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2020-2021 Leadership

Co-Presidents

Cele Covatta and Wendy Venet
president@aauwatlanta.org

Program Vice Presidents

Betty Arden and Velma Tilley
programs@aauwatlanta.org

Membership Vice Presidents

Phyllis Miller and Marge Anderson
membership@aauwatlanta.org

Board Secretary

Kay Collins
Secretary-board@aauwatlanta.org

Branch Meeting Secretary

Marcy Nader
Secretary-meeting@aauwatlanta.org

Finance Officers

Sharon Bevis-Hoover
treasurer@aauwatlanta.org

College/University Relations

Marge Anderson
universityrelations@aauwatlanta.org

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Co-President's Message

By: Cele Covatta

The only thing that remains certain in life is change. It looks more and more as if the post-Covid world that we are slowly moving toward will be very different than all we have known before. As we emerge from this year-long crisis state, it is good to remind ourselves that the Chinese character for crisis can mean danger or opportunity. Our organization, at both the national and local level, is struggling to emerge from the sort of inertia that has gripped the planet. We have had little ability to order outcome, but one never loses the ability to choose. A proposed change to the membership qualifications for AAUW lies ahead and will be brought to a vote in this spring. There are pro and con aspects of such a change, as there are to all changes. Wendy and I invite each of you to weigh in. You get a vote. Before you cast it, and we urge you to VOTE, please give thoughtful consideration to what you believe to be the best choice. We invite an open dialogue on this question. Please send us your thoughts, opinions and concerns. Since we are unable to meet in person, we can certainly share thoughts and concerns and publish these in this newsletter. Send a simple statement of what you think to publications@aauwatlanta.org , or president@aauwatlanta.org

We face another issue locally and we need help from the entire membership to manage it. Without the focus of an annual mall located Bookfair, we are working to sell and repurpose books as effectively as we can. We ALWAYS need more help in the BookRoom. A small group of us works very hard, and the work is infinite. We know that if everyone does a little, we can accomplish a lot. Every week there are large numbers of fine books that we cannot sell. They need to be repurposed through donation to schools, senior centers, churches, thrift shops, filling Little Free Libraries, and through whatever means any and all of you may know of. There is a story with delightful pictures in this newsletter about a donation to Dresden Elementary written by our friend Rita Glaser. The delight shines from the faces of the children. Change lies ahead. Please give your very most thoughtful consideration to what you want to do about it.

Wendy and I look forward to hearing from you.

Cele Covatta, co-president
AAUW Atlanta

Leadership continued

Diversity

Mary-Lynn Merkle
diversity@aauwatlanta.org

Historian

Wendy Venet
historian@aauwatlanta.org

Hospitality

Betty Arden and Velma Tilley
hospitality@aauwatlanta.org

Public Policy

Cecilia Cantrell
publicpolicy@aauwatlanta.org

Public Relations

Sharon Bevis-Hoover
publicrelations@aauwatlanta.org

Scholarship

Rose Cannon, Betty Slater
scholarship@aauwatlanta.org

Web Information

Terry Eshenour
webmaster@aauwatlanta.org

Contemporary Literature

Kay Collins
contemporaryliterature@
aauwatlanta.org

Travel Group

Betty Arden
travel@aauwatlanta.org

Advisory Board Chair

Kay Collins
advisory@aauwatlanta.org

Publications

publications@aauwatlanta.org

AAUW Funds

Dana Gordon
aauwfunds@aauwatlanta.org

Philanthropy Chair

Bea Meyer
philanthropy@aauwatlanta.org

Communications Chair

Ruth Yurchuck
communications@aauwatlanta.org

Bylaws Chair

Pat Bevis
bylaws@aauwatlanta.org

AAUW Legislature Issues 2021

By: Cecilia Cantrell, Public Policy Chair

House and Senate members are producing many Bills. Three areas will have serious impacts on each of us.

The Budget

HB 80 passed the House 149 to 20. It restores some cuts from the 2020 budget with no new cuts. This budget is in effect until June 2021. The new fiscal year 2021 begins July 2021. Georgia Budget Policy Institute Budget Primer is an excellent source of information concerning the Georgia Budget. (www.GBPI.org)

Health care issues are of enormous import due to COVID-19 and variants as well as the ongoing issues concerning health care coverage in general. Georgia is 48th among states in uncovered people; 13.41% our population is uncovered.

Georgia has never expanded Medicaid and Governor Kemp has requested a waiver that includes work or volunteer mandates; a premium payment by those covered by Medicaid. This waiver covers fewer people at greater cost than the full expansion of Medicaid because full coverage would primarily be painful for US budget. Over 200,000 more GA citizens would be covered under full expansion.

The Medicare-Medicaid Center has labeled the Kemp waiver pending. Further, Center finds the work mandate impractical especially during the pandemic. Georgia has lost 9 rural hospitals since 2009. Two closed this year and others are close to closing. These health issues are harmful to individuals, communities and state. Many employers hesitate to move to Georgia because our health care issues are so untenable.

Voting rights

Five Voter Suppression Bills have been proposed to limit votes of legal voters, one of which is a House Bill and 4 are Senate Bills. These may be combined in an omnibus bill. They are headed to Ethics Committee. Bills are advancing in the General Assembly are:

SB 67: Requires ID to acquire an absentee ballot.

SB 71: Ends no-excuse absentee voting (arbitrary evaluation of your "excuse")

SB 89: Creates a chief elections assistance Officer.

SB 93: Limits mobile voting buses.

HB 270: Establishes a deadline of 10 days before the election for absentee ballots to be requested.

Members, please oppose these efforts to restrict legal voters. Tallies are kept by staff on number of calls pro and con. Please contact you members of the GA Legislature.

Chairman Max Burns: max.burns@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-7586. Rep.
Dean Burke: dean.burke@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-0040. Rep.
Jason Anavitarte: jason.anavitarte@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-0085. Rep.
Mike Dugan: mike.dugan@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-7872. Rep.
Steve Gooch: steve.gooch@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-9221. Rep.
Bo Hatchett: bo.hatchett@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-7454. Rep.
Butch Miller: butch.miller@senate.ga.gov or (404) 656-6578. Rep.
Randy Robertson: randy.robertson@senate.ga.gov or (404) 463-3931. Rep.
Brian Strickland: brian.strickland@senate.ga.gov or (404) 463-6598. Rep.

Best wishes for you and your families to stay healthy and safe during the efforts to overcome the numerous impacts of COVID-19 and variants.

Peace,
Cecilia Cantrell
Public Policy Committee

Bookfair Steering Committee Update

By: Mary Lynn Merkle

The Bookfair work (a lot of it) goes on. Many of our members are committed to adjusting to all the changes that have been forced on us so that we can continue to provide the finances for our philanthropic projects. More help is always appreciated. The bookroom chair is Sharon Bevis-Hoover. Call or text her if you'd like to participate.

One of the ideas for reformatting the way we sell our books was to "woman a table" at the Scott Antiques Market. We will do this for the first time the second weekend in April. Kudos to Sharon and to Judy Lambert who have agreed to lead this effort.

The next meeting of the Bookfair Steering Committee will be April 21st, 10:30 a.m. at the Nelson-Rives Realty office. Many thanks to Pat Bevis, Atlanta Branch member, who allows us to use this space. During these pandemic times all caution is used in providing safe space our gathering. Masks are required and the office is large so that we can "social distance." If you are not a member of the steering committee but have an item of business that you would like to have considered, please contact Mary Lynn Merkle at books@aauwatlanta.org

Save the Date!

By: Velma Tilley, Program Development, Co-Chair

SAVE THE DATE for the last official meeting of the year on Saturday, May 1, 2021 at 11:30 a.m. Plan for a Zoom meeting. Our speaker is Jeff Graham, Executive Director of Georgia Equality. Plan to attend!

Need for Books Increases During Pandemic

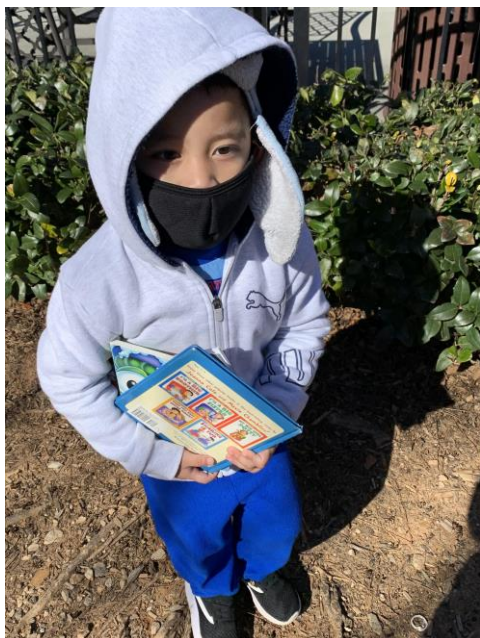
By: Rita Glaser

Dresden Elementary Students have had no face-to-face schooling for nearly a year. Since they aren't in the school building, they don't have access to their school library. They don't have access to their classroom teacher's books. This is especially tragic for our Dresden students who are already behind their grade level in most subjects. For most families in other schools the parents are able to help their children with their assignments and they are able to buy books or already have an ample supply at home. This is not the case with the Dresden Elementary families.

Most Dresden students come from households where neither parent speaks English. Parents have limited reading ability and limited computer skills. Going to the library is a challenge in normal times, but DeKalb library is currently all online. With these many limitations, most of our students have no access to books.

The American Association of University Women has been a generous supporter of efforts to bring books to these Dresden children, providing books to be given to these Dresden students. Thanks to donations from AAUW, we will again be able to host a book give-away at one of the apartment complexes in the Dresden School community. We meet the children and their parents on the playground, open up the trunk of the car, lay a heavy blanket on the ground and use near-by tables to display books. The children (and mothers) are then invited to "help themselves."

The children are excited to select books they get to keep—and so are the mothers! It's very sweet to watch the mothers who do not speak English pick out picture books for their young children. And what a great feeling to know we're helping these children learn a love of reading. Last time we did this, a little girl who looked about 8 years old said, "I'll get this for my baby brother. I can read it to him."



Photos courtesy of Rita Glaser

NORMAL? WHAT IS THAT?

By: Mary Lynn Merkle

Why do I consider myself normal? Like most fellow Branch members, I am

- a woman (although I'd be a little more powerful if I were male)
- literate
- white
- straight
- connected—to family and to friends and to groups of like-minded people.
- making every effort to be P.C. (politically correct!)
- pretty old (but to some extent that is a power enhancer)

And, it goes without saying that life is grand.

Consider all the women and children (and men, too) who aren't quite as "normal" as we are. They may not have had a college education and a profession. So, they work very hard in the school cafeteria rather than the classroom. Perhaps a Lesbian couple has been "disassociated" from their families, and perhaps even their church. There may be a man of color in the Publix parking lot who is actually a student at one of the Atlanta universities, dressed in his torn jeans and an oversized hoodie. And you find yourself closely clutching your handbag and walking a bit faster. And what about a person whose body or face is disfigured; do you quickly look aside, appearing not to notice anything?

Life for these people and those in other scenarios is not "normal." Many have managed to circumvent the difficulties they have faced; but they've worked hard to do that. And we celebrate that with them. What more can we do? Is "politically correct" enough?

I think we can acknowledge the presence (and humanity) of all people—including those who are "different" from us. We often stay in our safe space and give ourselves little opportunity to befriend those who are different. Perhaps we can be more intentional about widening our circle.

Remember the AAUW mission statement? We want equity for everyone. Our national organization seems to be making great effort toward that goal with their webinars. How about me? And us? What can we do? As Henri Nouwen said, "True liberation is freeing people from the bonds that have prevented them from giving their gifts to others." Our Branch has made similar efforts:

- Several years ago, Myra Carmon obtained a grant from AAUW National to have a leadership workshop for women college students at Georgia State University. Although we wished for a larger student attendance, the program itself was outstanding and so appreciated by the attendees. One of the speakers was Representative Stacey Abrams, and she was amazing!
- We spent several years sponsoring Cool Girls, a program for high school women most of whom were black, financially and in-person. We were good! Even better than us were the professional women of color who mentored these girls and came to our meetings
- Our speaker for our May meeting is a politically knowledgeable and an astute lobbyist for equality who just happens to be gay.
- We have had many fine communication interns over the past years—some of color and some white. And, when we were lucky, we got to know them and their dreams on a deeper level.
- So, we have not been remiss in our attempts to celebrate diversity. But, surely, we each have opportunities to do more. If we shared our "diversity stories" with one another, we could get new ideas for ourselves.

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In fact, I would ask that each of you look into your past and your present to find stories of when and where you were friended by or were a friend to a person whose “normal” was not quite the same as yours. It would be my best hope that we can have a long list of those in our next newsletter. But we can’t do it unless you are willing to brag a bit!

Please send items to Mary Lynn Merkle.

Contemporary Literature Meeting

By: Kay Collins

On March 1, 10:30 am, we will discuss *The Overstory* by Richard Powers. This will again be via Zoom so watch for the login info on Sunday afternoon, 2/28. We will open about 10:20 am. If you have questions, contact Kay Collins, 404/266-2183.

An Update from your Intern

By: Ansley Dyer

Hello, AAUW members! This year is already flying by. I wanted to take a moment to write an article to give you an update on what is happening in your intern’s life. I realize that Covid has severely hindered our ability to safely meet, and I have been unable to see the faces of the people I send newsletters to every month. Hopefully, we will be able to meet and mingle in the future.

In January, I got accepted into UGA’s graduate school to get my MA in Communication Studies. I will be taking the rhetoric track, and it is my dream to continue research and/or teach at the collegiate level. As an undergraduate, I wrote and defended my own thesis, so if that doesn’t tell you how much of a nerd I am, I don’t know what will. UGA has been my top pick, so I am incredibly blessed to have been admitted. I’ll be starting this two-year program in the fall.

To top it off, I will be living with my younger sister, who is an undergrad student at UGA. I am excited to be with her again! My family is also happy to have another one of us become a Georgia bulldog. Athens is a cool city, and I will be closer to Atlanta than I am right now.

This above point is important because I am excited to share that I will be working with the ladies of AAUW for another academic year. Thank you especially to the wonderful women of the executive board, I cannot wait to continue assisting in AAUW’s mission in any way I can. Once the virus is managed, I can even meet everyone in person at events. The idea sounds almost fantastical after a whole year of dealing with the pandemic—we have all missed out on so many things. Rather than lament the lost opportunities, I am trying to focus on the future. There are still good things to come!

Quote of the month:

“It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent.”

—Madeleine Albright

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