

The Story of the Kaua`i Hawai`i Branch Formation 2007-2008
by
Jane Asher, President

2007-

When I came to Kauai in early May 2007, I knew there was no AAUW branch. I had checked with the Division membership chair when I was still in CO. I had been active in the Waukegan, IL., Honolulu, HI and Littleton-Englewood, CO branches so I wanted to establish one in Kauai. (2009 is my 59th year as an AAUW member)

Two weeks after my arrival, I called Debbie Gochros, who at that time was a 7th grade science teacher at the Kapaa Middle School. I knew her from the time I was a member of the Honolulu Branch which had given her a grant to complete her master's thesis in science. She became a member and helped with the annual GEMS (Girls Engaged in Math and Science) conferences we presented to 5th and 6th grade girls. Debbie was a workshop leader; she was very popular because she brought animals, skeletons, etc. from the Honolulu Zoo where she had worked as a zookeeper. She also did monologues of famous women in the elementary schools during Women's History Month of March. I received information on how to start a branch from the Division membership director. Debbie and I met to plan our strategy.

She told me that she was working with the Women in Technology and the MIT Initiative to bring two MIT students to Kauai to speak on careers in engineering. She wanted AAUW to sponsor this conference for middle school girls in Kauai. She said many of the girls in her class have never had such opportunities. The conference was scheduled for the second Saturday in Jan. 2008.

Since we needed 15 charter members Debbie and I asked our friends and colleagues to join AAUW and to help implement the upcoming conference. Debbie asked other teachers at her school and other schools, her science association, etc. I asked at church, bridge, and the school where I volunteered, the doctor's office, etc. (I didn't know many people since I had just arrived on the island)

During the period, Debbie finally found a school that would open their cafeteria area and rest rooms on a Saturday for the conference without charging a fee. We were lucky to have a liaison person who was most cooperative. She became a member of our branch. Debbie and I also worked on the by-laws which were approved by the state by-laws chair and then by the Association By-laws person. The treasurer had to work with a bank to open a checking account and to get a tax ID number. She also worked with the state and Association officials to purchase liability insurance for the branch.

The first branch meeting was held in November at Memorial Hall, All Saints Episcopal church in Kapaa. We already had the state's approval to form a branch. Brochures from Association were passed out and refreshments served. We continued to work on getting charter members.

2008-

In January the group met for final assignments. Debbie told us she had to fly to Minnesota to attend her sister's memorial service that weekend of the conference. The 12 members and friends took hold of the duties and carried off the conference. All the students, girls from the public middle schools, private schools and home schoolers, were invited. No fees were charged. The branch members provided the refreshments and woman power. AAUW info packets were given out at the registration table. We were thrilled to have 70 girls attend on a Sat. About 25 adults stayed for any of the three sessions that were presented. The two MIT students did a power point presentation of where they came from (map), campus life, myths about engineers, and career opportunities in engineering. For a hands on activity,

the girls formed teams of 4 or 5, were given 4 pieces of construction paper and tape. They were to build a structure that would hold up books. One team made a tube structure that held up 12 heavy textbooks. Many skills were called upon to complete the project. One of the presenters was a PHD candidate in textile engineering and the other student was completing her masters in civil engineering. The two students had spent the earlier five days at school on the islands of Maui and Oahu. A freshman student from MIT, home in Kauai for the holidays spoke to the girls about her experiences at MIT. Some women joined our branch after the conference. Our branch members entertained the two presenters at early dinner before they flew home to Boston.

To get the last 2 charter members, a high school alum was asked to be a member. The membership fee was a gift to the 15th charter member.

Finally on February 11, 2008, we became an official branch with all the requirements fulfilled for the Association.

In March we presented monologues of Famous Women, past and present to all 3rd (?) grade classes at the elementary school in Lihue, Kauai where I volunteer during reading. We did Beatrix Potter, Georgia O'Keefe, Sally Ride and Yoshiko Uchida. We wore costumes and had props. The monologues were from the books published by the Twin Oaks AAUW branch in CA.

In April we sent letters and emails to congress women and men to support the pay equity act. Members and guests were invited to a pot luck lunch at the membership chair's house in May. Election of officers was followed by a presentation of the monologues of famous women. Several women joined the branch. We displayed our new branch certificate and AAUW banner.

During the summer the members passed out voter registration forms, addressed and stamped envelopes, and the Power of One Vote cards at two Big Save Markets. They were the only businesses that would allow us to pass out information without charging a fee..

Debbie Gochros did a power point presentation of her education trip to Europe. She bought many artifacts from different places to be used in the classroom. Two members were honored for the Equality Day. One member for being the CEO of her own management business and the other member for being appointed as pastor of a church.

In September we paid the airfare for Heather McMillen to come to speak to our branch members and guests. She was a recent graduate with a PHD in Anthropology from the U. of HI, Manoa, in Honolulu, HI. She was the recipient of the Hawaii Pacific American Fellowship to complete her PHD thesis. The HI Division had competed this American Fellowship in the 90's when I was State EF chair. It took 6 years to mass the \$100,000. Heather spoke on "Medicinal Plants and Conservation in Tanzania." (She lived in Tanzania while her parents were missionary teachers.) A potluck lunch followed. The EF chair had a silent auction. Used books were sold for LAF.

Our walking-hiking group participated in several charity walks during the summer and fall. The group also participated in the wonder walk (guided hike) at Kokee State Park this summer.

For Make A Difference Day we took items that were on the Wish List of the Women's Abuse Center. We also took flowering plants, vegetable plants and gardening tools to put in a garden for the Center. The guests of the Center helped by watering the plants.

In Dec. we had a breakfast meeting at a cafe owned and operated by a former CA. AAUW member. She is usually closed on Saturday but opened the Cafe for us and served us a lovely breakfast buffet. Nancy Golden, a member of our branch and founder of Nana's House, a family support center in Waimea spoke. Members made contributions towards gifts for a family we had adopted for Christmas from Nana's House. With the contributions, gift cards for the 5 children and the mother and the father, and a complete turkey dinner were purchased and delivered. Helen, the owner of the cafe, is now a branch member.