

ERIE PRESSIBLE June 2026

It's picnic time again!

The **AAUW Erie Branch June meeting** will once again be a picnic held at the **Presque Isle Runners Pavilion** on **Monday, June 8th**, starting at 5:30 p.m.

Family, significant others and prospective members are invited. Please bring a favorite dish to share.

Plates, plastic ware, cups, and napkins will be provided. Water and soft drinks will also be available. The Pavilion has water and electricity available. We will celebrate the end of our great year with a delicious cake!

Directions to the Runners Pavilion: Drive past Sara's Restaurant at the base of the hill and in about one tenth of a mile take the first left into a parking area. If you miss that turn, there is a second left that also turns into the parking lot by the pavilion. The pavilion is accessible, and restrooms are within easy walking distance.

Looking forward to seeing everyone there!



Reminder—Your Dues are Almost Due!

Annual dues of \$109 are due by June 30th. Life Members' dues are \$33 and Honorary Life Members pay no dues. Dues may be paid online at aauwerie.org or by check payable to AAUW Erie Branch, Inc. and mailed to P.O. Box 9264, Erie PA 16505 or in paid in person to Barb Hutzelman, the branch Finance Officer.

To receive a print copy of the Pressible for 2026/27, please add \$10. Does not apply to Honorary Life members.

Note: Due to the rolling membership year, there are members who will not owe dues until July or later. If in doubt, contact Barb at 814-881-7339 or barbhutz@yahoo.com.

President's Message

Friends,

As I write this article, it is hard to believe this is my final President's Message for the Pressible. This year has given me so many opportunities to connect with our members, learn from your experiences, and appreciate the meaningful relationships built along the way. I am especially grateful to our Board, whose guidance helped move the Erie Branch forward through every program and initiative.

Thank you to Pat Benekos, Soledad Traverso, and all committee members for delivering such a wide range of engaging and informative programs. Attendance has been strong, and I hope you'll continue that enthusiasm in the months ahead.

Our Pressible publications were exceptional once again. Many thanks to Deb Tonkin for her creative, visually appealing editions, and to all who contributed thoughtful articles. A special thanks to Barb Hauck for producing the Yearbook year after year.

I also want to recognize Christy Rieger for creating a user-friendly website that beautifully highlights AAUW Erie. I encourage everyone to visit it for easy access to Pressible and upcoming events.

We are grateful to Loretta Bellicini, Study Group Coordinator, for her dedication to expanding and supporting our study groups. From Book Clubs and Politalk to Gourmet gatherings, Computer class, Games, Food & Friends, and Global Friends, this year's offerings have thrived thanks to the hard work of many.



Sharmin Khundker

Thank you to Public Policy Chair Loretta Seigley for keeping us informed on issues central to AAUW's mission; to Sarah Larson for managing monthly meeting minutes; to Karen Miller for serving as an excellent parliamentarian; and to Barb Hutzelman for her steady financial stewardship. A warm thank-you as well to Edie and Anne Marie for their commitment to recruiting and welcoming members.

A big shout-out to Matasha and the Scholarship Committee. Matasha has led with energy and excellence for two consecutive years, even promoting our work on television. Thanks to her leadership and the committee's efforts, we are proud to award three Next Chapter Scholarships and one RISA Scholarship this year.

I also want to acknowledge that I stepped into this role following Asuman Baskan, whose passion for AAUW's mission set a high bar. I am deeply grateful to both Asuman and Barb Hutzelman for their support and guidance throughout the year.

Finally, I want to extend a special thank you to all who volunteered their time and talent on committees throughout the year. Your behind-the-scenes work—planning programs, coordinating events, supporting communications, managing logistics, and strengthening member engagement—has been essential to everything we accomplished. Your dedication truly keeps AAUW Erie thriving.

I also want to recognize all the members who continue to support AAUW Erie in so many meaningful ways. Your commitment, participation, and generosity make everything we accomplish possible. Without your support, none of the achievements we've celebrated this year could have been possible.

— Sharmin —

Scholarship Awards 2026



This year, our AAUW Erie Branch was able to give an impressive \$17,400 in scholarships. Our three Next Chapter recipients were awarded \$5,000 each, and our one RISA Scholarship recipient was awarded \$2,400. The recipients each presented impressive life experiences and challenges and will be an inspiration for other women.

<p>Next Chapter Scholarship Latifa Rezayee is a Global Affairs and Public Service student at Gannon University and an intern in the Mayor’s Office. She serves as an organizer for the New American Council and teaches English as a Second Language at the Quality-of-Life Learning Center. Originally from Afghanistan, Latifa has lived through two contrasting worlds—one defined by restrictions on women and one shaped by opportunity. Her experiences fuel her commitment to women’s rights, leadership, and education. An artist and former art instructor for girls in Afghanistan, she continues to use creativity and advocacy to empower women and girls to understand and claim their rights.</p>	<p>Next Chapter Scholarship Hannah Smart is graduating from Gannon University with a Bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice. Throughout her college journey, she balanced being a full-time student, working professional, and dedicated mother of twin boys while staying committed to her academic and personal goals. During her time at Gannon, Hannah completed an internship with Adult Probation at the Erie County Courthouse, where she gained valuable hands-on experience in community supervision and offender rehabilitation. She plans to pursue a career in federal probation and is passionate about creating positive change within her community through service, advocacy, and leadership.</p>
<p>RISA Scholarship Qamar Al-Ater is 20 years old, and came to Erie in January 2025. She was born in Syria and when she was 7 years old, her family fled the war in Syria and went to Egypt for 13 years. She attended Erie High School to earn her diploma and has been attending Gannon University to study English. She is in the fifth level and will complete the program in July. Her goal is to attend school to become a dentist. This scholarship will allow her to complete the last level in learning English at Gannon and to start the dentistry program at Great Lakes Institute of Technology. She is grateful for this opportunity to continue her studies.</p>	<p>Next Chapter Scholarship Ava Iranmanesh is a third-year Computer Science student at Penn State Behrend and a member of the Schreyer Honors College, maintaining a cumulative GPA of 3.8. Originally from Iran, where she earned a silver medal at the National Physics Olympiad in 2022, she came to the United States to pursue her passion for artificial intelligence research. She has served as a Resident Assistant in her residence hall while simultaneously working as a research assistant on multiple active projects. Her work focuses on AI evaluation, safety, and human-centered design. She is a first author on a position paper accepted as a spotlight at ICML 2026, one of the most competitive venues in machine learning, co-authored with prominent researchers in the field. Ava is multilingual in Persian, English, German, and French, and has studied across Iran, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, and the United States. She plans to pursue a PhD in AI safety and alignment, with the long-term goal of contributing to international technology policy. This scholarship will go directly toward her tuition as she completes her undergraduate degree.</p>

I want to convey appreciation to our scholarship committee, who worked diligently on application updates, advertising, and selecting our wonderful candidates: Cindy Belczyk, Candy Brown, Barb Hauck, Sharmin Khundker, and Jeannine Stearns.

— Matasha MurrellJones, Scholarship Committee Chair —



Top Left - Latifa Rezayee

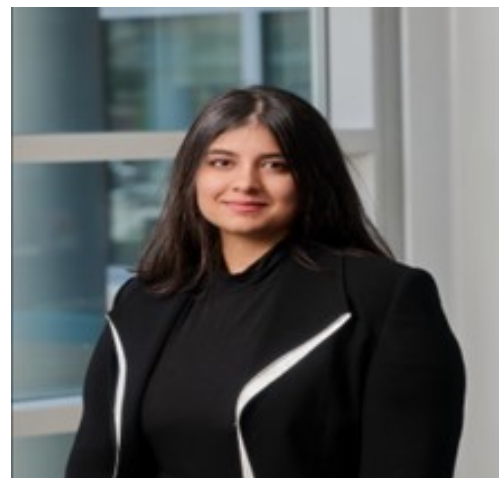


Top Right - Hannah Smart and her sons



Lower Left - Qamar Al-Ater

Lower Right - Ava Iranmanesh



With a heavy heart we share the passing of our friend and longtime AAUW member, Joy Steffan. She joined us at branch meetings and study groups in spring/summer and early fall. Joy maintained her membership even after moving to Texas to spend time with her daughter Jessica. Joy's positive outlook and generosity of energy will be forever missed.

*A great soul serves everyone all the time. A great soul never dies.
It brings us together again and again" – Maya Angelou*

Branch Study/Interest Groups

AAUW Book Club will meet for its annual potluck lunch and book selection on **Thursday, June 4th** at noon. We will meet at **Kitty Beaver's home, 2618 Lakeside Drive**. Please bring a dish to share and your favorite beverage. Remember to email your book suggestions to Barb Hutzelman at barbhutz@yahoo.com. Let us know you are coming by calling/texting Barb at 814-881-7339.

Politalk is an unstructured discussion about domestic and international political events which leads to brainstorming about ways of coping with such events. Politalk meets the **3rd Thursday** of the month from **1-3 PM** and/or **6:30-8:30 PM** at chair Asuman Baskan's house 3838 State Street. Finger foods will be served. Please R.S.V.P. when you receive the reminder email earlier in the month (814-282-8277 or irrepressibleturk@gmail.com). Feel free to switch between afternoon and evening groups as they will meet on the same day.

Games, Games, Games!

(No June meeting, see you in the fall)

Global Friends

(No June meeting, see you in the fall)

Gourmet

(No June meeting, see you in the fall)

Awards Presented



From left to right

Barb Hauck: Named Gift Honoree

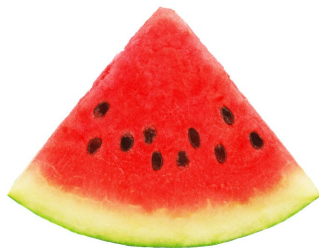
Loretto Bellicini: Named Gift Honoree

Sharmin Khundker: Woman of the Year

Barbara Hutzelman: Person Making a Difference

Not Shown — Edie Cultu: Gateway to Equity, Cindy Belczyk: Named Gift Honoree

The 2026-2027 Board



June 2026

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

	1	2	3	4 Book Club noon Kitty's home	5	6
7	8 Picnic 5:30 pm PISP Runner's Pavillion	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18 Politalk 1-3 pm & 6:30-8:30 pm at Asuman's	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

Welcome our Two New Members, and Add Them to Your Yearbook

Anna McCartney

11078 Freeport Lane, North East PA 16428

814-725-8906

mccartney.anna@gmail.com

**B.S. University of Pittsburgh,
Secondary Science Education**

Anna is a graduate of the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in education. She started her teaching career in the classroom and focused on helping special needs children. She led workshops for educators and families championing the role of play and family involvement in learning. She furthered her impact on supporting education for children by serving as the first Educational Director at WQLN, then as the Newspaper in Education Coordinator at the Erie-Times News, and finally at the Pennsylvania Sea Grant. In her role at these places she led workshops and wrote columns for the newspaper supporting educational and environmental activities for children and families. She helped raise awareness for local environmental concerns. Her passion is photography and using it as a means to tell stories about life, the environment, families, and communities.

Doris Cipolla

8640 East Lake Road, Erie 16511-1622

814-602-7226

dtcipolla@gmail.com

**B.A. Villa Maria College,
M.A. Case Western Reserve University**

Doris received her B.A. degree from Villa Maria College and her M.A. degree from Case Western Reserve University. She taught Spanish, French, and English in the North East School District and the Erie School District. She is a life-long social justice advocate. She supports LGBTQ rights, campaigned to preserve the McBride Bridge and keep the Blasco Library public. She fought against the proposed tire plant and rail terminal in Harborcreek and the death penalty in Pennsylvania. She also sponsored a speaker series at Mercyhurst. Doris is committed to peace, justice, and the environment. In her spare time, Doris enjoys reading and spending time in nature.

Mark your Calendar for Erie Gives Day, 2026

This year, our branch proudly awarded four scholarships totaling \$17,400. Erie Gives is a wonderful opportunity to support the Adella B. Woods Scholarship Fund, which provides essential assistance to women in Erie County pursuing higher education. If you believe in expanding educational opportunities for women, we encourage you to participate in Erie Gives and invite others to join you.

Donations can be made at ErieGives.org on August 11, 2026, from midnight to midnight. A phone bank will be available from 8 AM to 8 PM. You may also donate by check to The Erie Community Foundation; August 4 is the final day for check submissions.

Please search for us under "AAUW Erie Branch, Inc." Every gift—large or small—helps change lives. Additional details will be shared in the months ahead.



empowering women since 1881
Erie Branch—Founded in 1902

AAUW's Mission

AAUW advances equity for women and girls through education, philanthropy, and research. By joining AAUW you belong to a community that breaks through educational and economic barriers so that all women have a fair chance. In principle and in practice AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in the organization on the basis of gender, race, creed, age, sexual orientation, national origin, disability or class.

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The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.
Contact us at: lwverie@gmail.com

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