

Celebrating a Half-Century of Service in American Association of University Women

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Longtime AAUW Members

Sandy Godsey, Priscilla Tiller and Luana Graves have all been members of AAUW for over 50 years.

The Lewis County Branch of the American Association of University Women honored Luana Graves on her 50th anniversary with the organization on Thursday, June 2, at the group's annual potluck at Stillwaters Estates in Centralia.

Members arranged for flowers and cake and had some photos, directories and newsletters of Graves' history with the group placed out for viewing. National headquarters sent a Lifetime Member Certificate, which was presented to Graves, who will no longer be required to pay dues to the national organization or the branch.

Graves is one of three living members who have attained 50 years of membership.

The other two are Sandy Godsey and Priscilla Tiller, both of Centralia. Since the Lewis County Branch was founded 93 years ago, seven members have reached the 50-year membership milestone.

Coincidentally, Tiller was membership chairman in 1966 and introduced and welcomed Graves to the club at her first meeting.

The mission of the AAUW is to advance equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy and research. Just as many other members, Graves is well educated, having graduated as valedictorian in 1961 from Napavine High School. She earned a scholarship from the Soroptimist Club to attend Centralia College, then earned a bachelor's degree in

history at Western Washington State College, which is now Western Washington University. Later, she earned a master's degree from Pacific Lutheran University.

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he personal career of Graves has paralleled part of the AAUW mission. She has been a 40-year advocate for education and the job force. Graves helped educate young minds by teaching girls physical education and guidance at Winlock High School from 1966 to 1968. Graves next worked for the Employment Security Department for 37 years, first in Lewis County then in Olympia, where she found jobs for people or sent them to job training.

The majority of her clients were single mothers.

Graves has been an active member of the branch, serving as branch treasurer in 1969, branch president in 1979-1980 and 1988-1990, and branch delegate to the state convention in 1990. She has volunteered at many annual book sales, photographed many Expanding Your Horizons Conferences and other AAUW events, and has been active on various committees. Graves gave a talk to the group in 1968 on the qualifications of guidance counselors and the need for well-qualified counselors in Lewis County schools.

Not only has Graves remained with AAUW and the Employment Security Department for a long time, she has a long family history in the Lewis County area.

She lives on the property on Newaukum Hill that her great-grandparents, the Wymores, homesteaded in 1894.

During the AAUW celebration, some of the longer-term members reminisced about differences in AAUW over the past 50 years. Graves said when she joined, "women were referred to by Mrs. and then her husband's name or Miss." Tiller remembered that members were required to wear skirts or dresses and high heels to meetings. Graves noted that in the 1930s, the group voted to wear shorter skirts because some had to ride public transportation to the meetings. Tiller said, "We are much more comfortable now."

Graves said that despite the 63 members in 1966, "meetings were at members' homes." Living rooms were larger and could accommodate that many complete with white tablecloth and silver tea service.

There was plenty of parking back then.

Dues in 1966 were \$10. They're now \$69 a year.

Graves said AAUW has offered a scholarship to Centralia College long before her time. She remembers when the scholarship was funded by a progressive dinner in members' homes and some years by a white elephant sale, but Centralia College tuition was only \$30 a quarter. Later, the scholarship was funded by a book and plant sale. For many years now, AAUW has held an annual used book sale the last weekend of March to fund its scholarship. The recipient

50 years ago was referred to as the “scholarship girl”; now the recipient might be 19 years old or in her 40s and returning to school.

Graves remembered one year when AAUW members hosted two women educators from Africa who were touring the U.S. They were very much “taken with the giant yard bird” that stood 60 feet tall straddling the Yard Birds entrance drive.

Kristi Nelson said that when she started at AAUW the meetings were more intellectual.

All branches in the country studied the same topics: education, community problems, cultural interests and world problems.

The national AAUW would select study-group topics within those subjects for each branch to meet and discuss. Those who were interested would meet and discuss in depth the topic every two weeks for three months. At the end of the study period, the results were presented at the branch meeting. A look at the meeting notes from the month Graves joined shows study group subjects included Education: Antidote to Poverty, The Law and the Citizen; Science: A Creative Discipline; and Revolution in Modern China. Now AAUW has an Early Morning Discussion Group that fills a similar niche, but ladies choose topics themselves and discuss subsets of that topic once a month for a year. Discussions in recent years have included Lakes of the World, Australia and the Supreme Court.

Tiller said women were more likely back then to join right out of college. Others had been members since AAUW was started in Lewis County in 1923, so membership age ranged from early 20s to much older. Mary Metzger said, “I joined AAUW when I had two young children and thoroughly enjoyed adult conversations. I remember meeting in members' homes and becoming acquainted with interesting and lively women in Chehalis and Centralia.” Now the majority of AAUW members are retired, though they would gladly welcome younger members.

Graves thinks that 50 years later there are more opportunities for women in education and jobs. Women are not limited to careers in teaching and nursing. More women are attending college. Graves is still concerned for women's jobs.

She recently attended a Lyceum at the college that predicted a disproportionate job loss for women's jobs due to technology replacing jobs.