

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

In the year of which Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump running for the "Presidency of the United States of America," AAUW of Alabama is "Raising Our Voices". Each branch/organization is committed to AAUW's mission to advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research. Our AAUW Vision is to empower all women and girls to reach their highest potential. As in the past, with Ready-2-Run, Tech Trek, National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (NCCWSL), Younger Women's Task Force, Voter Education Drives, our efforts are untiring. We are managing to galvanize the power of our vote. "Every Voice Matters" in our organization. Each Year we like to take stock of where we've been, where we are, and where we are going as an organization. With almost half 2016 behind us, we are happy to report that the Leadership Team for 2016-2017 recently completed our planning journey together and have several group projects ranging from increasing membership through advocacy to fundraising. We owe much of our success to you our members and supporters. We would



also like to take a moment to thank everyone for their support of our programs

and events. We value diversity, equal access and opportunity for all whether its issues involving healthcare, pay equity, quality of education, social, or political advancement. AAUW remains strong at our national office, state, and branches. AAUW of Alabama women and men are devoted and spend endless hours of efforts to empower young women and girls. Join us in support of continuing our Mission by actively participating in "Branch Leadership Training sessions, workshops, and/or webinars. I would love to hear from you: leevonesfisher@gmail.com or call 251-457-6768 office.

Leevones G. Fisher, President
AAUW of Alabama

SAVE THE DATE

JANUARY 7, 2017
STATE BOARD MEETING
ATHENS STATE
UNIVERSITY

MORE INFORMATION TO
FOLLOW

Tech Trek's third outing widens horizons, boosts confidence of middle school girls

AUG 10, 2016 | written by Diana LaChance, UAH

Tech Trek's third outing at The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH) drew an all-time high of 65 rising eighth-grade girls from 39 schools across 17 Alabama counties. The weeklong residential camp, an American Association of University Women (AAUW) program, was held on the UAH campus from June 12-18 and featured intensive hands-on experiments and activities. All were designed to promote campers' interest in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, offering a targeted response to research showing that girls often take themselves out of the STEM talent pool while in middle school.

"We had an amazing week," says Camp Director Dr. Rhonda Gaede, an associate professor of electrical and computer engineering at UAH. "The girls did great work in their core classes and in the creative presentations they made about STEM women pioneers at the camp's closing. Perhaps more important, many new friendships took root and flowered."

This year's itinerary included courses on app development, cybersecurity, energy, and robotics; workshops on water filtration, electroplating, genomics, and sound waves; and field trips to the U.S. Space & Rocket Center, Teledyne, PPG Aerospace, and Adtran, who served as host of the camp's annual Professional Women's Night event.

For the majority of campers, however, the biggest takeaway was less educational than it was inspirational. That's because the girls received valuable encouragement, both to pursue their passion for the STEM fields and to persevere in spite of barriers - a sentiment that was reflected in much of the feedback they provided:

"I learned that it is okay to have bumps in the road. Bumps in the road are expected; don't let them slow you down."

Before Tech Trek, I was surrounded by people who didn't understand my personality and my goals. After Tech Trek, I know that I am not alone and that there are people just like me striving toward challenges most people aren't willing to take."

"Tech Trek was an exciting learning experience. It not only widened my horizons, but also gave me a sneak peek at fut
"Attending Tech Trek taught me that there are many obstacles ahead, but if you are determined and stay focused you can overcome them and be successful."

"Tech Trek made me feel more confident in myself, like I could do anything."

The experience was just as meaningful for those who served as volunteers. "It was an unexpected breath of fresh air at the end of a school year, during a typical month of vacation," says Shannon McClain, a science teacher at Bridgeport Middle School in Jackson County who taught a core course in robotics. "The young ladies were so full of life and excited about learning experiences. I especially admired their acceptance of challenges and their willingness to problem solve with other team members and celebrate each other's success while in a competition format."

As in the past, the camp's cost per person was kept to a modest \$50 thanks to the support of national sponsors, including AAUW, Verizon, Lockheed Martin, and Symantec. Additional support is provided at the local level from PPG Aerospace, UAH's College of Engineering, AAUW-Huntsville, Jacobs

Engineering, Adtran, PeopleTec, Women in Defense, UAH's College of Science, Dr. N. Jan Davis, Ms. Ruth Jurenko, and Ms. Eleanor Lienau.

Planning is already in the works for next year's fourth-annual Tech Trek - a process that has become easier with every successive year thanks to "the camaraderie between the members of the planning committee" and "the fellowship between the counselors, the teachers, the setup/cleanup team, and the campers themselves," says Dr. Gaede. "We've all come away strengthened and renewed, determined to 'Fall Forward,' in accordance with this year's camp motto."

Submitted by Cindi Branham, AAUW AL STEM Chair, Huntsville Branch STEM Chair

[Click on the photo to go to the news release.](#)

Photo Caption: UAH's third annual Tech Trek, a weeklong residential camp that promotes interest in the STEM fields, was attended by 65 rising eighth-grade girls from 39 schools across 17 Alabama counties.





2017 AAUW National Convention

June 14 - June 17

Washington, DC.

Registration Opens October 1

For more information, go to aauw.org

Applications open for grants and funding opportunities. For more information, go to <http://www.aauw.org/what-we-do/educational-funding-and-awards/>

Voter Guides are available at <https://www.aauwaction.org/voter-education/voter-guides/>

The Mobile Branch is collaborating with the University of South Alabama to present a one-day tech workshop, Girls Exploring Mathematics and Science (GEMS) on Saturday, November 5, 2016 at the University of South Alabama.

SALARY NEGOTIATION FACILITATORS

Trained volunteers in Alabama:

- ▶ Amy Bramlett, Amanda Ingram, Paige Miller, and Angelia Kimbrell are all at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa.
- ▶ Angelia Bendolph and Diedre Graham are with the Mobile branch of AAUW.
- ▶ Audrey Salgado is with the Birmingham branch of AAUW

You can learn how to be a find a workshop, how to be a facilitator, or become a ambassadoron the AAUW website.

AAUW MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Our Vision is Simple

Empowering women and girls to achieve their highest potential.

Our Mission is Sound

Advancing equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research.

Access Important Resources

\$3.7 million annually in fellowships, grants, and awards that encourage educational and professional development, as well as resources for members facing employment challenges;

networking and mentoring opportunities for professional growth, in person and online;

relevant and timely information on issues impacting women and girls through our research, magazine, and action briefings, all available with exclusive member benefits and discounts; and

the **chance to build lifelong relationships** with like-minded women.

Join or renew today, contact Audrey L. Salgado, AAUW of Alabama Membership Vice President, audrey5190@yahoo.com, 205 249-7788 (cell/text).

In principle and in practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or class.

*Source - <http://www.aauw.org/membership/>

AAUW Birmingham branch receives grant for STEM/STEAM projects for young girls



By **Special to AL.com**

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WASHINGTON — The American Association of University Women (AAUW) awarded a 2016–17 Community Action Grant to the Birmingham Branch with members in Sylacauga, AL. The goal of Girls STEAM Project is to help seventh and eighth grade girls in Talladega County expand their horizons in STEM with an Art component.

Since 1972, AAUW Community Action Grants have funded individuals, AAUW branches and state organizations, and local, community-based nonprofit organizations to support innovative programs that promote education and equality for women and girls. Special consideration is given to projects that focus on girls' and young women's achievement in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. Projects must be collaborative, focus on women and girls, and bring together AAUW branches, schools, and local community groups and nonprofits.

The majority of the 2016–17 AAUW Community Action Grant projects will serve girls in urban populations, with the remaining 20 percent supporting rural areas.

"The purpose of the grant is to change the stereotypes and biases towards STEM while demonstrating the value of Art in this process," said Audrey L. Salgado, Project Director, who lives in Sylacauga. "This is a community project through the collaboration of AAUW Birmingham (AL) Branch and Comer Museum and Arts Center with the support of Central Alabama Community College. The grant will focus on Talladega County and City Public Schools."

Donna Rentfrow, Executive Director, Comer Museum and Arts Center, was elated to learn of the awarding of the grant. "Receiving one of 15 AAUW Community Action Grants awarded in the nation is truly an honor," she said.

"Through the AAUW Community Action Grant program, we can address local needs by awarding funds to individuals and groups with great vision," said Gloria Blackwell, AAUW vice president of fellowships, grants, and global programs. "This year, our grantees will help girls realize their full potential by exposing them to new ideas and teaching them a variety of useful skills. The girls in these programs will emerge stronger. We're glad to have a hand in this work."

For the 2016–17 academic year, AAUW awarded a total of \$3.7 million through fellowships and grants to more than 230 scholars, research projects, and programs promoting education and equity for women and girls. AAUW is one of the world's leading supporters of graduate women's education, having awarded more than \$100 million in fellowships, grants, and awards to 12,000 women from more than 140 countries since 1888, and the AAUW Fellowships and Grants program is one of the oldest and largest in the world exclusively for women.

Read AAUW's announcement about this year's awards. To find out more about this year's exceptional class of awardees, visit the online directory. To reach an award recipient, call 202.728.7602 or e-mailfellowships@aauw.org.

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The American Association of University Women (AAUW) empowers women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research. Our nonpartisan, nonprofit organization has more than 170,000 members and supporters across the United States, as well as 1,000 local branches and more than 800 college and university partners. Since AAUW's founding in 1881, our members have examined and taken positions on the fundamental issues of the day — educational, social, economic, and political. Learn more and join us at www.aauw.org.

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Weeping may tarry for
the night, but joy comes
with the morning.

Psalm 30:5 ESV



JOY COMES in the MORNING

by Christine Scheele Weerts

This Christmas, Leevones G. Fisher will reflect on the 20th anniversary of a deep, wounding grief in her family: the murder of her brother, Clint.

An Air Force Sergeant who had served two tours of duty in Vietnam, Clint had been watching his nieces and nephews just before Christmas 1996, when he was shot and killed. Leevones found his body lying on the cold hard ground in their parents' front yard, surrounded by yellow police tape. The murder was never solved.

This Christmas will also be a celebration of a stronger community with new families, homes, and opportunities, thanks to the passion and prayer Leevones brought to healing her hurt and rebuilding the community's brokenness.

Mrs. Fisher put her crime- and drug-infested community in God's hands and started to work hard with her own to turn her sorrow into joy.

Tragedy brought Leevones to the Lutheran Church. A fire destroyed the elementary school she attended, and her parents, struggling to support seven children in the Jim Crow South, didn't have transportation or money to send her across town to the only other public school for blacks. Instead, they enrolled her and her brother at the nearby Trinity Evangelical Lutheran School, Mobile, Alabama.

Tuition was 10 cents.

Since joining the Trinity family, she has served faithfully in her LWML (the largest in the LWML Gulf States District), Sunday School, and choir. She has provided school supplies to Trinity students each fall and distributed clothes and food to the needy. She started a college scholarship fund in her parents' name, which has sent several high school graduates to college. Two attended Concordia College Alabama (Selma), where she serves on the Board of Regents. Decades of joy came out of the ashes of that destroyed elementary school.

Trinity Lutheran Church and School is located in the community of Trinity Gardens, whose bucolic name reflects its beginnings as a rural area where families like hers raised chickens, hogs, cows, and crops on the edge of Wragg Swamp. However, when industry moved into the area in the 1970s, the swamp was drained and the land was developed into housing. Later, as industries moved out, residents struggled with unemployment and poverty. The malaise led to growing crime, drugs, and despair.

A high school chemistry and physics teacher, Mrs. Fisher was busy with her job and family. She failed to see how her community was changing — until that cold December day 20 years ago, when she looked at her street and the neighborhood with new eyes. "There were drug dealers dealing right in front of my face. Prostitutes were at the end of my street. There was violence, abuse, theft, and alcohol abuse.

[I will] bestow on
them a crown
of beauty instead
of ashes, the oil
of joy instead of
mourning, and a
garment of praise
instead of a spirit
of despair. They
will be called oaks
of righteousness,
a planting of the
Lord for the display
of his splendor.

Isaiah 61:3

Photos courtesy of Erik M. Lunsford/
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod



"My people were undereducated; most hadn't finished high school. We had four generations of families living in two-bedroom houses.

"We had the worst crime rate in the state of Alabama. I asked the police why they didn't patrol our streets," she said. "They told me they were scared to come to my community. It was too violent. We had 41 churches on 29 streets and the devil still had a foothold."

Leevones saw that her neighbors lived broken lives with no hope. She didn't know about community organizing, but she knew how to pray and step out in faith. She started with a march against crime to publicly demonstrate — to police and others — that they were serious about stopping violence in their community. She made sure there was someone marching from each of the 29 streets. Her pastor, Rev. Ulmer Marshall, marched with her and was the first to adopt a street to clean up. Other pastors followed his lead.

Leevones rolled up her sleeves and got to work. She offered summer programs in the schools and churches to keep kids off the streets and to improve their education. She sponsored neighborhood cleanups. She worked with local, state, and other groups to plant more than 3,000 trees. She helped drug-addicted mothers get into recovery programs.

She came to the aid of residents whose homes were damaged by Hurricanes Ivan and Katrina. Most of her neighbors didn't qualify for federal assistance, so she sought donations to help repair roofs and replace windows.

She formed a nonprofit, Bay Women Coalition, to bring more help to her crippled community. She wrote for federal grants to fight crime. She cleaned up vacant lots — often by herself — and had better streetlights installed throughout her neighborhood.

She helped bring a much-needed health clinic to the neighborhood, built playgrounds, and helped with the construction of a community center. Ingeniously, she headed up the renovation of a community amphitheater. She named the amphitheater for the mayor of Mobile. When he and his family came to the dedication, he noted its distressed state, and sent architects and funds to renovate and refurbish it.

When Leevones saw that her community needed a library, she worked with Trinity Lutheran, Wheat Ridge Ministries, and others to establish a public library at Trinity, the only public library in a private school in the state of Alabama.

It's never been an easy journey. Just five years after her brother's murder, there was another killing a few days before Christmas. Six-year-old Kearis Bonham was living with his grandparents in Trinity Gardens while his mother was in college. Kearis was on the porch when his grandfather heard two dozen shots ring out from the nearby housing project. He came to the porch and saw his grandson on the ground. "At first we thought he was just ducking because we always duck when there's shooting." Then Mr. Bonham saw the pool of blood under the little boy's head and knew he'd been killed.

The family had lived in their home for over 30 years. Mrs. Fisher had taught the boy's mother in high school. Leevones had noticed the presence of gangs, drugs, and violence at two federally funded HUD housing projects in the neighborhood, but pleas to the owners of the buildings and city officials were ignored. Then Kearis was killed.

continued on page 21

Leevones immediately bought a plane ticket to Washington, D.C., to talk to the Director of Housing and Urban Development. Through her hard work, compelling story, and relentless quest for justice, the housing project — Queens Court — lost its HUD funding and closed its doors. Later, it was bulldozed.


Now Leevones receives HUD funds to help low-income working poor buy new and refurbished homes in the neighborhood. She has walked through miles of red tape to work with government, business, and contractors to renovate and build affordable, energy-efficient homes, subdivisions, and senior housing.

Judy Jones, who owns a small janitorial service, grew up in the neighborhood but never dreamed she would be able to own her own home. With Leevones' help, Judy qualified for a small mortgage and loves her new home — on the very street where she grew up.

"It's felt like home from day one," she said. "I thank God for Mrs. Fisher. I never could have done it without her."

Today, Trinity Gardens lives up to its name: there are four large gardens in the community, all dug, planted, and cared for by Leevones, her husband, Mike, and volunteers. These year-round gardens, located at Trinity and other locations, provide fresh vegetables for children, families, and seniors in her community.

You can often find Mrs. Fisher at her elementary alma mater, just a few blocks from her home, where she volunteers. Last fall, she worked with kindergarten through fifth graders in planting and caring for winter collards.

From the cold, hard ground of that broken community 20 years ago, the newly broken ground nourishes body and soul. "We are planting seeds of hope for the Trinity Gardens community," she said, adding a favorite Bible verse: *Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?* (Isaiah 43:18–19 ESV) 

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Mission Statement

AAUW advances education and equity for women and girls through research, education, advocacy and philanthropy.

Value Promise

By joining AAUW, you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance.

Membership in AAUW is open to all graduates who hold an associate (or equivalent), bachelor's or higher degree from a regionally accredited college or university.

In principle and in practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or class.

Send address changes to your branch membership vice president and to:

AAUW Records Office

**1111 16th St. NW
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You may also change your address through the AAUW website, in the Member Center. You will need your membership number, which may be obtained from your branch membership chair.

AAUW Member Helpline: 1-800-326-AAUW
(326-2289)

AAUW Help Email: connect@aauw.org

AAUW-Alabama Website: <http://aauw-al.aauw.net>

AAUW National Website: <http://www.aauw.org>