



AAUW Celebrates International Women's Day

BY STACEY BOMSER

EMPOWERING. INSPIRATIONAL. ENLIGHTENING. Those are some of the words being used to describe the International Women's Day Conference hosted by the Weston Branch of the American Association of University Women.

International Women's Day was established by the United Nations to focus on the contributions of women to their communities. Each year the AAUW Weston coordinates a program to educate and celebrate women in the Weston area. This year's theme was "Women have come a long way: Where to now?"

"Where to Now? Signifies the goal of the United Nations and AAUW to encourage women and girls to pursue studies in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math)," explains Dr. Kamala Anandam, president of the AAUW Weston.

Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz was the keynote speaker. She shared information about President Obama's "Educate to Innovate" initiative to accelerate students' engagement in STEM, especially female and minority students. Dr. Catherine Hill, Director of Research for AAUW, spoke about the organization's programs and accomplishments relative to STEM. AAUW gives grants annually to women pursuing doctoral work in STEM.

In addition to paving the pathway for future achievements, the event also celebrated the worthwhile work of women in our community. Weston resident Jackie Rosen, founder of the Florida Initiative for Suicide Prevention, was presented the Community



The AAUW Weston honored the Harvest Drive with the "Service of Distinction" Award. Pictured from left: Harvest Drive Founder Renee Herman, "Worker Bee" Kim O'Neil, Dr. Diane Carlson, Dr. Cassann Blake, "Worker Bee" Patti Bradley and Dr. Chieh-Lin Fu.

Service Star Award. According to Dr. Anandam, Mrs. Rosen founded the organization in 1986 after her son committed suicide. "To date she has helped over 15,000 people including a thousand teens."

Debbie Zelman, founder of Debbie's Dream, was also recognized with a Community Service Star Award. Three years ago this young mother was diagnosed with advanced stage stomach cancer. While continuing to battle the disease, Debbie is now actively raising funds and awareness. "She realized that there is hardly any research on early diagnosis of stomach cancer and established the Debbie's Dream Foundation to raise money for research," notes Dr. Anandam.

Weston-based Harvest Drive was selected as Service of Distinction. Founder Renee Herman and her Harvest Drive Worker Bees, Patti Bradley and Kim O'Neil, were recognized for their community service efforts. "The Harvest Drive's theme is 'children helping children' and it educates young people about other children who are not as fortunate as they are and how to help those children in need," explains Dr. Anandam. "It is amazing to see how the children get geared up to collect clothes and food items to share with those in need every year around Thanksgiving." Last year, Harvest Drive served 1,582 families in need in Broward County.

The International Women's Day conference also featured an exhibit area with tables showcasing all of the honorees as well as the event organizers: AAUW Weston, Women's Professional Staff Association of Cleveland Clinic Florida, and American Intercontinental University.

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