



Northwoods News - December 2025

MESSAGE FROM OUR CO-PRESIDENTS ANDREA AND LINDA

Greetings, Branch Members!

The holiday season has started and snow has arrived! As we gather together in warmth and community, it's a perfect time to reflect on how AAUW connects us—locally, across Minnesota, and nationwide. Many members have asked us about the difference between AAUW National, AAUW MN, and our local branch, so let's clarify how each level works together to advance equity for women and girls."

National AAUW

Role: Strategic leadership, advocacy, research, and funding

- **Sets the overall mission and strategic plan** for the organization, including national priorities like education equity, economic security, and leadership development.
- **Conducts and publishes research** on gender equity issues, such as pay gaps, education access, and workplace discrimination.

- **Advocates at the federal level** for policies that support women and girls, including lobbying efforts and public policy campaigns.
- **Manages national programs and fellowships**, including grants for individuals and community projects.
- **Provides resources and tools** for state and branch leaders, such as branding materials, fundraising guidelines, and leadership training.

State AAUWs

Role: Regional coordination, policy advocacy, and support for branches

- **Serve as a bridge between national and local branches**, helping implement national initiatives at the state level.
- **Advocate for state-level legislation** aligned with AAUW's mission, such as education funding or workplace protections.
- **Organize statewide events and conferences**, bringing together members from various branches.
- **Support and mentor branches**, offering leadership development, fundraising strategies, and program coordination.

Branch AAUWs

Role: Local engagement, community programs, and member activities

- **Operate at the community level**, hosting events, workshops, and programs for the community.
- **Engage members directly** through speaker programs, scholarship programs, and volunteer opportunities benefiting the community.
- **Implement AAUW initiatives locally**, such as STEM education for girls, candidate forums, or voter registration/education drives.
- **Fundraise and award local scholarships**, often supporting nontraditional students or women returning to school.

Summary

National – Strategy and advocacy through research, lobbying, grants, national campaigns

State – Regional Coordination through state policy, branch support, statewide events

Branch – Local community engagement through member activities, local programs, scholarships

In keeping with AAUW National's campaigns, we encourage you to sign up to get regular Two-Minute Activist alerts on when and how to engage on pressing issues.

Link:

AAUW Action Network – AAUW : Empowering Women Since 1881

As we close out 2025, we reflect on the strides our branch has made in supporting women and girls with scholarships and our programs. December is a time for gratitude, celebration, and planning for the year ahead. Thank you so much to all members who have contributed their time, energy, and resources this year.

We hope to see all of you at our **December Silent Auction/Bucket Raffle Holiday Gathering on Tuesday, December 9, at the GEL**. Come early at 5:00 for social time (and early bidding) with the branch meeting starting at 5:30. There will be NO ZOOM option for this holiday meeting as it will be largely social time while we bid on silent auction items and win prizes in the raffle drawings. **Please feel free to bring friends to the meeting**. Hope to see you there!

Andrea and Linda

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Branch meetings are held the second Tuesday, 5:30 pm, Grand Ely Lodge.

December 9:

Holiday celebration with auction and raffle.

January 13:

Ryan Stewart and Karl Kubiak, the Huckleberry Housing Community (the HUCK).

February 10:

Kristin Anthony, Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Ely (HRA).

March 10:

Florencia Sund, owner of Zone 3 Gardens, Landscape Company, will present

on intentional gardening with pollinator-friendly plants.

April 14:

Annual Meeting and 100th Anniversary Celebration of the Ely AAUW Branch.

May 12:

End-of-year banquet and silent auction.

If you need a ride to a meeting or event, please be sure to contact Linda Sutton!

BOARD MEETINGS are held the Monday after the branch meeting each month.

PUBLIC POLICY meetings are held the first and third Tuesdays of every month, 3 pm at Grace Lutheran Church in Ely.

PUBLIC POLICY

By Mary Setterholm

The Public Policy Committee works on social justice issues within our community and advocates in support of the AAUW mission to advance gender equity for women and girls. Any AAUW Ely branch member can participate in the Public Policy Committee.

At the 2025 AAUW Minnesota meeting, a resolution (submitted by our Ely branch) was passed that requires all Minnesota AAUW branches to work toward fostering a sense of safety and support for LGBTQIA+ residents and visitors in our community. In an effort to define how we foster safety and support, we spend time learning from experienced individuals in our area about challenges faced by gender diverse individuals, resources available to assist them, and how to be better allies, locally and through national advocacy. Spending the time to learn and understand is important to assure

our advocacy efforts hit their mark and are actually a betterment for the community and our branch.

Last month, we shared some of the work that the Public Policy committee has been doing to inform and educate our membership so we all become better allies for our LGBTQ+ population right here in Ely and promote Ely as a Welcoming Community. We mentioned a few of the available local resources for both LGBTQ+ individuals and their families and friends. One of those organizations, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays), is newly forming right here in Ely. This month we want to share just a bit about this national organization and just a couple of the multitude of available resources they offer.

PFLAG is the nation's largest organization dedicated to supporting, educating, and advocating for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them. Have you ever struggled with pronouns, terms and what they mean? What is a 'dead name'? What does NB mean? What is a nibling? There is a comprehensive explanation at this [link: PFLAG GLossary](#).

Want to be a better ally to Trans and nonbinary individuals? This publication, from PFLAG's Straight for Equality program, will help you learn more about what transgender and nonbinary mean, develop competency around talking about the issues that currently dominate the headlines, become better informed about the challenges that many trans and nonbinary people face, and know specific ways that you can be a strong ally to trans and nonbinary people. All found at this [link: Trans- nonbinary Ally Guide](#)

We are so lucky to live in a community with so many dedicated individuals working to make Ely a welcoming community!

The Public Policy committee will not meet in December, taking a well-deserved holiday break. January returns us to our regular schedule of the first and third Tuesday of every month.

During our activities around our LGBTQ+ initiatives, we will be wearing this T-shirt. See below if you would like to purchase one.



- Short Sleeve- \$25.44 (includes shipping)
- Long Sleeve- \$30.66 (includes shipping)
- Size S M L XL 2XL

If you would like one, there will be a form at the December meeting to fill in Name, sleeve length S (short) or L (long), and size. If you won't be at the meeting, send a check to Mary Setterholm, 550 Riverview Road, Ely MN 55731 with that information.

YOUR VOICE STARTS IN JANUARY

By Denise Case

Most people think elections happen in November. In truth, much of the work--and many decisions--begin much earlier.

Every two years, political parties in Minnesota and across the country start setting priorities and identifying candidates. The local precinct caucus is where it begins.

The Caucus (Tuesday, February 3 at 7 pm) kicks off the 2026 Election Cycle.

A caucus is a neighborhood meeting where community members share ideas, propose resolutions, and select delegates who shape the party platform. These early discussions influence the choices that appear on our November ballot.

Why Choose a Party?

You don't have to agree with a party on every issue to take part. Choosing a recognized party simply gives you a voice in shaping its direction. Those who remain unaffiliated can still vote in November but miss the opportunity to influence which issues and candidates move forward months earlier.

How to Make Your Voice Heard:

- In January: Choose a political party in Minnesota and find your precinct and caucus location at <https://pollfinder.sos.mn.gov/>
- In February: Attend your party precinct caucus on Tuesday, February 3, 2026 at 7 pm. (Registration typically begins at 6:30 pm.)

Bring your ideas, your curiosity, and your voice. Democracy depends on participation, and participation begins locally.

AAUW has long championed informed civic engagement as a path to equality and progress. Getting active early (starting January/February) is one of the most effective ways to ensure your values help shape the policies and leaders we vote on in November.

ANNUAL NORTHLAND GATHERING

Ely branch members carpooled to Grand Rapids to attend the annual Northland Gathering. Held every October (our branch hosted it in Ely last year), this six-hour event brings together members from six Northern Minnesota branches to exchange ideas, hear from inspiring speakers, enjoy a delicious lunch, and have fun!



FUNDRAISING



By Kay Vandervort

December 9 Holiday Party:

We have wonderful items for the auction and bucket raffle on the 9th. Thanks to everyone who donated and who will bring baked items that evening.

Remember we welcome friends at these events and at any meeting. Cash, check, and credit will be accepted for the silent auction, but be sure to remember cash for the bucket raffle. For those of you not familiar with the bucket raffle, you will purchase double raffle tickets at 2 for every \$5 that you spend. One half goes in the bucket (bowl in reality) of the item you would like to win, and you keep the other half to redeem your prizes.

Pop Up:

Keep an eye on the movie schedules. *Hamnet* is coming out soon. We read that book several years ago in our AAUW book discussion meeting and everyone really enjoyed it. We hope to organize an event around attending that movie together.

MEET OUR MEMBERS!

Meet Sharon Kuttler!

AAUW has been integral for me in this past year and a half that I have called Ely home--beginning with the serendipity of an invitation (from a friend of a Dubuque friend who just happened to live across the street from where we had just moved in) to the annual garden party. I had never heard of AAUW before, but at that first gathering I felt the warm welcome, the stimulating engagement, and the intergenerational participation of all those gathered so much that I joined that day!

Bill, my husband, had been coming to the BWCAW since he was 18 and when he introduced me to this area I immediately knew why it is his favorite place on the planet. We came many times throughout our 47 years of marriage, bringing friends and family to experience the unexplainable lure of this place. It had never been a plan to move here, but looking back, we have been making that decision in non-cognitive and intuitive ways for many years!

In August of 2023 we made an uncharacteristic spontaneous trip to camp at Fall Lake. It was a rainy week, and we spent a lot of time in the town of Ely, where heretofore we had only had a meal and a sleep over in route to our paddling adventures. We started 'checking things off on our list' of a place to live, and by the end of the week our decision was made. By February of 2024 we brought our first truckload to the sight-unseen-rental property we had signed on for, attended the Ely film festival, and went back to Dubuque Iowa to sell our home, acreage, practice and most of our belongings. In May 2024, Ely became our new forever home. We continue to feel embraced and welcomed here in so many ways and have found it all to be a very good 'fit'!

The whirlwind of moving here has felt somewhat like my experience at 17 when I boarded a plane (for my first plane ride) from Fargo, North Dakota to Honolulu, Hawaii. I had signed on to be nanny for a family to earn money to be able to go back to North Dakota and attend college (why not Hawaii? right?). As a result of that job, where the father of the family was

a dentist and who encouraged me to consider a career in dentistry, my career goals changed from social work to staying in Hawaii to obtain a degree in dental hygiene from the School of Nursing at the University of Hawaii while being employed in both their home as a nanny as well as working in their dental office. While in Hawaii my plans for education pivoted dramatically, as did the trajectory of my life. I learned about living as a minority in the classroom, the diversity of cultures and religions, and an environmental awareness that connected with spirituality and the Indigenous cultures there.

Moving to Ely has given me the experience of 'circling back' to growing up in a small town in North Dakota--one that I was eager to leave at age 17! However now living in Ely I appreciate so much of my time there as I return to the joys of community here. Growing up on a farm in North Dakota gave me a foundation in many ways. Living in Hawaii offered me another lens to experience many aspects of my life. Now, at this time in my life, I seem to be able to take a good look in the 'rearview mirror' and I feel deep gratitude for it all!

Returning from Hawaii was a bit of culture shock (just as the reverse had been true moving from North Dakota to Hawaii!). With my move to Dubuque, Iowa, I found a dental practice to help me grow in my career and scope of practice, as well as finding my soulmate! We had worked together in a group practice for 5 years, then married, and started our own practice together. I was able to work in many aspects of dentistry in Dubuque, including hospital dentistry for special needs clients and serving as a dental consultant traveling to various Head Start programs in Iowa for dental health education. Besides working in our practice as a clinician and health facilitator, I enjoyed providing dental health education for classes in schools, for direct care workers in nursing care facilities and in educational programs for preventive dental health care for children.

Bill and I both enjoyed our involvement and participation in volunteer and leadership positions in our respective dental associations on the local, state, and national levels for many years. We both worked extensively in legislative efforts to increase access to dental care and volunteered for those that were underserved and in need. Besides clinical treatment, the focus of our practice was on facilitating wellness, education for preventive skills and habits, and looking at the integration of dental health to total

health. We feel so blessed that we both were passionate about our work. and found so much fulfillment and joy in our careers.

Besides dentistry, I love to read and to participate in most any 'deep dive' discussions. I was very involved with Dubuque's film festival for many years and served on the board of a local 'urban farmstead' gardening program and mission for teaching and supporting community projects around meals and food. The 'farm girl' in me loves to garden, which is great match with my love of cooking, and I thoroughly enjoy managing a 'farm to table' approach to our lifestyle. Hiking, biking and camping round out the joys and interests of life for me - always the BEST with the additions of some food, wine and friends!



MEMBERSHIP

If you know someone who might like to join us, bring them to any meeting to check us out with no pressure. Or, schedule a coffee get together for the person and invite another member or two to talk about AAUW.

Use this QR code (or Google "Ely AAUW") to view the Ely AAUW

webpage. The webpage includes a link to our Membership Form (printable) or online membership link and highlights of what our branch has been doing.



1854 STUDY GROUP

As we thought about the Land Acknowledgement we have been reading at meetings and putting at the end of the newsletter for several years now, we felt it could be more meaningful if we provided or shared educational segments instead. A small group formed to identify short educational segments that could be shared at the beginning of each meeting to honor the indigenous community in our area--their history, the richness of their culture, their belief in the interconnectedness of all, and their remarkable resiliency.

From time to time, we may have segments here at the end of the newsletter that relate to what we are covering at the meetings. Over the next couple of meetings, we will be sharing information about wild rice: the cultural significance, the management and use, and the importance of water quality for its abundance. There may even be some lucky members who take home a little lake wild rice.