

*The American Association of University Women*

*The* **TORCH**

*December, 2024*

*Vol. 58, No. 6*

*AAUW. Vol. 63, No. 4  
Peggy Drennan Cihl, Editor.*



## **PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE FOR DECEMBER**

Greetings Members,

First, I want to thank Tam Pigott for her excellent presentation about the economic impact of tourism at our November meeting. It was great to hear about what her department is doing to bring tourism back to Lee County (and what some of the roadblocks are). Lakes Library was a wonderful host for the meeting and a great opportunity to try a different venue.

In December, we are back at The Landings for our annual fundraising gala. We have a great time planned with bingo, raffle, and a silent auction. The team has done a great job pulling everything together, and tickets are going fast. If you haven't reserved your spot, please do that. All the money raised supports our scholarships. I hope to see you there!

You'll notice a new look on the branch website (<https://fmhc-fl.aauw.net>). National has updated the template for all the branches, so we've refreshed the content as well. One of the changes you'll see is a link to the current edition of the Torch right in the top navigation so you can always find the latest news.

Coming up in March, we elect our new officers for the coming year. We have some current vacancies as well. If you are interested in serving on the board, please reach out to me, Bonnie Ryan, or Jemetta Hunt. Available positions include Ways & Means, Diversity, and President-Elect. There are also a variety of committees that need additional help.

I wish you and yours a happy holiday season and a peaceful (and storm-free) new year.

Lisa Crotty, Branch President

# AAUW

## BINGO FUNDRAISER

*Supporting Scholarships for Women*

**Tuesday, December 10th**

Doors Open at 4:30 PM

**Reserve your table today!**

[aauwleecounty@gmail.com](mailto:aauwleecounty@gmail.com)



Tables and tickets are going fast for our annual

## Bingo Gala Fundraiser!

You and your guests will enjoy five rounds of bingo, a delicious buffet dinner, and chances to win fabulous prizes with our silent auction, raffle prizes, and live auction! Need a gift for the holidays? Want to take a staycation with a loved one? Join us for an entertaining evening all in support of our scholarship and educational award funds for women! To reserve your tickets, email [aauwleecounty@gmail.com](mailto:aauwleecounty@gmail.com). Questions about the event? Do you have a silent auction item to donate? Call Astoria Aviles at 928-499-2981.



*Supporting Scholarships for Women*

### HONORING WOMEN IN HISTORY: BINGO GALA TABLE THEMES



**Clara Barton**  
(1821 - 1912),  
nurse, founder of  
the American Red  
Cross.



**Maria Beasley**  
(1836 - 1913),  
entrepreneur and  
inventor.



**Ruth Bader  
Ginsburg**  
(1933 - 2020)  
justice on the  
Supreme Court.



**Shirley Chisholm**  
(1924- 2005) first  
black woman to  
be elected to  
Congress.



**Patsy Mink**  
(1927-2002) first  
Asian-American  
woman elected to  
the U.S. House of  
Representatives.



**Sally Ride**  
(1951-2012)  
physicist, first  
American woman  
in space.



**Jennifer Doudna**  
(1964) biochemist  
who pioneered  
work in CRISPR  
gene editing.



**Kamala Harris**  
(1964) first  
female Vice  
President of  
the U.S.



**Grace Hopper**  
(1906 - 1992)  
computer  
scientist,  
mathematician,  
Navy rear admiral.



**Hedy Lamarr**  
(1914 - 2000)  
actress and  
inventor.



**Ellen Swallow Richard &  
Marion Talbot** (1881)  
Founders of AAUW.



**Elizabeth Warren**  
(1949) senator from  
Massachusetts.

To reserve your table or ticket, email  
[aauwleecounty@gmail.com](mailto:aauwleecounty@gmail.com)

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 10TH**  
DOORS OPEN AT 4:30 PM  
THE LANDINGS HELM CLUB, MAIN DECK

**BUFFET DINNER | BINGO GAMES |  
SILENT AUCTION & MORE!**



## CELEBRATING *GEMS*

### Scholarship Co-Chairs: Cheryl Tromley and Devera Graf

First, I we would like to give a shout out to two of our generous members who recently made contributions to our scholarships: Cathy Jones and Jane Lukowicz. It is through their, and other members', generosity that we are able to support our scholarships and programs like GEMS.

Many of you are familiar with GEMS (Girls in Engineering, Math, and Science), one of our STEM scholarships. It is a hands-on science education program for regional middle school girls. held at the Whitaker Center on the FGCU campus. One of its unique features is that, while it is led by professionals, undergraduates serve as facilitators and role-models.

The first GEMS program of the academic year was held on Saturday, November 16. The September session was cancelled because of hurricanes Ian and Helene. So, needless to say, there was a full group of students who were excited to be there, and the staff was happy to welcome these middle school students back to campus. The students were split into two groups, had the opportunity to explore two areas of study, and go home with two "hands-on" projects. Two instructors led the process in adjoining rooms. After the first session finished, the students switched rooms and worked on the other topic.

The first topic was Circuit Building. In this session, the students learned about resistors, currents, and voltage. After some initial instruction, students worked in pairs with a "bread board" to find a way to complete a circuit and make a bulb light up. After that, students worked on their own light-up greeting cards to take home.





The second session was Fossil Exploration. Students worked with college students to examine and identify fossils. They also had a chance to make rubbings of fossils in rocks supplied by the instructor.



This was followed by a Fossil Dig where each student received a block of plaster in which a fossil had been buried. They were very involved in digging into the block to find their unique fossil.

In addition, each student received a paperback book entitled *Ichthyosaurus and Little Mary Anning*, an account of the 12- year-old girl who discovered the first Ichthyosaurus skeleton.



What a great day for this group of Middle School students, learning scientific concepts in a fun way! Thank you for helping to make this possible!!!!



**Scholarship Co-Chairs:  
Cheryl Tromley and Devera Graf**

We want to **THANK YOU** for your incredible generosity. Because of that generosity, we can increase our support for several of our established scholarships and fund some exciting additions to our STEM awards.

***AAUW FGCU and FSW Endowed Scholarships:*** These scholarships were established in 2000. They award scholarships to female students who reside in the five-county (Lee, Collier, Charlotte, Glades, Hendry) area, with financial need, pursuing undergraduate degrees at FGCU and FSW respectively. The amount awarded is a percentage of the endowments and is approximately \$2,000.

***AAUW Star Bright Scholarships:*** Originally established in 2005, by Book Club 3, to provide branch members with the opportunity to make donations honoring friends and commemorating special events. There are now *two* Star Bright Scholarships, and they are a budgeted item that awards scholarships to female students attending the second semester at Cape Coral Technical College and Fort Myers Technical College.

We were able to increase the funding of these life-changing scholarships to \$2,000 each.

***AAUW Lee County High School Scholarships:*** Established in 2011 in memory

of Jane Wagner, a three-term branch president. Two scholarships are awarded to graduating female students (from two different schools) with financial need. The scholars are chosen by the schools' counselors and the scholarships are paid to the colleges of the recipients' choice. We were able to raise these awards to \$2,000 each.

***AAUW STEM Awards (High-School):*** Established in 2001 to encourage high school girls in STEM fields, it awards two entrants in the Thomas Alva Edison & Kiwanis Regional Science and Engineering Fair. Recipients must present a unique, quality topic, and conduct their own research. Judging is done by members of the Scholarship Committee. The *AAUW Thomas Edison and Kiwanis Regional Science & Engineering Fair Award* and *Emerging Research Scholar Award* will now each provide a \$500 prize.

***AAUW STEM Awards (Middle-School):*** Many of you know that girls often lose interest in STEM in middle-school, so this is an important time to support that interest. As you know we contribute annually to ***Girls in Engineering, Math, and Science (GEMS)*** program. Past ***Torch*** articles have highlighted this hands-on program dedicated to science education for regional middle-school students. The day-long programs, in a girls-only environment, are presented by enthusiastic professionals with undergraduates participating as facilitators and role models. This year we can increase the amount of our contribution to \$1,500. In addition, for this year, we are going to be able to support young women's interest in STEM by providing awards to middle-school girls participating in the *Junior Division of Thomas Edison Festival of Light Regional Inventors Fair*. There will be three *Regional Inventors Fairs*. There will be three \$200 awards—one each in grades six, seven and eight.

***We appreciate your support and donations!***



## WAYS TO BUILD OUR SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS

Our club's mission is to  
**PROVIDE SCHOLARSHIPS TO DESERVING  
WOMEN**

so they can further their education. We have three major methods of funding our scholarships.

1. Contribute to a particular scholarship
2. Sponsor a scholarship
3. Support our Bingo Gala fundraiser in December. Ways you can do this are described on the following pages.

Our AAUW Board approved an exciting new opportunity for our members to support our scholarships. Begun in our 2024/2025 fiscal year, anyone is now able to sponsor and name a scholarship *“in honor of”* someone.

For example, Cheryl Tromley is funding the Fort Myers Technical College Star Bright Scholarship and is naming it “ The Violet Roberts FMTC Star Bright Scholarship” in honor of her grandmother. You can do this as an individual or partner with others.

This offer applies to the following scholarships:

- AAUW Star Bright Scholarship (Cape Coral Technical College): \$1,000 per year.
- AAUW Lee County High School Scholarships: 2 @ \$1,500 per year.
- AAUW Thomas Edison and Kiwanis Regional Science & Engineering Fair Award: \$300 per year.
- AAUW Thomas Edison and Kiwanis Regional Science & Engineering Fair Emerging Research Scholar Award: \$500 per year.

This opportunity does not change any of our normal donation processes. All opportunities for donating will remain the same, and this is just an **additional way** to contribute to our scholarships and an **additional way** to honor someone. The normal channels will still be available.

In addition, if anyone wants to donate *“in honor of...”* but does not want to commit to a sponsorship, as has always been the case, they may elect to target that donation to a specific scholarship or the scholarship fund. If the latter, the Scholarship Committee and/or Chairs will allocate it where the need is greatest.

AAUW



*We have two book clubs.  
Each welcomes new members*

**Cover Girls** is meeting in members' homes. Zoom will be available for those who are out of town or unable to otherwise attend. The meeting time is generally the second Wednesday of each month from 1 pm to 3 pm.

Cover Girls will be meeting for a luncheon in December. The restaurant to be determined. Contact Carol Fuechsel at [cbfuechsel@gmail.com](mailto:cbfuechsel@gmail.com) for more information

New members are welcome.

For more information contact Carol Fuechsel at [cbfuechsel@gmail.com](mailto:cbfuechsel@gmail.com)

### **Page Turners' Book Club**

We welcome new members.

We haven't met since July and don't anticipate a meeting until 2025.

If interested, contact Lois Benedetto, [benedetl@georgetown.edu](mailto:benedetl@georgetown.edu)

### **Woman of Interest**



Aids Awareness Day is  
December 1 each year.



### **Elizabeth Taylor**

Compelled by radical compassion and bolstered by moral courage, Elizabeth Taylor became the *first globally recognized celebrity HIV and AIDS activist*. As ignorance, fear, and prejudice fueled the emerging HIV/AIDS epidemic, Elizabeth simply could not remain quiet. She used her massive celebrity platform to speak truth to power, exposing the injustice of society's response to the disease. Her unyielding conviction and passion raised hundreds of millions of dollars, changed the hearts and minds of a generation, and saved countless lives.

<https://elizabethayloraidfoundation.org/story/>





AAUW Fort Myers/Lee County  
P.O. Box 2115

Fort Myers, FL 33902-2115

<https://fmlc-fl.aauw.net>

Our local e-mail address:

[aauwleecounty@gmail.com](mailto:aauwleecounty@gmail.com)

Our National Organization

<https://www.aauw.org>

Facebook, linked from the website and the direct link:

<https://www.facebook.com/AAUW-Fort-Myers-Lee-County-Branch-107794550957375>

## 2024-2025 MEETING DATES and TORCH PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

SEND ARTICLES TO [peggycihi@comcast.net](mailto:peggycihi@comcast.net)

Meeting Date	Deadline for Articles	Mail Torch Date
September 21, 2024	August 21, 2024	September 9, 2024
October 19, 2024	September 25, 2024	October 9, 2024
November 16, 2024	October 21, 2024	November 3, 2024
*Bingo Dinner December 10	November 18, 2024	November 26, 2024
January 18, 2025	December 13, 2024	January 8, 2025
February 15, 2025	January 22, 2025	February 5, 2025
March 15, 2025	February 19, 2025	March 5, 2025
*April 12, 2025	March 19, 2025	April 2, 2025
May 17, 2025	April 23, 2025	May 7, 2025

\*Unusual Date

## PUBLIC POLICY

**AAUW Fort Myers** has a new website homepage <https://fmlc-fl.aauw.net> Find the latest news from National, including links to the seminars for the rest of the year and a link to the replay of *Securing the Future: A Post-Election Conversation on Women's Economic Security*. Gain insights on what's ahead under the new administration and the 119th Congress. Our policy chair Suzan Harden will also provide a recap of the session at our January meeting.

## PUBLIC POLICY

### TORCH UPDATE FOR DECEMBER, 2024

#### **AAUW FL Public Policy Forum**

AAUW FL's most recent Public Policy Forum was presented on Thursday, November 14. Patricia A. Roos, former sociology professor at Rutgers University, lost her only son Alex to the effects of drug addiction and mental health issues when he was just 25. Alex's problems related to addictive behavior began when he was only 12, with hospitalization for anorexia nervosa, triggered by anxiety and depression. Experimentation with, and addiction to, drugs and alcohol followed close behind. His parents were startled and disappointed when he got into trouble in college for violating the drug use policy and received no consequences. When shortly after graduating from college he was arrested on a DUI and faced adult consequences, he was shocked and scared. Numerous treatment options were tried, across several states. Ultimately, Alex took his own life at 25 because, in his own words, he "could no longer cope with my life." He told his parents he loved them.

The bulk of Patricia's work had been with inequality, gender, and work. After Alex's death, she turned to the study of the causes and treatments for addiction. She learned that the ineffectiveness of the treatment options Alex tried were just as ineffective for many other people. She began to study the Harm Reduction philosophy of treatment, which has been promoted by the Biden/Harris Administration. Harm Reduction is a practical and transformative approach that incorporates community-driven public health strategies — including prevention, risk reduction, and health promotion — to empower people who use drugs (and their families) with the choice to live healthy, self-directed, and purpose-filled lives. Harm reduction centers the lived and living experience of people who use drugs, especially those in underserved communities, in these strategies and the practices that flow from them.

Ms. Roos told her story in her book, SURVIVING ALEX: A MOTHER'S STORY OF LOVE, LOSS, AND ADDICTION. To watch the hour-long AAUW-FL presentation, go to <https://vimeo.com/1030977522>.

Note: As part of Gov. DeSantis's reorganization of higher education in Florida, Sociology classes can no longer be used to fulfill core course requirements.

(Update continued next page)

## PUBLIC POLICY

(Continued)

### **SECURING THE FUTURE: A POST-ELECTION CONVERSATION ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY**

Meghan Kissell, AAUW Senior Director, Policy & Member Advocacy, moderated this discussion held on Tuesday, November 19. Panelists were Gloria Blackwell, Chief Executive Officer of AAUW; Heather M. Boushey, Ph.D., Economist and Co-Founder, Washington Center for Equitable Growth (and an AAUW American Fellow in 1997-98); and Jamila Taylor, Ph.D., President & CEO, Institute for Women's Policy Research.

The purpose of this discussion was to assure AAUW members that AAUW will continue its advocacy for economic issues relating to women such as,

- Encouraging President Biden to publish the ERA to the U.S. Constitution before he leaves office in January.
- Monitoring the outcomes if the Department of Education is dissolved to assure women still have equal educational opportunities.
- Continuing its work to correct the Gender Pay Gap, which currently indicates a woman earns \$.83 for every \$1 a man earns. Combined with the motherhood penalty, a consequence of the Gender Pay Gap is that retired women have 70% of the retirement income men have.
- Urging Congress to extend the Child Tax Credit.
- Pushing for the recognition of immigration as an economic issue as well as a moral/ethical issue and developing reasonable policies.
- Advocating for more affordable health care for all and the full range of reproductive rights for women.
- Coaching young women to raise their voices in hostile environments.

AAUW will continue its partnerships with various organizations, such as the Institute for Women's Policy Research and the Washington Center for Equitable Growth and will keep us updated on issues as they arise. Keep an eye out for emails from Gloria Blackwell and Meghan Kissell, as they contain important information we should know.

## PUBLIC POLICY

AAUW Florida's Public Policy Education Forums were such a success last year, another year of discussions has been developed for 24/25. Here is the list of discussions:

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>	<b>Presenter</b>
Thurs., Jan. 9	Black Girls in Florida Schools	Bayliss Fiddiman National Women's Law Center
Thurs., Feb. 13	Florida Legislative Preview	Dr. Pat DeWitt, AAUW FL Co-Public Policy Director
Thurs., Mar. 6	Pay Gap, Caregiving, and Economic Security	Dr. Mary Gatta, AAUW FL Co-Public Policy Director Director, Research and Public Policy, National Association of Colleges and Employers
Thurs., Apr. 3	Gender and Race Equity in STEM	Amanda Koontz, Professor University of Central Florida

All sessions meet at 6 p.m. via Zoom. There is no cost. For more information about each topic, go to <https://aauw-fl.aauw.net/public-policy-issue-forums/>. You will see there is a reservation link for each topic, and you will need to make a reservation for each topic. Then you will receive a Zoom link for the session.

If you have any questions about these sessions, contact Suzan Harden. [skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:skh062653@gmail.com)

## Tools for Advocacy

As you completed your membership form for the 24-25 program year, you saw Tools for Advocacy listed as an interest group. The purpose of this group is to help interested members develop techniques for advocating with legislators. Contact Suzan Harden if you would like more information. Everyone is welcome!

[skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:skh062653@gmail.com)

## INTEREST GROUPS/COORDINATORS

### BOOK GROUPS

Carol Fuechsel, Coordinator  
[cbfuechsel@gmail.com](mailto:cbfuechsel@gmail.com)

Book Club Meets  
Cover Girls 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday, 1 PM  
Page Turners 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday, 12:45 PM

**(The book clubs accept new members.  
If interested, please contact Carol Fuechsel.)**

### BRIDGE

Lois McDougall, Coordinator  
[lois.mcdougall@yahoo.com](mailto:lois.mcdougall@yahoo.com)

### HAND & FOOT

Carolyn Nance, Coordinator  
Meets –1<sup>st</sup> Monday each month  
[cnance5240@gmail.com](mailto:cnance5240@gmail.com)

### MAHJONGG

Carolyn Nance, Coordinator  
Meets –3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday each month  
[cnance5240@gmail.com](mailto:cnance5240@gmail.com)

### GREAT DECISIONS

Suzan Harden, Coordinator  
Meets 1<sup>st</sup> Friday each month.  
[skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:skh062653@gmail.com)

### GUIDED NATURE EXCURSIONS

Jemetta Hunt, Coordinator  
[jemetta@aol.com](mailto:jemetta@aol.com)  
Cathy Tucker, Master Naturalist  
[cptucker@embarqmail.com](mailto:cptucker@embarqmail.com)

### TOOLS FOR ADVOCACY

Suzan Harden Coordinator  
[Skh062653@gmail.com](mailto:Skh062653@gmail.com)

New Interest Groups Are Welcome

Contact: Jemetta Hunt  
[jemetta@aol.com](mailto:jemetta@aol.com)

## AAUW Fort Myers/Lee County Branch, Inc. 2024-2025 Officers

### *Elected – Executive Board*

President – Lisa Crotty  
Past President – Bonnie Ryan  
President Elect –  
Open

Vice President of Programs –  
Jill Jennings

Vice President of Membership –  
Jemetta Hunt, Kathleen Haibach  
Secretary –Patricia Crowe  
Treasurer – Mary Kellner and  
Nancy Schoenstein

### *Appointed Officers – Board Members*

Public Policy – Suzan Harden  
Co-Chairs of Scholarship –  
Cheryl Tromley and Devera Graf  
Communications (Torch/Website/Facebook)  
Peggy Drennan Cihl, Astoria Aviles  
Ways and Means –Open

### *Standing Committees*

Records Retention – Executive Board  
Science Fair - Cathy Tucker  
Diversity Officer - Lisa Crotty  
Strategic Planning—  
Kathleen Haibach and Tamara Pigott

### *Ancillary Positions*

Reservations – Janet George and  
Bonnie Ryan  
Sunshine – Margot Flinn  
Greeters – Board Members  
Torch Proofreaders: Jill Jennings,  
Lisa Crotty and Carolyn Nance  
Torch Circulation –  
Jemetta Hunt (US Mail)  
Lisa Crotty (E-mail)



**AAUW American Association of University Women**

Fort Myers / Lee County (FL) Branch Inc.

PO Box 2115  
Fort Myers, FL 33902-2115

**Donate Today to help the Fort Myers Branch Advance Equity for Women**

**Use my Gift for:** \_\_\_ **Operating Expenses** \_\_\_ **Unrestricted** \_\_\_ **Scholarships\*** \_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: (Mobile) \_\_\_\_\_ (Home) \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Donation Amount** \_\_\_ **\$25** \_\_\_ **\$50** \_\_\_ **\$100** or **Other Amount \$** \_\_\_\_\_

**Is the gift in honor or memory of someone? If so please complete the following:**

**In Memory of** \_\_\_\_\_

**In Honor of** \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information for person honored or family of person remembered:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Street Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City, State & Zip:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** Should you want to specify a specific Branch scholarship or award please name below: (See list under: <https://fmlc-fl.aauw.net> under tab Philanthropy; Scholarships, Awards  
Scholarship/ Award: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to AAUW Fort Myers / Lee County, Inc. and mail to:  
AAUW – ATTN: Treasurer, PO Box 2115, Fort Myers, FL 33901- 2115**

AAUW Fort Myers/Lee Co FL is a 501 (c) 3 not for profit organization and gifts may be tax deductible to the extent allowed by the law.

A COPY OF THE OFFICIAL REGISTRATION AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION MAY BE OBTAINED FROM THE DIVISION OF CONSUMER SERVICES BY CALLING TOLL-FREE (800-435-7352) WITHIN THE STATE OR [www.800helpfla.com](http://www.800helpfla.com). REGISTRATION DOES NOT IMPLY ENDORSEMENT, APPROVAL, OR RECOMMENDATION BY THE STATE.” CH39730



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