



North Harris County AAUW History

In the early 1970s, the Wall Street Journal declared the sparsely populated FM 1960 area of Northwest Harris County the fastest growing residential area in the country. At the time, the public sector was hard-pressed to keep pace with the social demands created by the dramatic transition from a rural society to a bustling suburb of Houston. Beginning in 1973, the 86 original members of the NHC branch of AAUW lost no time in helping to launch much needed community based projects.

In its first decade, the branch helped form Friends of the Library, a support group for the newly established local library. Now three times its original size, the Barbara Bush library is one of the two busiest libraries in Harris County. Soon thereafter, the branch president co-founded Cypress Creek EMS, the first organization dedicated to providing 24-hour skilled emergency care to the FM 1960 community. Branch members pitched in by organizing fundraising campaigns in their respective subdivisions. Today, Cypress Creek EMS, the recipient of local and national awards, serves more than 500,000 residents of the 1960 area.

In that decade, the branch also contributed volunteer work and seed money to help develop the Mercer Arboretum and Botanic Garden, which now has the largest collection of native and cultivated plants in the Gulf Coast. More than 100,000 visitors, including thousands of children, come to Mercer annually to enjoy the gardens and to learn how important the plants are to the environment and the community's life. Further, as part of its bicentennial project, the branch successfully published *The Heritage of North Harris County*. Now in its fourth printing, the book serves as a valuable resource tool for local organizations and historical societies.

For thirty years North Harris County AAUW's Holiday Tour of Homes provided funding for both the association's Educational Funds and grants for local educational and cultural projects. The branch continued its commitment to community based projects throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Thanks to the dedicated volunteer work of its members, the branch's fundraising activities have been highly successful. As a result, the branch has been able to fund national and international grants as well as many local grants through its Educational Funds Program, a tradition that continues to this day. NHC AAUW currently funds national AAUW through the Virginia R. Lyon American Fellowship for graduate women and awards local educational grants from proceeds raised at the branch's annual North Harris County Outstanding Women Awards Luncheon. Some recent recipients of these grants are Boys and Girls Country, Pearl Fincher Art Museum, Barbara Bush Library, The Centrum, and various schools in CY Fair and Klein ISDs.

The new millennium has only repeated the branch's successful history of contributing to the local scene as well as its work for equity for women and girls. In 2005, the branch organized a Student Affiliate group at Lone Star College-North Harris to encourage young women to complete their degrees, develop their leadership skills, and increase their knowledge of public policy issues. Most recently, the branch organized a widely acclaimed "Summit" program for sophomore students that is now held annually in two local school districts. The programs, which bring successful professional graduates to address the students about the benefits of continuing education, have received national grants from the College Board as well as grants from local community organizations.

In summary, the branch has succeeded in attracting and retaining a vibrant membership for 40 years. Today, over 100 members continue to work for equity for women and girls, lifelong education, and positive societal change through a variety of avenues, including a slate of exciting monthly programs, study and interest groups, community outreach projects, local grant allocations, fundraisers, and coalitions with other organizations to pursue common goals.

The year 2013 marks the fortieth anniversary of North Harris County AAUW and celebrates the organization's commitment to advancing equity for women and girls through research, education, advocacy and education.