

TO: All Interested AAUW Officers
FROM: Diane Ehernberger, AAUW-Montana Finance Director
RE: Montana's New Statewide Branch
DATE: August 1, 2007

At the recent Phoenix Convention, many of you asked about Montana's new statewide, non-community based branch. Three years in the making, this new branch structure has offered solutions to several problems facing AAUW-Montana, primarily officer burnout and troubled branches. I hope this summary of the development process and a copy of our branch bylaws will help other states facing similar problems.

In 2004, while serving as membership VP for AAUW-Montana, I found that three of our ten branches were in trouble. One had all but collapsed, even with help from a nearby branch; another suffered from a major case of officer burnout; and the third seemed to disappear from view when their finance director was sent to Iraq. Corky Bush, then state president, asked me to develop a strategy to help these failing branches. Realizing that this would not be as simple as just supplying a bit more attention and outreach, our initial goal was simply to keep these members and branches connected to AAUW at both the national and local levels. We later added a second goal—that of providing a means for a Montana branch to dissolve with dignity while dealing with its assets within AAUW guidelines and satisfying the wishes of its members.

For the past three years, I have worked with our state board and the members of our three failing branches to develop what has just been approved as the Treasure State Branch of AAUW. This is a non-community based, statewide branch that welcomes the members of dissolving branches to remain involved at the state and local levels of AAUW by providing a flexible umbrella under which AAUW activities may take place. Officer burnout will not be a problem as board positions will be held by state officers until and unless primary TS branch members wish to serve in that capacity (see Article X. Section 5). Money concerns should not stop a branch from dissolving as assets from dissolving branches will be accepted by the TS branch with the stipulation that 85% of those assets will be available for AAUW activities, scholarships, etc. within the community of that dissolving branch for a period of 5 years, after which they will become general assets of the TS branch (see Article XV. Section 2). Other branches should not be adversely affected by this new branch structure as no one living within 25 miles of a regular, community based branch may switch their primary membership to this new branch (see Article V. Section 6). Finally, the necessity for the branch delegation chair to state Association conventions—normally the branch president—to hold primary branch membership in that branch has been addressed by adding Section 2 of Article XIV to the bylaws indicating that the branch delegation chair “shall be elected from among those branch members who hold their primary membership in the Treasure State Branch.”

Our list of 21 charter members for the Treasure State branch includes members from all three of our troubled branches. All three branches have agreed to our financial structure and plan to dissolve their former branches as soon as the paperwork on the TS branch is completed and a bank account opened. At this point it appears that we have accomplished both our goals—retaining our members at the state/local level and providing a satisfactory method of transferring the assets of dissolving branches in Montana.

At our next state board meeting, I expect that we will be establishing some additional goals for this new branch, perhaps that of actually increasing state membership numbers by attracting MALs to the Treasure State branch. All in all, I believe developing this new branch structure has helped to revitalize the state organization of AAUW-Montana, giving us a sense of pride and optimism about AAUW in Montana.

If anyone has further questions about this new branch structure, please contact me at di47mt@yahoo.com or 406-579-3088.