit.ly/aauwsjsep2025>



Building Inclusive & Sustainable AAUW Branches

Join us for an inspiring afternoon learning more about ways AAUW California is innovating to advance gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy!

Register Now



Special Speakers
Charmen Goehring, M Ed.
 President, AAUW California
Dr. Lata Murti
 DEI Chair, AAUW California

Saturday Sept. 20, 2025

1:30 PM - 3:00 PM
 Doors open at 1 PM
 Light refreshments

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

RSVP link: <https://bit.ly/aauwsjsep2025> programs@aauwsanjose.org

Join Us! Coffee & Convo

Date: Sat., Sept. 6,
10 am to noon
Location: HQ

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.



COFFEE & CONVO

*No agenda or speakers!
 Just coffee & conversation!*

AAUW San Jose

Sat. Sept. 6
 10 AM to 12 PM at HQ
 Guests Welcome

[Click Here | Full Up-to-Date Branch Calendar Online](#)



Our Newest Members!

By Claire Campodonico

SYLVIA MIN studied at New York University and at Mills College. She teaches at Evergreen Valley College. She joined through a partnership AAUWSJ has with her college. The partnership allows for two complementary memberships for college reps. Sylvia is one of the two representatives from Evergreen Valley College. Sylvia, we are happy that you have chosen to join our Branch!

TONI VANDERWEGE recently joined through National. She studied at San Bernardino Valley College. After enjoying her career at IBM Almaden Research Center for more than twenty years, she is now retired. Toni enjoys playing Mahjong with her friends at HQ on Tuesday afternoons.

BARB CRUMMEY earned her degree from UC Berkeley. Before she retired, she worked as a Paralegal. She was also a very talented florist! Barb learned of our Branch through her friends who have joined our Mahjong group. She is proud to be a Willow Glen resident and a grandmother of three wonderful children.

MANJU SHUKLA also enjoys playing Mahjong. She studied at Juhari Devi in Kanpur India as well at City College of San Jose. Before retiring, Manju was employed as a Medical Assistant. She looks forward to socializing and building community with other Branch members.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Monica Hojda

By Ruth Dusan



How did you discover AAUW San Jose?

It was by accident. For many years, I worked with the AAU Morgan Hill Wildflower Race event to raise funds for their women/girls' sports program and other school activities. I've been doing 5K runs every year in the springtime and then I asked Susan Brazelton and Sharon Chatman: what is AAUW? And they told me: "you do have a branch in San Jose." I got involved in their Title IX focus group because I wanted to promote and energize the women's equity and sports education.

How long have you been a member of AAUW?

I have been a member of AAUW since late 2017.

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

I was attracted to the various interest groups, my main interest is in Title IX, and working with women in leadership roles, and contributing to the community.

Is there anything else we can do to improve membership experience?

I think membership should explore areas that appeal to younger members to promote leadership opportunities. We already do this type of activity through Tech Trek camps and STEM programs. AAUW as an all-inclusive group still needs to get more diversified through introduction of opportunities to high school and college students. We need to explain and/or network with women and introduce them to community services, leadership opportunities, and what they can do even at a young age. The San Jose Branch could work more with IBC (Inter Branch Council) to promote this activity.

What would you like members to know about you?

I'm retired and would like people to know that I am a perpetual student of learning. I explore new experiences. During retirement, I advanced my interests in photography, music, and travel. I was introduced in my late 60's to the ukulele. I'm working with a small group and now we are doing gigs and volunteer work around the community. I also enjoy working with all students who want to learn, who are unafraid to ask the questions. I have worked with Santa Cruz, Petaluma, and Morgan Hill branches.

How would you like to be remembered?

I want to be remembered as a woman who never gives up, who is always ready to question why and to fight for the little person, no matter who they are. I always want to be me and to enjoy that no matter what. I am a "UkeKool Lady"! And to know that I'm always learning that the world changes, I have to change with it, and it's okay to be me.

Please contact [Ruth Dusan](#) if you want to submit your Spotlight article.

Advancing Gender Equity

PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

Let's Move Forward Together!

By Susan Karlins

National AAUW was an official partner in the John Lewis Day of Action July 17 in St. James Park. At least a dozen SJ Branch members participated. Some of us are shown below:



If you'd like to hear about ongoing opportunities to take action with a local movement to protect democracy, education, social security and healthcare, add your name to the [AAUW SJ Public Policy list](#).

Our email list will also bring you opportunities to participate in local events such as Santa Clara County Women's Leadership & Policy Summit on October 18, of which we are a co-sponsor.

Postcards to voters—fill out this form by September 6 to order postcards, stamps, addresses and everything needed to encourage voting among Virginians of Color in their important off-year elections [Sign up for AAUW SJ Postcards to Voters](#). Postcards can be picked up from Susan's doorstep and must be sent by mid-October.

Join our committee meetings to find out more about all of our current and upcoming projects. We meet the third Wednesday of the month at 7 pm via Zoom. Learn more about AAUW CA public policy priorities and what we're doing to support them: [AAUW CA priorities](#).

To learn more about the state of our country from an esteemed historian of American History, tune into Heather Cox Richardson on Substack or social media. Here's a recent presentation she made on [YouTube](#).

Read more at the [AAUW CA Public Policy Newsletter](#).

Recent Accomplishments & Activities

Community Action Project (CAP) | Gifts for Teens Seeking Donations for Holiday Gift Giving

By Cheryl Markman, Gifts for Teens

As the saying goes, we couldn't do this without your help. Once again, Gifts for Teens is requesting donations for our annual Holiday gift-giving project.

In-kind donations to help fill the duffel bags for both girls and boys are always appreciated. Items such as earbuds and power banks; cosmetics and zippered bags to package them in; full-sized personal care products; school supplies such as notepads, pens or pencils; and the ever-popular \$50 Target or Walmart gift cards are all welcome. Store gift cards allow these teens, who often wear second-hand clothes and shoes, to personally select new items they want or need, certainly a rare treat for them. Or they may choose to purchase favorite food items which otherwise might be considered a luxury. Please contact [Elaine Benoit](#) or (408) 605-6262 to donate in-kind items. To donate store gift cards, contact [Beverly Bassett](#).



If you prefer, cash contributions of any amount are always welcome. No gift is too small. We will use this money to purchase additional gift cards and other gift items for the duffel bags. Please make checks payable to ISPF-AAUW-GFT or simply to ISPF-AAUW with Gifts for Teens in the memo line; mail them to Jan Giroux, c/o AAUW, 1165 Minnesota Avenue, San Jose, CA 95125.

Last year we began a new project geared toward the 18 to 22-year-olds in foster care served by the Bill Wilson Center. This year our plan is to serve all 144 of these young women and 144 young men. By providing specialized gift bags containing fewer but nicer gift items, including \$75 in store gift cards, more stylish clothing, Bluetooth ear buds and other more suitable gifts appealing to these older teens, our goal is to bolster their confidence, better helping them to become self-sufficient members of our community. As noted, any help you can provide, either with cash or in-kind donations, will be greatly appreciated.

Other Great News! Named Gift Honoree 2024–2025

By Mary Jane Vitkovich

Congratulations to Karelle Cornwell for being named the AAUW San Jose Branch Named Gift Honoree for 2024-25.

As soon as Karelle retired in 2017, she became involved in the Tech Trek project. Her commitment to the project led her to become the Tech Trek chair in 2018. She worked tirelessly over the past years with local middle schools to include their students in the project.

One of the hardest parts was choosing which girls to select to attend Tech Trek camps as she wanted them all to have the opportunity. The rewards were the thank you letters she received from campers who told her it was a life changing experience being at the camp. As a dorm mom, Karelle watched girls gain self-



confidence and discover other girls were also interested in STEM.

Despite the pandemic affecting the project, Karelle worked diligently to ensure students were interviewed, selected and able to attend camps via Zoom. Her efforts paid off in improved communications and relationships with local schools and AAUW California.

Karelle previously served as a chair for Neighbors Helping Neighbors, and currently is instrumental in providing Front Door Communities with needed items through NHN. She has also been a valuable member of the Public Policy Committee.

On behalf of our branch, thank you Karelle for all your accomplishments and representation of our mission in the community.

AAUW San Jose Programs for 2025–2026

(Preliminary–Subject to Change)

By the [Program Development/Planning Committee](#)

Save the dates, and volunteer with our program team.

- **October 4, 2025**, 9:30 am-noon, Fall Gathering. Willow Glen United Methodist Church/Kohlstedt Hall. Event Organizer: Membership Committee
- **November 8, 2025**, 10 am-noon, Gail Pellerin, D28 State Assemblymember. Willow Glen United Methodist Church/Kohlstedt Hall. Event Organizer: Program Development Committee (PDC)
- **December 6, 2025**, 12:30-2:30 pm, Holiday celebration. Willow Glen United Methodist Church/Kohlstedt Hall. Event Organizer: Diane Trombetta/PDC
- **January 17, 2026**, 1 pm, Financial Planning with Russell Malley. Willow Glen United Methodist Church/Kohlstedt Hall. Event Organizer: PDC
- **February 21, 2026**, 10 am-noon, Michael Mulcahy D6 Councilmember Heart-Healthy Month. Willow Glen United Methodist Church/Kohlstedt Hall. Event Organizer: PDC
- **March 21, 2026**, 1-3 pm, SJSU Women's Group Panel led by Tanya Bakru. Willow Glen United Methodist Church/Kohlstedt Hall. Event Organizer: Diane Trombetta
- **April 11, 2026**, 1-3 pm Annual Meeting Event Organizer President Tynka Dees/PDC. Place TBD
- **May 16, 2026**, 1:30-3 pm (doors open at 1 pm), San Jose Mayor Matt Mahan. Willow Glen United Methodist Church/Kohlstedt Hall. Event Organizer: PDC

Recent Gatherings

**Celebrating Our 2025
Local Scholarship Winners
Reception Attendance Breaks Records**

By the Local Scholarship Program Event Team

One sunny and breezy Saturday morning in July, Branch members welcomed more than 20 of this year's Local Scholarship winners along with past winners, family and friends. Margaret Bard, the event leader, said, "I was thrilled with the turn out. It was tremendous fun to hear what our current, and especially, our past winners are doing."



Recipients shared their appreciation for the funding and described how it would support their academic journeys. Several students emphasized how our awards will enable them to work fewer hours and to devote more time to their studies.

A few scholarship recipients unable to attend also sent messages of appreciation. Carly Casanova Moore, scholarship recipient in 2024 and 2025, is completing an internship in Barcelona. She sent us this [brief video](#), which will show you that she's putting her AAUW SJ scholarship to good use!

Congratulations and thank you to everyone who volunteered and donated to this year's Local Scholarship project. Access to college is becoming increasingly expensive. Thank you, AAUW SJ members, for helping women reach their goal of higher education and setting them up for brighter futures.

Branch News and Innovation

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Tynka Dees



It's the beginning of a new Branch year. We have fabulous programs planned for this year! Our first is September 20 with our AAUW California State President and I hope to see you there. I also hope to see you at Fall Gathering on October 4. It's a chance to greet old friends and make some new ones, see the tables for Interest Groups, and hear from some of our Local Scholarship recipients and Tech Trekkers.

At least annually the Branch president is tasked with reminding everyone of the Branch "Use of Name" Policies. It is important to remember these when planning a program or event:

1. The policies and procedures of AAUW shall be binding on all members engaged in AAUW activities. No member shall use the name of AAUW to oppose such policies or programs.
2. The name and logo of AAUW may be used only by members and affiliates (as defined in the membership section of the bylaws) only according to policies and procedures established by the AAUW Board of Directors. Others may do so only according to written licenses.
3. These bylaws shall not abridge the freedom of speech of any AAUW member to voice an opinion in the member's own name.

If you are interested in getting involved in something right away email the head of the committee or the interest group chair. You do not have to be on the Board to be involved and help. We have many volunteer opportunities and we want to have all our members be as involved as they want to be. Make friends immediately and help as much as you can and are willing. If you are having trouble figuring it out, contact me at president@aauwsanjose.org. I hope this is a wonderful year for each one of you!

In Loving Memory

Jean Anne Luckhardt, an Association Life Member, passed away peacefully at her Willow Glen home on July 17, 2025.
We send her loves ones our deepest condolences.

IN OTHER NEWS

Gearing Up for New Fiscal Year Communications/PR ad hoc Committee

By Michele Bertolone

Our committee, led by President Tynka Dees, spent May and June developing a set of priorities, with a specific budget to match, for the FY 2025-26* to make sure nothing slows the great momentum built in year one. Here's a short summary of some of the major items on our 'to do list' for the upcoming year.



New initiatives | To Level Up Our Communication Tools

- Member Communications – Engage with the Bonfire Team to define needs. Then, design and help deploy a new enewsletter template which reflects current communication, design best practices, and Branch needs. (Launched with this new format! Troubleshooting for the next few months as needed).

- Member/Public Communications – Redesign and update Branch website to streamline messaging, visually reinforce brand, and boost usability. (Completion Target: Spring 2025)

Continuing Priorities | To Maintain Momentum for Long Term Success

- Member/Public Communications – Support event and program organizers with internal (intra-branch) and external promotions, especially of key Branch events (Fall Gathering, Holiday Party, Annual Meeting, etc.) and the monthly speaker series program.
- Support Local Scholarship 2025-26 cycle – raise funds and continue to boost student application outreach.
- Support Member Recruitment/Retainment – promote Branch accomplishments and offerings.

Want more info? Questions? Make a new communication request?

It's super simple, same as last year! Email both [Diane Trombetta](#) and [Michele Bertolone](#).

Refresh Your Memory of the Committee's 2024-25 Accomplishments

Check out two links on the 'members only' page on the Branch website: [2024 Results](#) and [2025 Q1 Report](#).

** Our paid part time staff of three is currently working under the Board approved Interim Summer Budget for FY 2025-26. The full FY budget is in review with the Finance Committee and will be considered and voted on by the Board in a meeting early this Fall. For more information on the budget process, contact Katherine Oven.*

INTEREST GROUP SNAPSHOT

Mahjong

Meets | 1PM on 2nd, 3rd, & 4th Tues. of the month at HQ

Leaders | [Shelley Powers](#)
& Marion Meyer

[More Photos](#)



Welcoming All Levels – Beginners to Advance

20+ INTEREST GROUPS TO CHOOSE FROM

Join AAUW Members for
fun, friendship and lifelong learning

- List of all Interest Groups | [Click Here](#)
- Find Meeting Leaders
Contact Information | [Via the Branch's Online Calendar](#)

The BONFIRE is looking for a Copy Editor and a new Editor. I've been doing it since 2021 and my new job at SJSU is requiring more of my time. --[Email Sonia](#) for info.

Save the Date

Fall Gathering, October 4, 2025

9:30 am to noon

Willow Glen United Methodist
Church

By Renee Sommerfeld

Mark your calendar! This year's Fall Gathering will be on Saturday, October 4, in Kohlstedt Hall at Willow Glen United Methodist Church (across the street from AAUW Headquarters). Join fellow members and invite prospective members for conversation and refreshments, to learn about what our interest groups and Community Action Projects are planning for the coming year, and to celebrate our accomplishments of the past year.



[Click Here](#) | [Full Up-to-Date Branch Calendar Online](#)

September 2025

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](#).

Tue Sep 2 10-11 am German Conversation ZOOM (RSVP [Barbara Snyder](#))

- 1-4 pm Film Fans Time to Be Determined (RSVP [Nancy Wheeler Linda Snashall](#))
- Wed Sep 3 5:30-6 pm AAUW Board Social Time ([Tynka Dees](#))
6-7:30 pm AAUW BOARD Meeting Hybrid ([Tynka Dees](#))
- Sat Sep 6 10 am-Noon Member & Prospective Members Coffee and Conversation (Membership@aauwsanjose.org)
- Sun Sep 7 9-10:30 am Weekend Walkers (RSVP [Judy Burt](#))
- Mon Sep 8 6:30- 9:30 pm Light Gourmet ([Cheryl Markman](#))
- Tue Sep 9 10-11:30 am Book Discussion AM Spider Woman's Daughter ([Nanci Eksterowicz](#))
10-11 am Conversacion Espanol ZOOM (RSVP [Barbara Snyder](#))
1-3 pm Mahjongg ([RSVP Shelley Powers](#))
6:30-8 pm Neighbors Helping Neighbors ([Bobbie Baker](#))
- Wed Sep 10 11 am-1 pm Art Appreciation (RSVP [Jan Bartolotta](#))
- Thu Sep 11 1-4 pm Bridge 2nd Thursday (RSVP [Bobbie Eckerman](#))
- Fri Sep 12 10 am-1 pm Duplicate Bridge (RSVP [Lida Kluzek](#))
- Sat Sep 13 6:30 am-6 pm Gifts for teens in parking lot packing ([Elaine Benoit](#))
6:30-9:30 pm Couples Dining (RSVP [Cheryl Markman](#))
- Sun Sep 14 9-10:30 am Weekend Walkers (RSVP [Judy Burt](#))
- Mon Sep 15 9:30-11am Exploring World Literature Hybrid (RSVP [Candace Roney](#))
1-4 pm Interbranch Council ZOOM ([Tynka Dees](#))
6:30-9 pm International Gourmet (RSVP [Jan Bartolotta](#))
- Tue Sep 16 10-11 am French Conversation ZOOM (RSVP [Barbara Snyder](#))
1-3 pm Mahjongg ([RSVP Shelley Powers](#))
3:45-5:15 pm Membership meeting (Membership@aauwsanjose.org)
- Wed Sep 17 1:30-3 pm Program Planning (RSVP [Ruth Dusan](#))
7-8:30 pm Public Policy ([Susan Karlins](#))
- Thu Sep 18 6:30-8 pm Mystery Lovers ([Sharon Shephard](#))
- Fri Sep 19 10 am-1 pm Bridge (RSVP [Lida Kluzek](#))
- Sat Sep 20 6:30 am-6 pm Gifts for teens in parking lot packing ([Elaine Benoit](#))
1:30-3 pm Program CA State President Charlene Goehring Willow Glen United Methodist Church 1420 Newport Ave. ([RSVP Ruth Dusan](#))
- Sun Sep 21 9-10:30 am Weekend Walkers (RSVP [Judy Burt](#))
- Mon Sep 22 11 am-12:30 pm Building and Properties Committee ([Linda Snashall](#))
- Tue Sep 23 10-11 am Italian Conversation ZOOM (RSVP [Barbara Snyder](#))
1-4 pm Bridge 4th Tuesday (RSVP [Bobbie Eckerman](#))
1-3 pm Mahjongg ([RSVP Shelley Powers](#))
7-8:30 pm Great Decisions PM ZOOM ([Sharon Shephard](#))
- Wed Sep 24 12:30-1:30 pm Lunch Bunch (RSVP [Cheryl Markman Sueann Snow](#))
- Fri Sep 26 1:30-3 pm Local Scholarship ([Beth Redmond](#))

Sun Sep 28 9-10:30 am Weekend Walkers (RSVP [Judy Burt](#))

Tue Sep 30 1-3 pm Mahjongg ([RSVP Shelley Powers](#))



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BONFIRE Newsletter

E: BONFIREeditor@aauwsanjose.org

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San Jose, CA 95125

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Sonia Wright, Editor

Vacant, Copy Editor

Tynka Dees, Calendar Editor

Jan Giroux & Cheryl Markman, Proofreading

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