

Trailblazing a path for next generation

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(Peter Hvizdak - New Haven Register)

Members of the Joint Meeting of the Shoreline and Lower Connecticut Valley American Association of University Women at the Acton Public Library in Old Saybrook. From far left to right: Co-chair Barbara Dunham of Madison, Mary Mazur of Hadlyme, Claudia Workman of Old Lyme, Deborah DeHertogh of Old Saybrook, Barbara Hall of Essex, Barbara D'Agostino of Old Saybrook, Sara Keaney of Old Saybrook, Sharon Howell of Old Saybrook; and Elaine Quayle of Guilford.

Local branch of AAUW to host fellowship recipients in Clinton

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CLINTON » They raised \$156,413 so Marie Curie could purchase one gram of radium to continue

the experiments that would forever change the course of science. They provided the funding that allowed Rachel Carson to publish the pioneering work "Silent Spring." And a fellowship for Dr.

Joyce Brothers that enabled the iconic pop psychologist to finish her dissertation.

To that illustrious list of recipients awarded fellowships by the American Association of Univer-

sity Women (AAUW), add graduate students Erin Marceno and Wafa Mohamed Elmannai, who will be discussing their innovative projects at Clinton's Henry Carter Hull Library on Wednesday, April 20.

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The presentations, which will be held at the annual meeting of the Shoreline Connecticut and Lower Connecticut Valley branches, are a highlight of the year, according to Guilford's Elaine Quayle, the co-chair, along with Madison's Barbara Dunham, of the Education Opportunity Fund for the Shoreline branch of the AAUW.

It's quite simple, said Quayle, a former editor, who got involved with AAUW because of the lively curiosity of its members and its commitment to helping women of all ages realize their aspirations.

And, with the fellowship recipients, she added, "we get the opportunity to see

that our work is having its intended effect."

Specifically, a planned pedestrian link between a commercial district and a park in New Britain that Marceno, who's pursuing a Master of Architecture degree at the University of Hartford, is designing. And the advanced use of sensors for health monitoring that Elmannai, a University of Bridgeport doctoral student in computer science and engineering, has been developing.

Both Marceno and Elmannai, who were selected by a national panel, follow in the tradition of such distinguished figures as the anthropologist Margaret Mead; Eudora Welty, the Pulitzer Prize-winning writer; and Challenger astronaut Judith Resnik, who earned an AAUW fellowship to complete her dis-

sertation in electrical engineering at a time when few women chose that path.

While she tragically died in 1984 when the space shuttle Challenger exploded during its launch, Resnik ushered in a steady increase in the number of female astronauts: 50% of the 2013 class of astronaut candidates were women, according to the NASA website.

Resnik's continuing status as role model and trailblazer is also in accord with the "Women and Leadership" theme of the AAUW's annual convention on Saturday, April 23 in Madison. The event will feature a series of guest speakers and panel discussions on the subject.

Not to mention programs like the Tech Savvy initiative at Trinity College in February, a daylong ex-

perience designed to inspire girls in sixth through ninth grades to consider careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and math, or STEM, said Alice Reitz, state co-president of the AAUW and financial advisor.

It's not just the hands-on workshop in the morning in robotics and computer modeling. Or the "daily life skills," as Reitz put it, that the 142 participating students focused on through the afternoon, such as critical thinking, sharing opinions, and public speaking.

Above all, "it's a crucial opportunity for the next generation of girls in STEM to meet real women who are succeeding in fields in which woman are historically underrepresented," said Reitz.

"By eating with an engineer or snacking with

a scientist, they can get a road map on what they need to do to succeed in where they want to go."

STEM is emblematic of AAUW's mission since 1881: to support the education and careers of women through fellowships and grants, whether by raising money to assist scholars displaced by the Nazi-led occupation and unable to continue their work, or tripling the number of awards after the GI Bill opened doors for women.

To date AAUW has awarded more than \$100 million to female scholars. In the 2015-2016 academic year, AAUW is providing more than \$4 million in funding for outstanding women.

"We want to recognize girls and women of promise," said Reitz. "We want

to help foster a belief in themselves, in what they can do. It's as easy as giving that extra measure of support and guidance."

If that support means that Erin Marceno or Wafa Mohamed Elmannai will become the next Marie Curie or Rachel Carson in her field, so much the better.

The AAUW fellowship recipients attending universities in Connecticut, Erin Marceno and Wafa Mohamed Elmannai, will discuss their studies and projects at the annual joint meeting of the AAUW Shoreline Connecticut and Lower Connecticut branches at the Henry Carter Hull Library, 10 Killingworth Turnpike, Clinton at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 20.