

# ERIE PRESSIBLE December 2025



## Happy Holidays!

We look forward to seeing everyone at our **annual holiday luncheon** to be held on **Saturday, Dec. 6th, at the Kahkwa Club** beginning at 11:30 a.m. with lunch served at noon. Valet parking will be available. Location 3300 Kahkwa Club Rd. off of Swanville Rd.

Our **entertainment** will be provided by Kelly Armor and Liz Sesler-Beckman. Together Liz and Kelly perform original songs, jazz standards, and beautiful pieces from Argentina, Madagascar, Kenya, and France

Kelly Armor is a freelance folklorist, flutist, and storyteller. She has spent over 20 years working closely with Erie's New American artists, helping them keep their traditions and share them with the wider community. She has performed across the country as half of the duo Armor & Sturtevant and regularly collaborates with Dafmark Dance Theater.

Liz Sesler-Beckman is a brilliant pianist with an extensive background as a performer, music director, and educator. She has performed internationally in Japan, Europe, and the United States, collaborating with renowned musicians such as Tonight Show drummer Ed Shaughnessy, legendary bassist Milt Hinton, and saxophonist Don Menza and has been a member of the Stan Kenton Alumni Band. She recently returned to her hometown of Erie after 35 years of living in Baltimore.

**Reservations are due by Monday, Dec. 1st** by sending a check for \$30 payable to "AAUW Erie Branch Inc." to Barbara Hutzelman, 3226 Rustic Lane, Erie 16506 or online via our branch website [aauwerie.org](http://aauwerie.org) under the Events tab.

**Meal choices are:** Salmon with Cucumber Dill Sauce, Grilled Chicken Breast with Velouté Sauce, or Zucchini Boat Stuffed with Vegetable Ragout. All entrees will be accompanied by a Winter Salad with mustard vinaigrette dressing, Parmesan Risotto, Vegetable Medley, Rolls & Butter, Coffee or Tea. Dessert is a Mixed Berry Crumble with Ice Cream.

By tradition, there will be an opportunity for everyone to contribute to national's Legal Advocacy Fund. LAF supports court cases which address sex discrimination in employment or education. Questions? Please contact Barb Hutzelman at 814-881-7339.



## President's Message

Friends,

As we reflect on the past year at AAUW, I am filled with gratitude for the many accomplishments and connections that have strengthened our community. Together, we have advanced our mission of promoting equity and education, and I am proud of the meaningful progress we have made. Our fundraisers have been both successful and inspiring, allowing us to continue awarding scholarships to deserving students and ensuring that educational opportunities remain accessible to all. We are also delighted to welcome three new members—Sepi, Dee, and Sarah—whose energy and commitment will enrich our work in the year ahead.

Education has been a guiding theme in our programs and initiatives. At the Lincoln Library, we hosted a powerful session with Deputy Chief Rick Lorah of the City of Erie, who spoke on the critical issue of domestic abuse. His presentation was not only informative but also deeply educational, offering us insight into police procedures, referrals to agencies such as SafeNet, and the long-term effects on families and communities. We learned how officers in the Crisis Intervention Unit are trained to respond to complex situations involving domestic violence, mental health challenges, homelessness, and OCY disturbances. This program reminded us that education extends beyond classrooms—it is also about raising awareness and equipping communities with knowledge to create change.



Sharmin Khundker

I also had the privilege of attending AAUW's national webinar, *Defending Equity in Education*. This timely and thought-provoking session addressed the growing challenges to educational equity across the United States, from curriculum restrictions to the rollback of key initiatives. The panelists emphasized that "defending education is defending democracy in real time," a powerful reminder of the urgency of our work. Their insights underscored the importance of standing firm in support of inclusive and equitable learning environments, and they offered strategies for educators, advocates, and policymakers to respond effectively.

At this critical moment in history, AAUW remains steadfast in its commitment to academic freedom, inclusion, and equity. We know that education is the foundation of opportunity, and we will continue to champion truth-telling, access, and fairness in every aspect of learning.

This month also holds special meaning for us: November 29th marks the 123rd anniversary of the Erie AAUW branch. It is a moment to honor our history, celebrate the dedication of those who came before us, and recommit ourselves to the values of equity, education, and advocacy that continue to guide our work today.

As we enter this season of celebration and reflection, I am thankful for each of you—for your support, your energy, and your dedication to AAUW's mission. Together, we are building a brighter future where education empowers every individual. Wishing you a joyful holiday season and a year ahead filled with hope, progress, and continued learning.

Sharmin

## Branch Study/Interest Groups

**Global Friends** is an outreach program to immigrant women in our community. It is open to both AAUW members and immigrant women. The intent is to understand and respect other cultures. Global Friends is chaired by Edie Cultu (814-397-2975).

Join us for a **holiday meal on December 1st** at Edie's home at **638 Vermont Ave.** (edie\_cultu@yahoo.com) Bring something to share at our annual potluck dinner.

**Games, Games, Games!** is a new interest group. Plan to resume the fun in January. The contact is Susan Roehrl (814-868-4537).

**AAUW Book Club** meets the **first Thursday of every month, from 1-2:30 PM** at SpringHill, 2323 Edinboro Road, room 316. The book to be discussed in December is **Frozen River** by Ariel Lawhon. Cindy Belczyk is the coordinator for the group (814-873-5401 or BelczykCA@gmail.com).

Upcoming book selections include:

**Jan. 8, *The Lost Bookshop*** by Evie Woods

**Feb. 5, *The Love of my Life*** by Rosie Walsh

**March 5, *James*** by Percival Everett

**April 2, *The Book Club for Troublesome Women*** by Marie Bostwick

**May 7, *Miss Morgan's Book Brigade*** by Janet Skeslien

**Computer Knowledge** has held several classes so far. Future classes will be based on decisions made at the next class. Contact Loretto Bellicini at loretto.bellicini1@gmail.com for more information.

**Gourmet** Pierre and Loretto Bellicini have graciously opened their home on **Sunday, December 14** from **4-6:00 p.m.** for our December gourmet meeting. Attendees are asked to bring an appetizer, side dish, or a dessert to share.

Please rsvp to Candy Brown (814-873-0486 or candycbrown1@gmail.com) on or before December 8 with your selection and number of people attending the open house with you.

**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** at chair Asuman Baskan's house 3838 State Street. (814-282-8277) (irrepressibleturk@gmail.com)

## Boscov Fundraising

Thank you to all the members who volunteered their time. The final total for the Boscov's fundraiser is \$2,830.26! Great job!

## Follow-up on November's Program with Deputy Chief Lorah

Twenty two branch members braved the blowing snow and windy conditions to attend our branch meeting on November 10 to learn about domestic abuse and it's impact on society at large.

Rick Lorah, the Deputy Chief of Police in the Criminal Investigations Division for the City of Erie, shared his long 26 year journey starting as a Patrolman and his eventual promotions to Detective and Captain in various divisions, until he was promoted to his current position.

Rick is especially proud of his work and founding of the Crisis Intervention Unit that was started several years ago. This unit works to develop relationships not only with members of the community, but also with the agencies trained in mental health. The 9 members of this unit are all trained in mental health.

When a member of the Police Department interacts with a victim after a call for service, there is a useful app that is used to answer questions that determine the alleged victim's level of risk. The Crisis Unit interacts with many social services in the community as needed as per the risk assessment.

He shared the many advantages in working with the community, including the use of bicycle patrols in selected neighborhoods during the summer. Our engaged branch members enjoyed a lively question and answer session at the conclusion of Rick's program.

### Food and Friends Art Program



### Harding School Steam Fair



## Erie Branch Officers

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## Public Policy Update

The US Department of Education has pressured all schools receiving federal funding to eliminate Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts, limit speech on campus and restrict which students are welcome to attend. In a "Dear Colleague" letter, the Education Department has directed institutions to stop using "racial preferences" in admissions, financial aid, hiring and other areas. The funding includes Title IV (student and programs authorized by the Higher Education Act of 1965 designed to help eligible students to cover the cost of postsecondary education), state funding for curriculum development, free and reduced lunch programs and support for students with special needs. The message has drawn strong criticism and legal challenges arguing that the order exceeds executive authority and threatens academic freedom and access to higher education.

Cynthia Jackson-Hammond, president of the Council for Higher Education Accreditation, indicated that "DEI Programs do not only focus on diversity, but broaden opportunities for fairness including policies and procedures that are fair to everyone. For example, prior to DEI, there were few options for women to have a fair and equal chance to succeed." DEI programs have been designed to close achievement gaps in education and funding. Jackson-Hammond further indicated that "there's a fine line between removing programs that are considered to be discriminatory by race and removing programs that speak to a cultural or ethnicity support for students".

Loss of programs targeted by the administration would create struggles for schools at all levels. Everything from student loans, support for students with disabilities and policies and procedures that are fair to all faculty, staff and students would be impacted.

AAUW National has provided a roadmap for us to follow in the wake of these concerns. This was printed in the March 2025 Pressible. Given the continued struggles re: all DEI concerns, it bears repeating: **Our efforts to advance women's economic security through higher education remains critical. The progress we've made is at risk-and we must be vigilant in fighting back.**

## Welcome our new members!

Last month we introduced you to two new members: Darla-Elayne Bretta Brown (Dee) and Sepideh Javadpour. This month please welcome Sarah Peelman! Please give her a warm welcome and make sure to add her to your yearbook.

**Sarah Peelman** attended the Mercyhurst University of Erie, where she received a B.A. in Biology.

**Sarah Peelman**  
9004 Prindle Road  
North East, PA 16428  
814-572-2415  
Email: Redgalloway@gmail.com

## Prospective Member Open House at Asuman's Home



## Scholarship Committee 2026

Joining the AAUW Scholarship Committee is a high-impact, low-commitment opportunity to directly advance equity and education for Erie County women in a meaningful way. By committing to a maximum of three brief meetings per year (usually online), you play a vital role in shaping the future of the organization's mission. Committee members are essential for selecting the recipients, as the individual awards are determined solely by the qualifications of the candidates who apply and are evaluated using the committee's carefully developed rubric.

This year, your involvement is even more impactful as the committee works to establish a networking list to follow up with previous recipients, ensuring the support extends beyond the initial award to foster a lasting professional community that assists them in achieving their career and personal goals. In addition, as a committee member, you can use your communication skills to promote the scholarship, ensuring the annual funds determined by the Board reach and empower the broadest possible pool of ambitious women.

This year will also be a year of transition, as we are seeking a new Scholarship Committee Chair. If you have any ideas to promote the scholarship throughout Erie County, or if you are interested in Chairing or working with the committee, please reach out to Matasha MurrellJones (murrelljones@gmail.com).



Merry Christmas



# December 2025

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1 <b>Global Friends</b> 6 pm Eddie's home	2	3	4 <b>Book Club</b> 1-2:30 pm Springhill	5	6 <b>Holiday Luncheon</b> 11:30 am Kahkwa Club
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14 <b>Gourmet</b> 4-6 pm Bellicini's home	15 Hanukkah begins	16	17	18 <b>Politalk</b> 1-3 pm Asuman's and	19	20
21	22	23	24	25 Christmas Day Holiday	26 Kwanzaa begins	27
28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve	Happy 2026		



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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