

# ERIE PRESSIBLE June 2025



Erie Branch's 2025 honorees, (from left): Sharmin Khundker, Loretta Seigley, Ann Marie Kumhera Asuman Baskan and Matasha Murrell-Jones, gather at the annual meeting.

## Branch names Outstanding Woman, 2024-25 honorees

Asuman Baskan was named Erie Branch's Outstanding Woman of the Year at this year's annual meeting at Nick's Place.

Sharmin Khundker received the Gateway to Equity Award, Ann Marie Kumhera was recognized as Member Making a Difference, and Loretta Seigley and Matasha Murrell-Jones were named AAUW Educational Foundation Named Gift Honorees.

**Asuman Baskan** has led our branch now for two terms as President and has used her talents wisely and effectively to serve as an inspiration and model for us all. One of those terms was during Covid, a particularly difficult time, in which she set up Zoom and helped bring the branch into this new technology that enabled us to meet remotely.

Her leadership style is intelligent, consistent and focused on our mission. Her vision looks forward but is also wide. That is, she seeks to bring everyone into the fold so that we can display our best selves. She initiated the Politalk study group to talk about politics at the national and global level.

*Con't. on P. 3*

## It's picnic time again!

*Branch will hold June meeting at Presque Isle*

The AAUW Erie Branch June meeting will once again be a picnic held at the Presque Isle Runners Pavilion on Monday, June 9, 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 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.

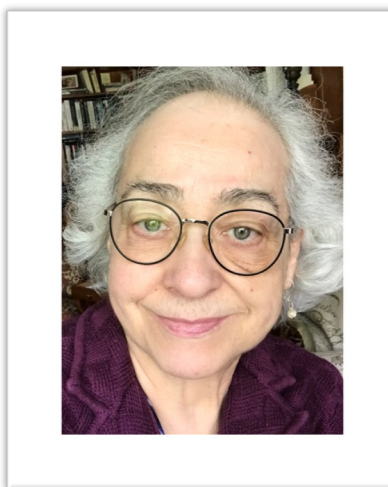
Looking forward to seeing everyone there!

## President's Message

Friends,

In this farewell essay for the President's corner, I couldn't help but focus on the assault on education that is taking place in our country... I use the strong language advisedly because I have seen this happen in the country of my birth, starting about 20 years ago, also in this country, during my 6 years of service on a school board and 35 years of college teaching. Let me tell the story of the former...

Politicians began to withdraw support from education, so it became less available to the underprivileged. They did this by reducing funding, but also by interfering with the curricula, which proved to be more important than lack of funds. By ignoring their expertise, they forced well-trained teachers and curriculum directors out of the profession. Curricula began to serve special interests, mostly the wealthy, connected to the religious party in power. Same politicians started to affirm, in public statements, that their votes rose as the literacy measures declined!



Asuman Baskan

In a short period of time, schools turned into institutions that cloned minds supporting the regime, who then took jobs as teachers, judges, legislators, without the requisite skills of critical thinking.

When loyalty counted more than their qualifications in obtaining well-paid jobs, the legislators as well as the judiciary began to take orders from the Executive. This destroyed the separation of powers in government, increasing the stronghold of one dictator over all facets of the government, the economy, the media and social life. He began to rule via executive orders rather than laws that had to be written, debated and passed by the Parliament...

Fast forward to today, while the country (the size of Texas) houses more than 200 universities, having graduated millions with worthless diplomas, the electorate has consistently voted for the dictator, now in his 23<sup>rd</sup> year of uninterrupted power.

Schools and universities bowing to the demands of special interests (which is, in this case, mostly the religious right,) are now "debating" whether a good education can be achieved *without* science and be based only on religious instruction. Or whether a religion "scholar" who argues that it is alright for a 6-year-old girl to be wedded to a 25-year-old man, belongs on a university campus to deliver an "academic" speech...

Long story short, this is the story of a 100-year-old democracy taking a U-turn towards an Iran or an Afghanistan.

*Con't. on P. 3*

## President's message

*Con't. from P. 2*

If we remain silent and watch the denigration of objective educational standards now, it won't be long before we, in the US, will also wonder how we got to where we end up.

It takes only a few generations of students without knowledge and the skills to use it analytically to create a society that is polarized into those who owe their livelihoods to the "leader" in return for blind loyalty and those who resist the slippery slope they can see ahead of them.

Democracy is an ideal and is fragile... It can easily be damaged, yes, even lost, if those who believe in it don't speak up, fearing repercussions.

Heroes are not fearless, because they are smart enough to know when and whom to fear. What makes them heroes is that they do something **despite** their fears...

Protecting education that raises **independent** thinkers, regardless of their socioeconomic status, power networks or political affiliation is becoming a tall order in our time. But as AAUW, education is part of our mission. We need to be concerned, and we need to stay engaged, and we need to speak up – NOW – for our democracy to survive ...

All the best,  
Asuman

## Branch honorees are introduced

*Con't. from P. 1*

She is also a regular and active participant of Global Friends study group. The Outstanding Woman Award recognizes a member for their demonstrated commitment to the ideals and goals of AAUW.

The **Member Making a Difference Award**, given to **Ann Marie Kumhera**, recognizes a branch member who has made a big difference in something important to the branch within the last year.

Anne Marie joined only two years ago and is always willing to go out of her way wherever needed. She is an active member of *ALL* of our study/interest groups and was the moving force in establishing our newest group, Food and Friends. She helps with every Harding School event.

A few months ago, Anne Marie volunteered to fill the newly created position of Member Outreach. In that capacity, she has reached out via telephone, email, and in person meetings to our members who are not able to attend meetings.

The **Named Gift Honoree** program recognizes individuals who have made special or distinguished contributions. Two members were honored this year.

**Loretta Seigley** was recognized for her extensive past service, particularly as president and currently as an engaged and informative Public Policy chair.

**Matasha Murrell Jones** was recognized for agreeing to step up at the last minute last May when we needed a secretary, for serving so well in that capacity and on the Scholarship Committee.

The **AAUW Pennsylvania Gateway to Equity Award** honors an individual, group or organization that has shown by action and philosophy the promotion of the AAUW mission to advance gender equity across the entire Commonwealth. Our branch has recognized **Sharmin Khundker** with this honor.

Sharmin's role in Erie Asian Pacific American Association 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.

More recently, she and Sarah Larson have done an amazing job with branch programming, with especially notable monthly meetings highlighting the work of the Erie League of Women Voters and the dramatization of the life of Fanny Kemble.

## Next Chapter Scholarship awardee named

Erie Branch awarded its Next Chapter Scholarship to DeAzhanè M. Matthews at the branch's annual meeting on May 12.

**DeAzhanè Monique Matthews-Rosendary** was awarded Erie Branch's Next Chapter Scholarship.

The devoted wife of Donovan Rosendary and loving mother to three boys, Donovan Jr., Dior and D'Kobe, was born and raised in Erie. The Rosendary Family is also expecting their first baby girl in just a few weeks!

After graduating from Collegiate Academy in June of 2018, life's endeavors hit and caused the current Gannon University student to take a break from pursuing her secondary education. Studies recommenced in August of 2021, when DeAzhanè enrolled at Erie County Community College, completing her Associate of Applied Science Degree in Criminal Justice in December 2023. She enrolled at Gannon in August of 2024 and plans to attain a Bachelor's of Science in Criminal Justice in December of 2025. Her main goal post-graduation is to attend law school, pass the Bar exam and represent wrongfully accused clients.



DeAzhanè M. Matthews

## Don't forget ERIE GIVES!

This year, our branch awarded five scholarships totaling \$11,000 dollars.



Erie Gives affords us the opportunity to add to our Adella B. Woods Scholarship Fund, to which all donations are allocated. If you are interested in furthering the education of Erie County women, please participate in Erie Gives and ask your friends to contribute as well. How do you give? Online donations will be accepted Aug. 12 from midnight to midnight at [ErieGives.org](http://ErieGives.org). Checks will be accepted at the Erie Community Foundation from June 17 to Aug. 5. We are listed as "AAUW Erie Branch, Inc." And this year, in addition to proportional matching, credit card fees are covered. No donation is too small, and all donations will be greatly appreciated. For more information, contact Barb Hutzelman at 814-881-7339 or [barbhutz@yahoo.com](mailto:barbhutz@yahoo.com)

## Welcome to our new member!

New member **Anita Splendore** attended the University of Dayton, where she received a B.S. in Education and Simmons College, where she earned her Master's in Special Education.

Recently she moved to Erie from Boston, where she had taught 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade.

Anita volunteered for several years as a CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) working with foster children, their foster parents, schools and social workers. She taught English to prisoners at a minimum security prison for three years, and also taught English to foreign students in the public library.

Anita enjoys gardening and was also a gleaner, which involved picking and boxing produce that farmers did not want and sending it to places which could use it, such as soup kitchens.

Please add Anita to your yearbook.

Anita Splendore  
6323 Stonebrook Drive, Fairview, PA 16415  
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Email: [anita.splendore@gmail.com](mailto:anita.splendore@gmail.com)

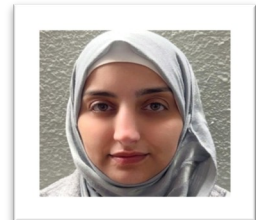


## Branch awards four RISA scholarships

Erie Branch awarded RISA scholarships to study ESL and further their education to four recent immigrants, Donya Aljouja, Fadumo Elmi, Tasiayene Kabalisa and Shireen Pari Wardak. They were recognized at the Annual Meeting at Nick's Place.

**Donya Aljouja**, 40 years old, was born in Syria and is married to Abdul Nasser Al-Attar. They have four children, three girls and one boy. Because of the war in Syria, the family moved to Egypt in 2013 and was resettled to Erie at the beginning of 2025. In 2001, she earned her high school diploma and, in 2003, a certificate in Fine Arts.

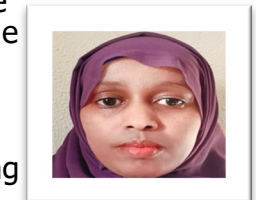
In Egypt, she worked with UNICEF as a teacher and assistant in providing psychosocial support activities for children for 10 years. Her educational goal is to improve her English, so that she can communicate better in daily life and at work. She would also like to study in the future so that she can work with children again, especially in the fields of psychological support or education.



Donya Aljouja

**Fadumo Elmi** is a mother and wife. The family has a daughter and moved to Erie in the winter of 2024. Fadumo attained a nursing diploma from Almira Institute and graduated from high school in Mogadishu, Somalia. After fleeing, she lived in Indonesia in a large community of other refugees.

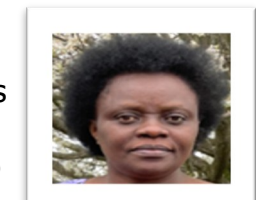
Fadumo was chosen by the International Migration Organization to be trained to help lead the community's peer health sessions and was able to use her skills in nursing to do this. Fadumo is looking forward to using her scholarship to improve her English skills and join the healthcare community in Erie.



Fadumo Elmi

**Tasiayene Kabalisa**, 36, was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo and attended school up to Grade 9. She currently works as a package handler at FedEx, but wants to go back to school to become a healthcare professional here after taking a 3-year nursing program in Rwanda. She has over 13 years of experience serving diverse communities as a nurse and believes nursing is a meaningful way to give back to the United States.

Tasiayene has faced many challenges. She was forced to flee the Congo after facing significant security threats. As the oldest of six children, she had to take care of her siblings at 15 years old when her parents passed away. This involved fetching water, growing crops for food, and fetching firewood. She married at age 21.



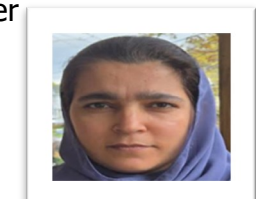
Tasiayene Kabalisa

**Shireen Wardak**, 38, came to Erie last October with her husband, Sultan, and four children. In Afghanistan she was not allowed to attend school, but her father was a teacher and taught her to read at home. Her husband is a mechanical engineer and managed large contracts for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In 2009, the Taliban began targeting people who worked with the U.S. government. When the Taliban took over Kabul, Shireen, Sultan, and their children left Afghanistan.

Shireen and Sultan want their sons and daughters to get a good education and Shireen would like to learn English and establish herself as a wage earner in the family and a contributor to her community. Communicating clearly is very important to her.

She aspires to pursue a career in nursing, teaching, or engineering. In addition, she would like to help other refugees adapt, learn English, and succeed in life. Learning English is the huge first step!



Shireen Wardak

## DUES ARE DUE!

The AAUW fiscal year ends on June 30, and your annual dues of \$107 are due before that date.

Life members' dues are \$33 and Honorary Life members pay no dues. Dues may be paid online at [www.aauwerie.org](http://www.aauwerie.org) or by check payable to AAUW Erie Branch, Inc. and mailed to P.O. Box 9264, Erie PA 16505.

If you would like to have the Pressible mailed to you in the coming year, please send a check for \$10 to P.O. Box 9264, Erie PA 16505. This does not apply to Honorary Life members.

Note: Due to the newly enacted rolling membership year, there are members who will not owe dues until July or later. Those members will be notified by the treasurer, Barb Hutzelman.

## Branch's Tech Savvy funds boost Harding

This year, Erie Branch funded STEAM programming at Harding Elementary, a United Way community school, and funds have already been approved by our board for the next school year.

This year's total cost of \$4,800 was covered by \$4,079 in surplus Tech Savvy funds and \$721 from our Boscov's fundraiser.

Tech Savvy was a STEM program for middle school girls sponsored by our branch in collaboration with Edinboro University a number of years ago. We received many community grants to fund Tech Savvy, and therefore the board felt it appropriate to financially support a very similar program with the surplus.

*By Barb Hutzelman*

## New computer group to meet at Blasco this month

### *Topic is on Top 10 Scams in PA*

Scammers and fraudsters target Pennsylvanians every day in an effort to gain access to our money or personal information. They target our emotions in hopes that we will let our guard down and believe the scams they are perpetrating.

From robocalls to social media messages, texts to emails, Pennsylvanians must be on the lookout for these "too good to be true" hoaxes.

This presentation will break down the top 10 scams currently being used in PA

We will meet June 17 at 3 p.m. in the Blasco Library's Admiral Room. Anyone interested can come. The room holds 30 to 40 people. Currently 17 people have signed up.

*By Loretto Bellicini*

## Food & Friends still taking reservations for June event

Please join the Food and Friends group for an evening at the Station Restaurant Dinner Theatre on Saturday, June 21, at 5:30 p.m. for a performance of Holy Cannoli.

The synopsis of the play: What do you do to prepare for a visit from your parents?

Plenty, when you are the daughter of strict Italian Catholic parents who expect to meet your female roommate, who is actually a guy.

John was hoping to celebrate his and Maria's two-year anniversary as housemates by proposing to her. Instead, he finds himself as "Suzanne" wearing a dress and trying to cope with Maria's cranky father, her overbearing mother and her wild younger sister.

Then there's Maria's old childhood friend who tries to make his move on Maria as well as "Suzanne." Add John's trouble-making friend and you've got laughs on top of laughs.

To reserve your place, please send a check for \$43 to: Karen Miller, 3625 Bellaire Drive, Erie, PA 16506.

## Branch Study Groups

### Book Discussion

The Book Group will meet for its annual pot-luck lunch and book selection on Thursday, June 5, at noon at Kitty Beaver's home, 2618 Lakeside Drive.

Please bring a lawn chair, dish to share, and your favorite beverage.

Remember to email your book suggestions to Barb Hutzelman at [barbhutz@yahoo.com](mailto:barbhutz@yahoo.com). Let us know you're coming by calling/texting Barb at 814-881-7339.

### Computer

Computer Group will hold its first meeting Tuesday, June 17, at 3 p.m. in the Blasco Library Admiral Room to learn about ways to prevent falling victim to fraud.

### Food and Friends

Food & Friends will meet on Saturday, June 21 at 5:30 p.m. at the Station Restaurant Dinner Theatre for a performance of Holy Canoli. To reserve your place, please send a check for \$43 to: Karen Miller, 3625 Bellaire Drive, Erie, PA 16506.

### Global Friends

See you in September!

### Gourmet

The final Gourmet event was held in April. See you this fall!

### Politalk

Politalk group will meet at Asuman's home 3838 State St., June 19, 1 - 3 p.m.

June 2025

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
2 <b>Board mtg.</b> 6:30 p.m. Zoom	3	4	5 <b>Book Club</b> Noon at Kitty Beaver's	6	7
9	10	11	12	13	14
16	17 <b>Computer</b> 3 p.m. at Blasco Admiral Room	18	19 <b>Politalk</b> 1-3 p.m. at Asuman's	20	21 <b>Food &amp; Friends</b> 5:30 p.m. at Station Restaurant Dinner Theatre
23	24	25	26	27	28



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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