

Forum Concludes Dialogue on Degree Requirement

by Jodi Lipson

Should AAUW retain its degree requirement? Members in branches, states, and regions across the country have debated that question since the 1997 convention. And the response has overwhelmingly been, "Yes." A Sunday afternoon membership forum opened the question for discussion again, before completing a member-mandated two-year dialogue.

Anyone who holds a baccalaureate degree from an accredited university can join AAUW. But a number of delegates to the 1997 convention called for change, arguing that the degree requirement was a barrier to many people who support AAUW's mission and could contribute to its advancement. A resolution called for dialogue among members ending in a forum at the 1999 convention.

More than 600 branches as well as states, regions, members-at-large, and student affiliates participated in the discussions.

However, Sunday's forum showed differences of opinion remain.

Neola Waller, Virginia AAUW president, defended the degree requirement as helpful to state lobbying: "A lot of legislators ask, 'What is AAUW? Who are you?' In describing ourselves, we always say we are a national organization of women college graduates. If we change our membership, that would dilute our influence in the state house."

Nann Hilyard of Illinois, a member of the AAUW Public Policy Committee, took the other side. "I do not believe that having no college degree would cheapen the organization," she said. "But I commend the process. I think the results are in, and we can now put this matter to rest and work on our priority issues." ❖



Photo by Judy G. Rolfe

Left to right, AAUW construction workers Geraldyn Wicker, Adrienne Smith, Barbara Hyle, and Nancy Rustad don hard hats and prepare to apply their power tools to membership development.

Time to Get to Work, Say Membership Leaders

by Jodi Lipson

Rocking to "You've Got the Power," Membership Vice President Nancy Rustad stood on stage and stripped off her jacket, exposing a neon safety vest. Membership Committee members Adrienne Smith, Barbara Hyle, and Geraldyn Wicker, in look-alike vests, joined the line, adjusting their yellow hard hats, maneuvering their sanders and hammers, and stepping around bright orange pylons.

What does all that have to do with membership?

Plenty.

The membership plenary, which took place Sunday afternoon, provided several new tools for membership development.

A bright new membership brochure is aimed at branch membership. "Purple!" said Rustad with obvious delight. A Membership Tool Kit, part of AAUW's new Leadership Library, is designed to help MVPs strategize to recruit and retain members. And three new pilot programs are aimed at diversifying AAUW's membership.

Member-at-large Adrienne Smith, a younger member who has been active on the national leader

ship level, encouraged branches to apply for a pilot to recruit young professionals. Branches should be prepared to make a two-year commitment to recruiting and retaining professional women under 40.

Geraldyn Wicker, who expanded the Centennial (DC) Branch from eight to 88 members, talked about a leadership program for student affiliates, where branches would offer students internships related to their fields of study.

Barbara Hyle, who helped the Boston Branch grow by 22 percent, introduced a "give a grad a free membership" pilot program.

Those are the tools. But it's the members who've got the power.

"Since the beginning of AAUW, its power has been in the branch members who built it from a handful of interested women to the vast network that it is today," said Rustad.

"It is your energy, your excitement, your enthusiasm, your creativity that makes the difference," said Rustad. "It's you connecting with people in your community. It's you providing the connections that are needed to launch this powerful network of educated women into the national force it can be."

Let's get to work! ❖