

Interest Groups Liaison Annual Report 2021 Submitted by Linnea Masson

Something that makes the Poughkeepsie AAUW Branch such a dynamic organization is that it offers something for everyone.

If one likes doing things that reach out to the community, we have initiatives such as Leading to Reading, Court Watch and Days for Girls among others.

In addition to that AAUW has many Interest Groups. There are three card groups (Bridge I and II and Canasta), Word Games, Mah Jongg, Art on the Go, Aventures en Soleil, Cuisine and Gourmet: Out & About Groups, Pins and Needles, two movie groups (Movie Night and Reely Together), Pedal Pushers, Trekkers, World Travelers, and five book groups (Poetry and Plays, Manderley Literary Society, Daytime Literature, All those Books and Contemporary Literature). And so, there is something for everyone.

During the '20-'21 season of Covid all groups that could, switched over to a Zoom format and continued to function.

Groups were quite innovative in their approach. The Cuisine Group still had theme dinners with individuals preparing dishes and reporting to others on the taste and showing the appearance by Zoom. The Word Games groups even developed their own ways of playing the games that could be done by Zoom. Bridge and Canasta groups joined established online groups and still continued to play together. The book groups had an easier time of adopting to Zoom and never missed a beat. A new movie group was formed that used the library service Kanopy and viewed a movie on their own and met by Zoom for discussion. World Traveler even found an advantage with Zoom since they did not have to limit their attendance to those that could meet in a member's home but anyone interested could attend. The spring has brought the opening up of Pedal Pushers and Trekkers with vaccines and relaxed restrictions on outside gatherings.

We now find ourselves keeping up with current times with some new offerings. Diane Jablonski started "Seeing White", a podcast discussion group. Diane wrote the following:

"Seeing White - Scene on Radio" provided a forum to discuss issues of race in light of the Black Lives Matter movement and the death of George Floyd. While the podcast was created in 2017, it was amazingly current for our discussion. The podcast asks the question, "Where did the notion of "whiteness" come from? What does it mean? What is "whiteness" for?" The group met twice a month from September of 2020 through January 2021 on Zoom.

Approximately 30 women participated in discussion based on the podcast they had listened to in advance. The unexpected benefit of the group was that everyone started doing their own research and began to identify additional resources related to race. An enormous amount of material was shared among group members, often leading in unexpected directions. In a time of pandemic and increasing racial unrest in this country, this group was an inspiration to me as we all grew as we explored together.

On a personal note:

I am grateful for support from the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Committee, and particularly Gwen Higgins. I am most thankful for all the women who participated in the group and shared their views, concerns and thoughts in a thoughtful yet candid manner. As we move out of the pandemic isolation we have all felt, the group participating in Seeing White will be one of my best memories from the pandemic times".

Following the Seeing White group, our Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Committee (DEI) began to reimagine itself. Under the able leadership of Gwen Higgins, DEI has a newly formulated Mission Statement: "The Poughkeepsie Branch AAUW, Inc. encourages and supports a diverse and inclusive membership. Through the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Committee, we commit to create open and safe dialog opportunities on issues of social justice, bias, equity and culture. The focus is on dissolving barriers which limit the aspirations of women and girls."

DEI is now moving forward with a book discussion group based on the book, "The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We can Prosper Together" by Heather McGhee. This group will meet once a month from May until September.

DEI has been encouraged by the overwhelming response to this project. With 33 women registered to participate we look forward to rich conversation and learning together.

DEI is also in the process of moving beyond learning with some form of action which promotes racial justice.

So, it is clear that Poughkeepsie AAUW is evolving and growing, providing members with rich activities as reflected in its activities.