

Annual Report – President – 2015-16

Barbara Van Itallie

We had a very successful year, due to the hard work of our board members, group leaders and many others.

Thanks to Sandy Goldberg and Betsy Kopstein-Stuts, our programs were excellent and diverse. We jointly offered programs with other organizations, which I believe is helpful to our organization in reaching out to the community with important issues as well as marketing ourselves to the community. These were the programs on the Women of Iran with the World Affairs Council of the Mid-Hudson Valley, the Victorian Lady with the Poughkeepsie Public Library District, and What a Woman Can Do with an Auto, with the Dutchess County Historical Society. At our December program our members brought donations for the women residents of Grace Smith House. Additionally we had a panel on the Common Core, a program on sex trafficking and a talk on suicide prevention.

Our membership stands at 362 at this time, down from a peak of about 400. New members joined throughout the year and most have become involved in an interest group or initiative. Our membership team of Susie Blecker and Sheila Zweifler has contacted new members to welcome them to the branch, and to encourage them to get involved.

Our initiatives continue to have successful, on-going programs. Our Leading to Reading program, in addition to its extensive activities, continues its Books for Babies so that every baby born at Vassar Hospital receives a book. The Diversity initiative held a film discussion, a lecture on Islam and has plans for upcoming trips. Extending Girls Horizons continues the monthly STEAM and relationship activity events for girls in grades 6-12. The Partnership for Healthcare Awareness continues its meetings with 8 to 10 young mothers and provides parenting education discussion as well as many other activities. Court Watch volunteers continue going into Family Court on a monthly basis for the purpose of making sure that women are being treated fairly and justly in cases of domestic violence; this program had a training workshop and added new volunteers this year. The International initiative organized a bus trip to the UN conference on women with a film and discussion afterwards. I'm happy to report that a committee, headed by Diana Babington and Lori Scolaro of DCC, is hard at work preparing for the next The Live Your Dream Girls' Conference in November, after a year's absence. The STEM initiative, while holding a joint workshop with Marist College Liberty Partnership in the spring, is trying to determine what programs might be possible to continue in the future. These programs not only provide valuable community service but are also increasing our visibility in the community.

Our 20 interest groups continue to flourish and are a popular part of our branch. These interest groups most likely serve as our best recruiting tool. They also should serve as a way to publicize our branch-wide events to all members.

Our annual fund raiser, the Writer's Tea and Auction, was very successful and very well received by the attendees. We raised more than \$8000 for our initiatives and scholarships. We presented two scholarships to students graduating from DCC to continue their education. The LAF fund raiser, the Rib Fest, also brought in over \$400, which becomes part of our donation to the National LAF. We contributed \$3000, mostly from our branch but from individual members as well, to EOF, and honored six of our members with Named Gifts in doing so. We gave scholarships to two Marist College students to attend the NCCWSL. Also, our members contributed almost \$900 along with their dues renewal for scholarships and initiatives

We continue to be in a good financial position. We experimented with accepting payments via PayPal this year for the Tea, and will be determining if this method will work for other payments in the future.

We continue to have outstanding internal communications, with our newsletter, website, Facebook page and e-mails. We added a photo coordinator this year. Articles and press releases were sent regularly to media outlets but we received little print coverage. Our best hopes for external coverage and visibility appear to be by forming coalitions with other local groups who will share information with their members. For example, this year we participated in the International Women's Day walk along with the Women's' Leadership Alliance.

Our Woman of the Year luncheon, honoring our own Mary Lou Davis, had over 120 people in attendance. Pamela Eddington, President of DCC, was the well-received speaker at our 2015 annual meeting and dinner, and this year we will feature Lisa Gharthey of the New York Office of Children and Family Services at the annual dinner.

Our branch was recognized on the State level with many awards, including a Platinum Award for our program on campus sexual assault, Awards of Excellence for our newsletter, website and visibility, an Awards of Distinction for social media, recognition for our Equal Pay Day program, and several other awards. We also received a \$500 grant from the State which we used for Leading to Reading.

Concerning membership involvement, during my tenure almost 25 members who had not been in leadership positions before, came forward to take positions as board members, initiative heads, interest group chairs and event chairs.

I attended the Cazenovia Summer Workshop and the State Convention in Saratoga Springs.

Some issues that in my opinion should continue to be addressed in the future:

We must continue to encourage leaders to add new people to their committees and in the future should continue to engage members, particularly newer ones, by asking them to participate in projects.

We must continue our attempts to be visible in the community, particularly by joining with other organizations where we can. Several of these outside organizations are mentioned in this report.

As always, we should continue our focus on diversity of membership, programs, age, culture, and issues.

We should continue to include state and national AAUW issues in our programming. For example, although we held one STEM workshop this year, we should be re-examining our STEM efforts.

We should investigate further our interaction with our local colleges. At the moment we have no programs specifically for college students. Some inroads are being made with Marist College, through a STEM program and NCCWSL scholarships, and with DCC, with our scholarships, Diversity programming and the Girls' Conference.

Please see the individual annual reports for details about these programs and areas.

Again, it has been a pleasure working with and getting to know the board, the other leaders and all members. I look forward to continuing on the board in the new immediate-past-president position.