

February 2026

Volume 71 Number 6

## Lobby Days 2026 will focus on local district legislators

Calling all AAUW Advocates! AAUW California encourages all members to participate in Lobby Days 2026 - an important opportunity to meet with legislative offices and advance our priority bills to promote gender equity.

We are introducing a new approach this year, shaped by recent experience and strong member feedback. In-district meetings will be our primary strategy. For members unable to travel to in-district meetings, Zoom meetings will also be available.

Our branch Lobby Day Team Leaders, Katherine Linnemann and Carol Orton, will focus on scheduling in-district meetings.

For details of the event including key dates and frequently asked questions, visit [Lobby Days 2026](#).

## Resources for aging, disability to be March topic

Representatives of the San Mateo County Aging and Disability Resource Connection will discuss resources available locally for the aging and/or disabled at Mid-Pen's March 14 general meeting.

The session is set for 1:30 p.m. at Skyway Center, 655 Skyway Road, San Carlos.

Kellie Hanson and Benjamin McMullin of the Aging and Disability Resource Connection will talk about places to go to find short-term housing, food and clothing and to provide assistance in navigating and obtaining benefits.

More details will appear in the March Triad.



Although the talk by Supervisor Jackie Speier is free, Mid-Pen members have been asked to register at Eventbrite, using this [link](#), to secure their space at the Feb. 7 meeting at Skyway Center in San Carlos.

## Supervisor Jackie Speier set to speak to Mid-Pen branch Feb. 7

By Karen Large

As a prelude to Women's History Month in March, the San Mateo and Mid-Pen branches will feature San Mateo County Supervisor Jackie Speier as a speaker on Saturday, Feb. 7.

The event will take place at 1:30 p.m. at Skyway Center, 655 Skyway Road, San Carlos, near the San Carlos Airport.

Throughout her 40 years representing the residents of the San Mateo County, Speier has made history by championing the causes of affordability in child care and housing, childhood poverty, sexual assault, suicide prevention, breast cancer research, child abuse prevention, financial privacy and more.

She also will talk about the Jackie Speier Foundation for Women and Children which targets poverty, lack of housing and child care and domestic violence.

During her career in the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, the California

Assembly and Senate, and the U.S. Congress, Speier has supported women's and children's rights and safety.

More than 300 of her bills were signed into law by Democratic and Republican governors.

Recently, she co-hosted a San Mateo County training session on Human Trafficking for the FBI, Homeland Security and local law enforcement.

Speier also created the Professional and Business Women's Conference, which for 35 years, was one of the largest in the nation, and inspired and empowered tens of thousands of women.

She is a longtime member of AAUW.

Speier, who was born in San Francisco, began her political career as an aide to Rep. Leo Ryan, who represented San Mateo County.

She was elected to the House of Representatives in 2008, filling the seat of Rep.

**See SPEIER, Page 2**

## President's Message

# Mid-Pen's president tells her story to empower you to act

By Barb Finnegan

In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson designated February as American Heart Month.

Those who know me best know that I am a very private person. However, I feel especially close to our Mid-Peninsula members because we share both mission-based goals and meaningful social connections. I'm sharing my story in the hope that it may help even one of you.

On Jan. 17, around 10 p.m., I began experiencing abdominal pain. I assumed it was something I ate for dinner, took some Tums, and went to bed. The discomfort continued into the next day.

As a nurse, I tried to manage it myself before seeking help. I consulted my physician, who felt it was likely the flu, but something didn't feel right. I had none of the usual flu symptoms. When the pain increased to an 8 out of 10 and I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep, I asked a dear friend to take me to the Emergency Room.

In the ER, routine cardiac labs revealed an elevated Troponin level – an indicator of heart injury. The next day I had a cardiac catheterization.

That procedure revealed I had suffered a myocardial infarction (MI), or heart attack, caused not by plaque, but by SCAD — Spontaneous Coronary Artery Dissection.

SCAD occurs when the layers of a coronary artery separate, blocking blood flow. Without oxygen-rich blood reaching the heart muscle, part of the heart is damaged or dies.

## Speier

### Continued from Page One

Tom Lantos (who died in office) that was once held by Ryan, her first boss. She joined good friends, Rep. Anna Eshoo and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to put a female Bay Area stamp on Congress.

In 2023, Speier won a seat on the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors 40 years after she first served on that board.

Among her many awards, she was



Fortunately, no stent or surgical intervention was needed, and I was discharged home on new medications.

That night, however, I developed generalized chest pain. Once again, I hesitated – hoping I could manage it myself before waking my son, who had stayed overnight.

We returned to the hospital, where my Troponin levels were significantly higher, indicating either a second dissection or the first one had expanded.

Again, no further treatment was required. I was — and truly am — very lucky.

I share this not to alarm you, but to empower you.

Please learn from my experience. Heart disease doesn't always look the same – especially in women.

Please don't dismiss what your body is telling you. Don't wait. Don't try to push through it alone. If something feels wrong, call your physician. And if the pain is severe – no matter where it is — go to the nearest

named one of the 150 most fearless women in the world by Newsweek, one of the 50 most influential members in the U.S. House by Politico magazine for her work on the #MeToo Congressional movement.

She received the 2022 Distinguished Public Service Medal from both the US Army and Navy for her “unwavering advocacy for soldiers, sailors, civilians and families. Her leadership was instrumental in ensuring our military had the best people, equipment and training.”

## Who? What? When?

**President:** Barb Finnegan

**Membership:** Stephanie Katz and Gail Langkusch

**Electronic distribution:** Cathy Chowenhill

**Triad editor:** Micki Carter

**Sunshine Lady:** Marge Haruff. Please contact Marge if you know anyone who would appreciate a card from Mid-Pen Branch.

**Know of a prospective member?**

Please contact Stephanie Katz or Gail Langkusch.

**Board Meeting:** Wednesday, Feb. 11, at 10 a.m. at the Community Activities Building, 1400 Roosevelt, Redwood City

**Triad Deadline for March** will be Feb. 15. Please send articles in Word, Pages or Google.doc and photos (separately, not embedded) as large-format JPEGs to Micki Carter.

**Two-Minute Activist** — Sign up [here](#) to receive regular alerts on AAUW public policy priorities, including how to send drafted letters to your legislators.

**AAUW Email** — Enroll [here](#). Don't miss any news!

Emergency Room.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the U.S., yet up to 80% of cases are preventable through healthy lifestyle choices such as healthy eating, regular exercise, managing blood pressure and decreasing stress.

On Friday, Feb. 6, National Red Day, please join me in wearing red to show support for women's heart health and to remind one another that prevention, awareness, and advocacy save lives.

She was awarded the 2024 UCSF Medal, the university's most prestigious award, for her “efforts pioneering life-changing science, caring for our communities, and advancing public health and social justice,” according to her online biography.

Please note, this month's program will be on the first Saturday of the month, not the usual second Saturday. As with the January meeting, members wishing to attend must register with Eventbrite using this [link](#).

# Human Trafficking: Watch, recognize and respond

By Barb Finnegan

While large sporting events like the Super Bowl bring excitement, unfortunately they also have an increased risk of human trafficking, according to the three speakers at the Jan. 10 Mid-Peninsula Branch meeting at Skyway Center.

Those speakers included San Mateo County Sheriff's Office incoming Assistant Sheriff Ryan Monaghan; Elizabeth Quiroz, a survivor of human trafficking; and Lisa Blanchard, founder and executive director of the Grateful Garment Project in San Jose.

With three international airports close by and hotels and motels lining Highway 101 and other busy corridors, officials say the Peninsula's geography gives traffickers the mobility and cover they need to operate without being noticed.

Under state and federal law, human trafficking encompasses forced labor, forced commercial sex, and any commercial sexual exploitation of children.

## What is the profile for someone involved in human trafficking?

There is no single profile of traffickers or victims, they said.

What many share, however, is a history of abuse, neglect or trauma at a young age, which can leave them emotionally, physically or financially vulnerable.

They often lack strong support networks or are marginalized by society.

How to notice something suspicious? Watch for these red flags:

- Someone who appears fearful, controlled or unable to speak for themselves

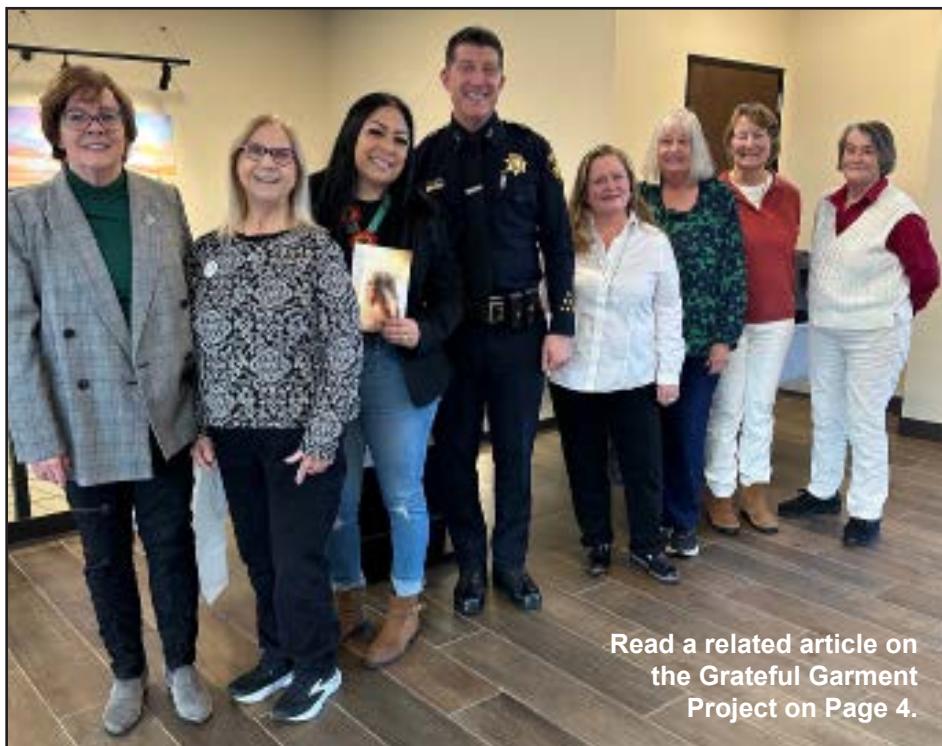
- A person without access to identification, money or a phone

- Frequent movement between hotels or venues

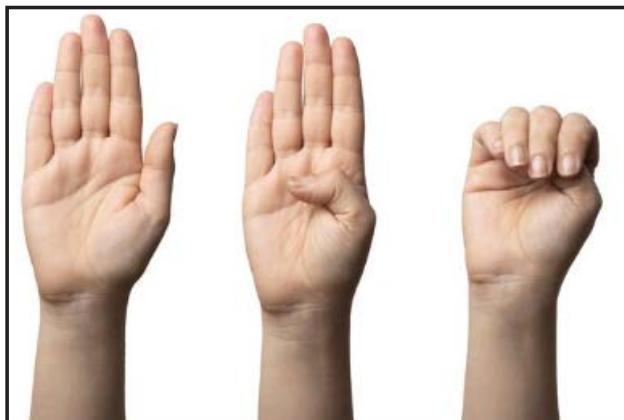
- A minor with an unrelated adult in late-night or commercial settings

- Expressions of fear, anxiety, or unusual restraint

- Victim may give a hand signal to ask for help. (See illustration to the right.) The signal is performed by holding one hand up with the thumb tucked into the palm, then folding the four other fingers down, symbolically trapping the thumb by the rest of the fingers. It was designed intentionally as a single continuous hand movement, rather than a sign held in one position, so it could



Read a related article on the Grateful Garment Project on Page 4.



**The hand signal indicating a request for help. It's a single continuous hand movement.**

be made easily visible.

If someone appears to be in immediate danger, call 911.

## What to do if you suspect trafficking

- Do not confront the suspected trafficker or victim

- Report concerns — You do not need proof.

- Call the National Human Trafficking Hotline (1-888-373-7888 — 24/7, confidential) or text BEFREE (233733)

- San Mateo County Tip Email: <https://smgov.org>

Pictured at the Jan. 10 branch meeting are (from left\_ Karen Large, Barb Finnegan, Elizabeth Quiroz, Assistant Sheriff Ryan Monaghan, Lisa Blanchard, Maureen Buchner and Pat McCarty.

smgov.org (Monday through Friday, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.)

## Your role matters

Trafficking often goes unnoticed because bystanders assume "someone else will act." Awareness and timely reporting can save lives.

If you see something suspicious during Super Bowl events or in everyday life, say something — your tip could make all the difference.

If you would like to read more about human trafficking and the threat that the large sporting events like the Feb. 8 Super Bowl at Levi Stadium in Santa Clara pose, here's a [link](#) to another article about it.

The Neighborhood 4 Holiday Party was to be simply a delicious lunch at Divino's in Belmont.

Wilma Hoffmann could not believe it when the waiter placed a large birthday cake in front of her. What a delightful surprise!



## We raised \$15,251 for Tech Trek! That's just about 80 percent of our \$20,000 goal!

### To donate online:

Log on [here](#).

Scroll down to DONATE.

Select "Tech Trek –Santa Clara Hopper 5043" on the memo line and add the name of our branch (CA-0095 Mid- Peninsula) to the NOTES field.

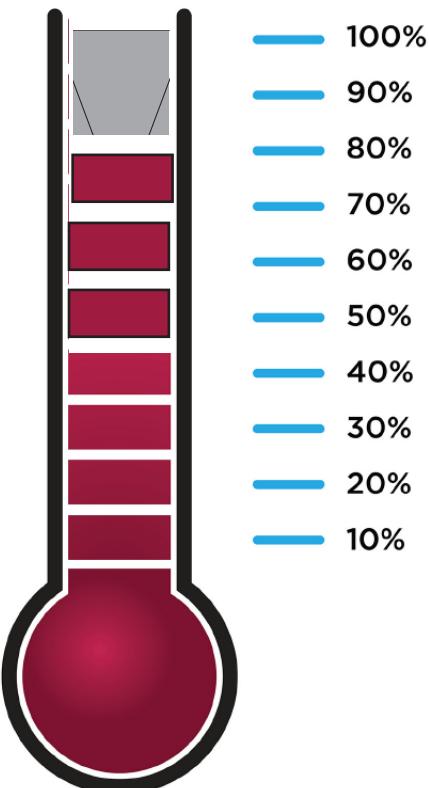
### To donate by check:

Make your check payable to AAUW-CA-SPF. Specify: Tech Trek — Camp Hopper and the name of our branch (CA-0095-Mid-Peninsula) on the memo line.

Mail your donation to our treasurer, Nancy Kucharik, 1025 Lafayette St., San Mateo 94403.

### Additional donors

Donors through December: Wilma Hoffmann, Maureen Buchner, Jane Bradley, Mary Spring, Rashna Bharrucha, Nancy Battern, Betty Skov, Nancy Oliver, Micki Carter and Melly Metcalf.



## Grateful Garment Project needs your care and donations

By Yvonne Bergero

At the Jan. 10 meeting of the Mid-Peninsula and San Mateo branches, Lisa Blanchard of the Grateful Garment Project told us that victims of sexual violence and human trafficking have to surrender their clothing for forensic testing. They are left with a hospital gown as their only option when leaving the hospital.

The Grateful Garment Project provides clothing so that these survivors need not go through this affront alone. Every piece of clothing given to them comes with the phrase, "To you from somebody who cares."

Unfortunately, I learned this appalling fact too when I was called to bring clothing to a friend who had survived a kidnapping and sexual assault.

Lisa created the Grateful Garment Project as a capstone project for her undergraduate degree at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont.

The Grateful Garment Project works with 115 hospitals, shelters and law enforcement agencies to provide clothing and personal needs to 35-45 survivors daily.

However, the pandemic affected TGGP's finances dramatically. In-kind donations dropped 50%. Scan the QR codes to use [Amazon](#) or [Walmart](#) to donate clothing or personal items, or click on the links provided.

The Grateful Garment Project is also in urgent need of the following gift cards:

- Kohl's/Target Gift Cards \$25+
- Amazon Gift Cards \$10 +

Mail cards to TGGP, 1777 Hamilton Ave., Suite 2280, San Jose, CA 95125



## Climate Change/Public Policy

# AAUW California Public Policy Symposium



## THE SCHOOL BOARD PROJECT: DEFENDING THE FRONTLINE OF DEMOCRACY

 Saturday, Jan 31<sup>st</sup>

 9am - 12:30pm  Virtual

FREE  
PUBLIC EVENT  
REGISTER HERE



### FEDERAL CHALLENGES TO CALIFORNIA LAWS

Learn where California's protective laws against book banning, curriculum censorship, and attacks on LGBTQ+ students currently stand in light of recent Federal education policy changes  
*Richard Barrera, MPP – Trustee of the San Diego School Board*

### HOW TO EFFECTIVELY MONITOR SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS

Gain knowledge and skills to confidently assess school board compliance with state law and report non-compliance

*Brianna Mullen, MPP – Education Advocate, Public School Defenders Hub*

### CHALLENGES FACING CALIFORNIA SCHOOL BOARDS

Get insights from a students' advocate, parents' advocate, and current board member

*Ariel Bustamante – Equity and Compliance Expert, L.A. LGBTQ Center*

*Lisa Gross, Ph.D. – California PTA Board of Managers*

*Nancy Young, MA – Murietta School Board Trustee*

### EFFECTIVE RECRUITING OF SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

Hear how to recruit and support great candidates from a national leader on running school board campaigns  
*Kyrstin Schuette – Executive Director, School Board Integrity Project*

### COALITION BUILDING FOR GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT

Engage with two AAUW California Public Policy Committee members from the Danville-Alamo-Walnut Creek branch who formed a successful local education coalition

*Ogie Strogatz, MSPH and Laurinda Ochoa, JD, Co-Founders, Lift Up Public Schools Coalition*

#### WHO SHOULD ATTEND:

Concerned parents and guardians, educators, nonprofits, civic leaders, advocates, equity activists, legal advisors, media, local and state agencies.

**AAUW members are encouraged to attend, but membership is not required.**

#### LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SCHOOL BOARD PROJECT

[aauw-ca.org/school-board-project-toolkit/](http://aauw-ca.org/school-board-project-toolkit/)

[publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org](mailto:publicpolicy@aauw-ca.org)  
[aauw-ca.org/public-policy](http://aauw-ca.org/public-policy)

## Interest Sections

# Two new sections proposed by Mikki Coffino

Mid-Peninsula member Mikki Coffino is interested in forming two additional interest sections.

The first is a mystery book discussion group. "We would read most mystery genres including traditional cozy mysteries, legal and police procedurals, thrillers, etc., written by both domestic and foreign authors.

"Each member would take a turn at leading a discussion, providing the group with some author information and other insight into the book's themes.

The other is a Rummikub game group.

"Rummikub is a popular tile-based game where two-four players (preferably a minimum of three players) strategically form 'runs' (consecutive numbers, same color) and 'groups' (same number, different colors) to be the first to play all their tiles, combining luck with pattern recognition and planning, similar to the Gin Rummy card game but with tiles.

"Players start with 14 tiles and must meet a minimum score of 30 points with their initial moves before manipulating existing tiles and adding to the growing 'pool' on the table."

If possible, both groups would meet at the San Carlos Library in either meeting room A or B, depending on the number of participants and room availability.

If you're interested in either or both groups, contact Mikki (Marlene) Coffino at 650-341-2428 or [mikkicof@att.net](mailto:mikkicof@att.net).

## Team Mah-Jongg

A lively group of members play and continue to learn American Mah-Jongg. We meet Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to noon and Tuesdays and Fridays from 12:45-2:45 p.m. at the San Carlos Adult Community Center at 601 Chestnut, San Carlos. New players are welcome. Periodically, classes are offered for those who are new to the game. For further information, contact Carolyn Seffens.

## Movie Group

The Movie Group meets on the third Tuesday of each month in the mid- or late afternoon, depending upon the selected film. This is the bargain cost day in local theaters.

We attend a movie, usually in Redwood City, occasionally in San Mateo, and then go to a nearby restaurant for dinner. Call or email Gail Langusch.

## Book Bunch

On Friday, Feb. 20, the Book Bunch will discuss *A Slow Fire Burning* by Paula Hawkins, hosted by Barb Finnegan.

On Friday, March 20, the group will discuss *The Buccaneers* by Edith Wharton, hosted by Gail Langusch.

Book Bunch meets on the third Friday of each month from 10 a.m. to noon. Meetings are hosted by members who take turns hosting and choosing the books. If you have questions, please contact Carol Orton.

## Climate Change

The Climate Change section meets once a month on the fourth Monday from 1-2:30 p.m.

If you're interested in knowing more about the Climate Change group, please feel free to contact Victoria Kline at 650-315-6995 or [victoria.klinecosley@gmail.com](mailto:victoria.klinecosley@gmail.com).

## Hilly Hikers

Hilly Hikers will continue to meet on the fourth Friday of the month. New members wanting to join should contact Wilma Hoffmann.

## All About Food

Join us as we explore the history, uses and benefits of foods and how to grow or prepare them. Take a turn leading monthly discussions or suggest a tasting or excursion. Meetings are at 3:30 p.m. on the second Thursday. Contact Carole Farina.

## French Conversation

We'll be getting together on Feb. 10 at 1:30 p.m.. Keep in touch with Laverne Rabinowitz for the plans!

## Walk/Talk & Gawk

The group continues to meet on Thursday mornings. Members of the group suggest walks, hikes, routes and the time and place to meet, and then someone leads. Stephanie Katz ([stk4@lehigh.edu](mailto:stk4@lehigh.edu)) is the contact.



When the San Carlos Senior Center was closed recently, Karen Large offered her home for the Mah-Jongg gathering. From left are Julie Hitchcock, Laura Miller, Linda Montgomery, Karen Large and Hilary Hausman with Carolyn Seffens and Madeline Mindek seated.



**Micki Carter's husband Mike Venturino jumped in to fill two book-wrapping slots at Kepler's when the sniffles felled Micki's wrapping partners.**

## Kepler's fundraiser a huge success!

By Margot Diltz

With the help of dedicated volunteers, the Mid-Peninsula Branch successfully completed our annual December fundraiser at Kepler's Books in Menlo Park.

We wrapped books Dec. 11-23, totaling 80 hours at the job. Our 35 member-volunteers were assisted by helpful friends and family when illness or other issues prevented book wrappers from coming in.

**Neighborhood 2 used the occasion of their holiday party to visit Olive Crush (pictured here) and Reach & Teach in San Carlos. Both those shops offered Mid-Pen branch 10 percent of sales for two weeks leading up to the holidays. Mid-Pen made about \$200 from Reach & Teach, but the accounting from Olive Crush isn't in yet. Pictured here are Cathy Chowenhill, Carole Farina, Nancy Cantisano, Barb Finnegan, Chris Panero and Margot Diltz.**

The total income earned was a little more than \$2100, far surpassing last year's revenue of \$1400. The board has voted to use this money to support our scholarship fund for community college women moving on to four-year universities.

Chairs Margot Diltz and Stephanie Meyer were delighted at the generosity of the Kepler's Books customers and the commitment of Mid-Pen wrappers.



## Law professor to speak on women's reproductive rights on Jan. 22 webinar

Silicon Valley Branch has invited Mid-Pen members to join the branch's annual event, Step Out for Pro Choice, held every year on the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision.

This year it's Jan. 22 at 1 p.m., via Zoom.

No Rights, No Law — A discussion about the Supreme Court and attacks on reproductive rights and justice will feature as a keynote speaker Leah Litman, a leader for women's issues and a very well-known podcaster.

Litman is a co-host of Strict Scrutiny, a podcast about the Supreme Court of the United States, alongside Melissa Murray and Kate A. Shaw.

She is a professor of law at the University of Michigan Law School and writes on constitutional law, federal courts and federal post-conviction review.

She is the author of a new book, *Lawless: How the Supreme Court Runs on Conservative Grievance, Fringe Theories, and Bad Vibes*.

Be sure to [register](#) now to receive the Zoom link.



The Community Room at the Sports Basement in Redwood City provided the setting for the Mid-Peninsula board Holiday Party. Here are Carolyn Seffens, Erika Abbott, Wilma Hoffmann, Nancy Kucharik, Nancy Cantisano, Mary Spring, Katherine Linnemann, Gail Langkusch, Carole Farina, Nancy Oliver, Karen Large and Barb Finnegan.

## Learn the story of astronomer Charity Woodrum

In a special STEM program via Zoom on Tuesday, Jan. 27, at 7 p.m., Dr. Charity Woodrum will share her journey from rural Canyonville, Ore., through poverty and personal tragedy, to studying the stars at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center.

Currently, she is a NASA Postdoctoral Program Fellow working on the James Webb

Space Telescope team. She is also a member of the Oregon Online Branch.

Charity earned a B.S. in Physics at the University of Oregon. She was a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow at the University of Arizona's Steward Observatory, where she earned her Ph.D. in astronomy and astrophysics.

*Space, Hope and Charity*, an award-winning documentary film, was made about her life. We recommend watching the film, or at least the [film trailer](#), before the presentation.

The Oregon Online Branch invites you to join the branches of Oregon, Washington and California. Click [here](#) to register in advance for this meeting.



On the left, Kathy Mountain, Wilma Hoffmann and Jane Meyer enjoyed a brisk walk on the bayside in Redwood Shores. The photo on the right may look poorly composed but your focus is supposed to be on the nine (!) deer on the hillside at Sawyer Camp Trail in San Mateo behind Kathy Mountain, Stephanie Katz and her friend Ellen Stern. Both groups were part of Walk, Talk & Gawk outings.