

ERIE PRESSIBLE June 2023



Receiving scholarships this year are (from left): Nadia Mir Ali, Skylar Mumford, Brenda Medina, Rebecca L. Stanopiewicz, and Nandine M. Nguengo. Alphonsine Rehema was unable to attend the presentation.

Erie Branch awards \$13,500 in scholarships at May dinner

Erie Branch awarded \$13,500 in scholarships to six area women at the Branch's annual meeting at Nick's Place.

Two types of awards were given this year – Adult Scholarship Awards of \$3,000 per student and \$1,500 Refugee/Immigrant (RISA) awards.

Adult scholarship recipients

Brenda Medina is a senior at Mercyhurst University. She will complete her bachelor's degree next fall in English with a minor in sociology. She plans to begin work on her master's degree in Secondary Education after that. Brenda's goal is to teach middle school or high school language arts. Her education was interrupted so she could care for multiple family members dealing with health, depression, suicide, loss of housing, and financial issues. Thereafter she had to deal with her own very serious health issue. To say the least, it has been a very challenging time for her. Brenda has been so grateful for the support of the staff at

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Branch picnic set at peninsula

Join us for a picnic to celebrate the end of a great year for AAUW Erie Branch!

We will be gathering Monday, June 12, at 5:30 p.m. at the Runner's Pavilion.

The Branch will provide plates, plastic ware, cups and napkins. We are asking you to bring one of your favorite dishes to share. Water and soft drinks will also be provided. There is a kitchen with water and electricity, if needed. We will end with a delicious cake to celebrate!

Directions to the Runner's Pavilion: Drive past Sara's and in about one tenth of a mile, you will turn left onto the first road. We will have a small sign and balloons to help you find the turn. If you miss it, a second turn into the parking lot by the pavilion is a short distance away. The pavilion is accessible and there are bathrooms very close by.

This is a family event, bring significant others and members of your family.

Looking forward to seeing you there!

President's Message

It may be difficult to believe but this is my final President's message for the *Pressible*. I hope that each article had some value for all of you.

I am grateful for each Board member who guided the Erie Branch through this year's challenges and events.

Thank you to Sarah Larson and Sharmin Khundker and their committee for enlightening and valuable programs. Lena Surzhko-Harned's presentation in September about the war in Ukraine and women's roles in and off the battlefields set the standard of all the programs to follow. Not one was disappointing! Erie Branch's September program was repeated statewide for AAUW-PA.



Ellen DiPlacido

We found that online webinars and Zoom meetings can be very valuable in keeping all of us informed about AAUW-PA and AAUW National. This was another year of superb *Pressible* publications. Much thanks to Claudia Mosso and every member who contributed interesting and informative articles.

Much gratitude to Sue Drabant, Study Group Coordinator, for continuing to promote and help establish new study groups. To Asuman Baskan's Politalk, as well as to Sue Roehrl's GAMES -- Kudos!!

We all owe Christy Rieger a round of applause for the valuable time she spent creating a user-friendly website that promotes AAUW Erie and its programs and issues.

Last but not least, let's give a big shout out to Deb Tonkin and the Scholarship Committee. They not only reached out to nontraditional female students, but created a platform for refugee and immigrant female students to also apply for scholarships. In all, six scholarships were presented to nontraditional students at the May dinner!

I can't forget to recognize all members who have continued to support AAUW Erie Branch in all ways. Without that support none of the above would have happened.

Thanks again to the Board and all members who have stepped forward to serve on the 2023-2024 Board!
As I have quoted Maya Angelou before: "It takes a village."

Edie Cultu named Outstanding Woman

Edie Cultu was honored as Erie Branch's *Outstanding Woman of the Year*. The award, bestowed at the annual meeting, recognizes her dedication to promoting and increasing awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion in our workplaces, schools, and community. Edie was introduced by Loretto Bellicini.

A retired teacher from Edison Elementary, an inner-city school in the Erie School District, Edie has held numerous positions in our branch, including two terms as President. About 20 years ago she originated the community outreach program called Global Friends that welcomed and supported immigrant women to our community. She is married to an immigrant from Turkey and understands the frustration and obstacles immigrants face in Erie.

Her special project, Global Friends, welcomes and supports immigrant and refugee women in our community. The group learns about the new immigrants' cultures and offers understanding and respect for their customs and traditions. Edie in turn shares her experiences and knowledge of life in Erie.

The Global Friends study group has also cleaned apartments for new Afghan refugees to move into and showed them how to walk their children to school. She also helped raise money to buy books to help immigrants learn English.

Last year, Edie and other branch members formed the Community Action Committee to provide services for those in need in our town. Edie organized the branch's collection of winter clothing, household items, food and baby products, dishes, pots and pans, curtains, linens and bags and bags of non-perishable food items to help sustain the Afghan families on their arrival in the Erie community. These contributions have eased the strain on the resettlement agencies, who received a large influx of refugees in a short span of time. She also organized voter registrations to help new citizens become active in local elections. Most recently she served two terms as AAUW Membership Chair. She developed new member brochures for potential members. She maintained and grew membership in the Erie branch throughout the Pandemic. Many of the current AAUW Erie Branch members are also immigrants to this country and were introduced to the group through Edie's efforts.



Edie Cultu

TIME TO RENEW YOUR DUES!

If you pay by June 30, 2023-24 dues are \$103.
State dues will increase on July 1, bringing the total payable to \$105.
Renew online through AAUW website

or

Send a check made out to AAUW Erie Branch to
Beverly Gocal, 40 Niagara Pier, Erie, PA 16507

Christy Rieger, Sharmin Khundker are honored

Dr. Christy Rieger was presented the *Member Making a Difference Award* at Erie Branch's annual meeting by Barbara Hutzelman. This award is given to a branch member who has made a big difference in something important to the branch within the last year. The branch selects this award's recipient because she (or he) exemplifies the spirit of AAUW.



Dr. Christy Rieger

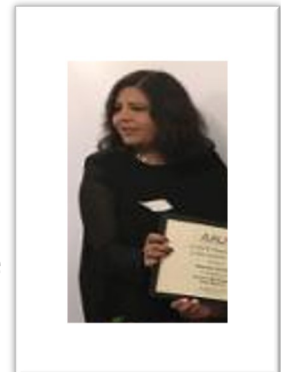
In the past, Christy was instrumental in obtaining authors for our Lunch & Literature fundraiser, was the instigator for our collaboration with Mercyhurst University and the Friends of the Library to bring author Marie Benedict to Erie, served as our branch president, and managed the archiving of our branch records. She has served as publicity/social media chair, and has always been willing to help where needed.

This year, she focused on revisions to our branch's website, with a focus on improving management and updating. She quickly came to the conclusion that the site was too cumbersome and outdated and needed to be rebuilt. Then it would again help AAUW Erie be a more effective organization. She recommended to the Board that we start over with professional help and, after researching various web design companies, convinced the Board to allocate the money needed to make it happen. Since last September, she has been working tirelessly providing information and working with the web designers to bring things up to speed.

Named *AAUW Educational Foundation Named Gift honoree* was **Sharmin Khundker**. Sharmin, who served as Co-Program Vice President for the Branch this year, is also the past President of the Erie Asian Pacific American Association. She was introduced by Niken Astari Carpenter. Sharmin obtained her bachelor degree in Applied Chemistry and doctoral degree in Analytical Chemistry, both awarded from the University of Northumbria, UK. She immigrated from Bangladesh to the United States in 1996 when she married her husband, who was a graduate student at the time. She has also worked as an analytical chemist in a contract pharmaceutical company. Ten years later, in 2006, Sharmin received her green card, and five years later in 2011, she received her U.S. citizenship.

Sharmin's role in Erie APAA has allowed new Americans to both showcase their cultures in the city and to network among themselves to form close, cultural communities that support the values of diversity and inclusion alike. Her role has allowed expansion of the role and integration of new Americans into the greater Erie community. Although there are bridges/organizations being made for new Americans, such as the New American Council, Sharmin would like to see more being done so new Americans can utilize their skills throughout the city. She would like to discuss more ways that new Americans can gain representation as well.

One of Sharmin's biggest focuses is the mitigation of the language barrier and the creation of access to transparent communication amongst stakeholders.



Sharmin Khundker

Names still needed to boost upcoming Erie Gives fundraiser

Help enable us to give out more in scholarships!

Names are still needed to bolster the list of contacts the Branch is compiling to help spread the word about our participation in Erie Gives. You don't have to qualify your friends or family as "good" donors. This is an exercise in numbers. In June a postcard will go to everyone on your list to let them know that Erie Gives is coming soon, on Aug. 8, and ask them, if they're planning to participate, to make AAUW Erie one of their choices. This nets us additional funds through the Non-Profit Partnership's match.

Please send your list with addresses (email or postal), by Memorial Day, if possible, to Loretto Bellicini.

Scholarship winners

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Mercyhurst who made sure that she could make it through this latest challenge. Her grades have steadily improved, and she even made the Dean's List! She also joined Sigma Tau Delta as treasurer and can't wait to be the first in her family to graduate from college!

Skylar Mumford grew up in Plumer Village near Oil City and moved to Erie to take care of her ill grandmother. Skylar spent several years as her caretaker until her grandmother passed away. She also worked as a hospice volunteer and later worked at a Covid clinic during the pandemic. During this time, she grew a love for the medical field and currently is enrolled at Gannon University with the goal of becoming a Physician's Assistant.

She hopes to help in rural areas of PA, where healthcare is spread thin. Growing up in her village, she saw neighbors put off care because of a lack of choices and because the hospital was far away. Skylar wants to be able to give back to the community and improve this situation in rural PA with the skills that she learns.

Rebecca Stanopiewicz has a common theme in her life, service to our community's youth. This work has taken several paths. She has served on mission trips to establish community programs and centers for at-risk youth, volunteered in area shelters, participated in community projects that benefit youth, and serves in the classroom. For seven years she has been an Instructional Paraprofessional at Iroquois Elementary School in the Emotional Support Program. She has felt gratified while supporting these learners to find their success. In the past two years she has been a Pre-K teacher at Saint Luke School helping her students build a strong foundation.

Rebecca is a wife and mother of two active daughters. In watching her girls setting and achieving their goals, she decided to set her goal to complete her education. Her daughters are her biggest cheerleaders. She is grateful to know that she is passing on her strength and determination by achieving her goal of getting certified in Elementary Education and Special Education.

Refugee and Immigrant Scholarship (RISA) recipients

Nadia Mir Ali said that she "grew up in a place where education is a dream that never comes true." In her native Afghanistan, she started in a nursing program while she was still in high school. Her family was very supportive of her education. During her training she would work with her husband, who is a trauma surgeon and served in the U.S. military.

When the U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan, they had to flee so they would not be persecuted by the Taliban. She came to the United States with her husband and daughter and now they are a family of four. She feels very lucky to have a safe place like Erie to call home. Like many working mothers she is juggling work, family and education (ESL classes). Nadia is looking forward to getting back to her career in nursing. This means having to start over to earn a BSN, pass NCLEX-RN, work two years in a clinical setting, and then getting her MSN to become a nurse practitioner.

Nadine Nguengo is a single mother of two children and a recent refugee to Erie from the Central African Republic (CAR). Years of religious conflict forced her to flee her country and stop her pursuit of university studies. She went to Mauretania in 2014 but was not welcomed there. While there she could not continue her education, but she would like to do so here. The Central African Republic is a French-speaking country,

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Scholarship winners

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and she did all her studies in French. Nadine is enrolled to start ESL classes at Gannon this summer. After learning English, she wants to continue university studies in the field of economics and social work. Her career goal is to become an entrepreneur and establish businesses to employ workers and in turn reduce the unemployment rate. Her personal goal is to be reunited with her children.

Alphonsine Rehema loves helping people and nursing is one of the best ways to do that. She has been wanting to become a nurse since middle school but there have been many challenges. The classes are rigorous but when the goal is noble you keep working as hard as you can. She tries to stay positive and to stay strong.

She is working and praying to do her best so that she can help others. It gives her so much satisfaction to watch people improve and recover. Alphonsine is trying to use all available resources to help achieve her dream. She is so grateful for all the scholarships and loans received.



Erie Branch installs new officers at May dinner

Erie Branch held the election and installation of officers for the 2023-24 year at its annual meeting held May 8 at Nick's Place.

Loretta Seigley was installed as President, Asuman Baskan as President-Elect. Membership VP is Susan Drabant, and Loretta Bellicini Membership VP-Elect.

Installed as Co-Program VPs are Sharmin Khundker and Sarah Larson. Matasha Murrell-Jones is Recording Secretary and Barbara Hutzelman will serve as Finance Officer.



Erie Branch's board members for next year (from left) Loretta Bellicini, Barbara Hutzelman, Sharmin Khundker, Sarah Larson, Loretta Seigley and Asuman Baskan are installed by Karen Miller. Absent are Susan Drabant and Matasha Murrell-Jones .

Induction of officers was conducted by Karen Miller.

A remembrance of members who passed away over the last several years was given by Program Vice President Sarah Larson. Those remembered include Kitty Felion, Betty Browning, Barbara Althof, Pat Dietly, Judy Lawrence and Diane Harris.

Scholarship Committee chair Deborah Tonkin introduced the committee. Introducing the scholarship recipients were Loretta Seigley, Edie Cultu, Beverly Gocal and Cindy Belczyk.

Branch Study Groups

Book Discussion

We are ending our stimulating year of AAUW book group at the home of Kathrine (Kitty) Beaver, 2618 Lakeside Drive, on June 1. She is graciously hosting a picnic lunch for us at noon. Please bring your wonderful summer salad or any other dish to share. We will also discuss and decide our reading book list for next year. Call Sarah Larson with any questions. See you there!

Games

GAMES for your BRAIN! will meet on the third Wednesday *and* the last Saturday of each month from 2 – 4 p.m. at Susan

Roehrl's home, 626 Mohawk Dr. Please RSVP by PHONE ONLY, 814-452-6158, to secure your space.

Global Friends

Global Friends will reconvene next year.

Gourmet

TBA

Politalk

Politalk will not meet in June.

Further meetings will be announced at a later date.

June 2023

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1 Book Discussion Kitty Beaver's home, noon	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12 Branch picnic, 5:30 p.m. Presque Isle	13	14	15 Board 7 p.m. Neighborhood Art House	16	17
18	19	20 Games 2 p.m. at Susan Roehrl's	21	22	23 Gourmet TBA	24
25	26	27	28	29	30 Games 2 p.m. at Susan Roehrl's	



Erie Branch ♦ Founded in 1902

P.O. Box 9264 Erie PA 16505

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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