

## **HERSTORY OF NACOGDOCHES, TEXAS BRANCH AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF UNIVERSITY WOMEN**

The Nacogdoches Branch of AAUW was founded in 1930 soon after the beginning of Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches. During the early years, the members were either housewives or teachers in the public schools or at the University.

Betty Burr, current member, served as Branch President in 1953 and was elected to serve again in 2003. She remembers that in the beginning of her involvement, AAUW had a policy of approving a University before its graduates were eligible for membership. Universities were measured by opportunities available to women on their campuses. Betty remembers that the Branch met at night in members' homes for the convenience of the teachers and so that members' husbands could baby sit. During this period, very few married members worked unless they were teachers.

Demographics of the Branch have significantly changed; today we find that the 60 members of the Nacogdoches Branch are culturally and professionally very diverse. Most of the members work – many holding administrative positions in and out of academia.

In 1985, the Branch began its annual Woman of the Year Awards banquet. This event has grown into a major community celebration. A woman who has made significant contributions to the community is chosen as the main honoree. In addition, five or six special category awards are given to women who excel in specific areas of business, medical services, educational activities, community service, and volunteerism. One recipient of this award was Sue Kennedy, County Judge, who expertly handled the crisis following the explosion of the Columbia space shuttle over Nacogdoches County in 2003. Keynote speakers for these events have included Ann Richards, governor of Texas; Laura Bush, wife of governor of Texas; Kay Bailey Hutchinson, U. S. Senator; Capt. Ann Duke, USAF, Thunderbird Executive Officer. Other outstanding speakers were Dr. Nadine Barlow, Planetary Geoscientist, NASA; Susan Combs, TX Commissioner of Agriculture; Carole Keeton-Rylander, TX Comptroller; Mary Scott Nabers, TX Employment Commission; Sarah Weddington, Roe vs. Wade Attorney. In recent years the grand ballroom on the SFA campus has been filled for this event.

A successful effort which the Branch has relished is that of 11 years of "Expanding Your Horizons" career conference for girls. Members spend the entire year planning for a one-day event for girls grades six through eight, which is designed to expose them to many career options, especially those involving math, science and technology. Sessions are led by successful women in various careers. Workshops include athletic training, banking, biotechnology, chemistry, computer technology, dentistry, finance, geophysical science, health care, medicine, newspaper publishing, pharmacy, physical therapy, theatre, veterinary medicine, visual arts, zoo management. Attendance each year has averaged 300 with the highest being 434 girls. Community backing in forms of door prizes and

financial assistance has been gratifying. University officials have made all necessary facilities available for this special day.

An able group of assistants for EYH has come from the SFASU/AAUW student affiliates. The group was formed in 1993 and has become a strong presence on campus. The 2004-05 membership has helped with voter mobilization, instituted the first Walk for Cure, and offered a seminar on self-esteem for women students. Initially, the organization got a strong start because branch members sponsored a student by paying the \$15 dues. The roster includes women of color, nontraditional-age students and an occasion male. The group has been very effective in raising awareness of AAUW on the SFA campus. A current Branch member, Kathy McGough, joined AAUW as a student affiliate in 1994. After graduation, she joined the branch and very successfully chaired the Woman of the Year banquet for several years. The student affiliate organization had thus developed for the branch a strong leader. A problem always faced by a Student Satellite group is that of turnover. Just as the members become an adhesive group, the school year ends. Despite this drawback, the group has flourished for eleven years. Dr. Donnya Stephens and Dr. Lynnette Solomon were instrumental in organizing the affiliates. Other faculty advisors have been Lucy Stringer and Dr. Karen Jenlink.

Another ongoing project of the Branch has been that of providing magazines and books for nursing homes, hospitals, clinics, libraries, and senior citizens. A faithful member, Wyomie Love, has almost single-handedly gathered magazines at each branch meeting, covered mailing labels with an AAUW sticker, and delivered them to facilities in the East Texas Area. Between October, 2002 and November, 2004, 2822 magazines and 150 books have been distributed.

Not only are members of the branch active in many other local organizations, the Nacogdoches Branch has had a number of members serve on the AAUW/Texas Board. Irene Armsworth, Jo Beth Mace, Lucy Stringer, Donna Stephens, and Lynnette Solomon have served terms at the state level. Donna Stephens and Lynnette Solomon have also served at Association level positions.

For twenty years, one of the major fund raisers for fellowships has been the silent auction at the December branch meeting. This involves members contributing crafts, baked goods, and other items to be auctioned in a fun-filled competition for the most cherished choices.

Significantly, the Nacogdoches branch has sponsored political forums during major election years. Dr. Carolyn Mitchell served as the moderator of these lively discussions between opposing candidates.

For fun, branch refreshments have been planned around an international theme. At each meeting the cuisine of a different country is served. On occasion, committee members have found themselves expanding new horizons by preparing dishes which fit the evening's theme.

For almost 75 years, the Nacogdoches Branch of AAUW has served as a training ground for women. Not only are there strong leaders in the branch but in many other facets of community activities. The Branch has been strongly supported and influenced by the presence of Stephen F. Austin State University which is an institutional member of the Association.