

LA Cares Project



There is still time to support our local community at this festive holiday season with our branch's project of adding bags of fresh fruit to the LA Cares distribution.

Mail your contribution to Denise George, 411 Cheryl Ave, White Rock, NM, 87547.

Reminder: bag decorating on Monday, Dec 8, 2pm at Denise's: bag filling on Thursday, Dec 11, 1pm at Karin's, 415 Cheryl.

Science Fair

The Los Alamos School Science Fair will be held on Saturday, Jan 24 at Barranca Mesa Elementary school.

Karen Henderson has registered AAUW-LA with the science fair. She will lead our group of judges, but needs volunteers for the committee; a background in science is not required.

Contact Karen at (505-695-0247, KOH7X@yahoo.com) to volunteer. Come to support the youth of our community.

Branch Anniversary – 75 Years!

Our branch will reach a major milestone in 2026: our 75th anniversary in AAUW. How should we celebrate this achievement? The Coordinating Council is looking for ideas on how to mark this milestone either this coming Spring or next Fall. How would you like to see us celebrate? Share your ideas with any Council member, or send your ideas to AAUWLA@icloud.com.

From one of our Scholarship Recipients

Dear AAUW,

I hope this message finds you in great spirits. I am writing to sincerely express my heartfelt gratitude for awarding me your esteemed scholarship. In this challenging period of my life, particularly in light of the unexpected health issues I have been navigating, receiving this scholarship has been an incredible source of hope and encouragement.

Last month, I underwent a significant and painful surgery, which not only tested my physical resilience but also impacted my emotional well-being. Against this backdrop, the news of being selected for the AAUW scholarship came as a profound relief and a much-needed uplift. It reminded me that there are people and organizations who believe in my potential and my aspirations to effect meaningful change within the educational system.

This opportunity will not only help alleviate some of the financial burdens I face but also empower me to focus on my studies with renewed determination and optimism. I am truly honored by your support and commitment to fostering education and empowering women like me.

Thank you once again for your extraordinary kindness and belief in my journey. Your support means more to me than words can convey.

Warm regards,

Alegandra Pizano Mendez

News Release from National: National announced that AAUW is joining the League of Women Voters as part of the Grassroots Power Partners Initiative, a key component of the League's *Unite and Rise 8.5* campaign. The goal is to engage 8.5 million people in defending democracy and advancing voter participation by mobilizing women and communities nationwide to expand civic participation, foster equity, and build a stronger and more inclusive democracy.

Gloria Blackwell, CEO of AAUW, noted: "Through this partnership, we're helping women across the country strengthen their voices, and shape a democracy that truly represents us all." AAUW is the nation's leading organization for equity in higher education and women's economic empowerment. Founded in 1881 by women who defied society's conventions by earning college degrees, AAUW has since worked to increase women's access, opportunity, and equity in higher education through research, advocacy, and educational grants supporting thousands of women scholars.

Stay tuned for more details on branch and state involvement.

Book Group

The December book is Finding Flora by Elinor Florence.

The December 1st, 7pm meeting will be hosted by Mary Ann Lindahl, 928 Circle Dr. Let her know if you are coming (505-660-2259, moonbeamx@comcast.com). This will be a group discussion with Denise George moderating.

Marilyn Thayer will lead the discussion at the 2pm, December 2nd meeting to be held at Bev Cooper's home, 521 Ridgecrest. Let Bev know if you are coming, (bcooper@cybermesa.com, 505-709-0480).

Nonfiction Book Group

The next meeting will be in April. The book is The Art Spy by Michelle Young.

Great Decisions

Twelve members have signed up for this study group which will begin in February. The books have been ordered. Details of meeting times and place will be handled after the holidays.



Honoring (JEDI) Woman: Anne Raven Wilkinson was born on November 2, 1935 to Anne James Wilkinson and Frost Bernie Wilkinson in New York City. Both of her parents were born and raised in South Carolina but moved north to pursue their educations. The family eventually settled in then-middle-class Harlem, New York to open Raven's father's dental practice; the office was directly across the street from what would become the [Dance Theatre of Harlem](#), foreshadowing Wilkinson's future in dance. Dr. Wilkinson was known for his equal treatment of black and white patients, sowing the seeds of equality early as an example to his daughter.

When Wilkinson was five years old, her mother took her to see the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo perform in New York City. Upon recollection of her introduction to ballet, she shares, "Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo did *Coppélia*, and I remember being so

overwhelmed by the orchestra, the curtains, the lights, that I started crying.” Her mother soon enrolled her at the Dalcroze school to begin her formal training. Four years later, she enrolled at the Swoboda school, which came under the management of Ballet Russe in 1951. Wilkinson auditioned for the company many times, but was not invited to join, presumably because of her race. That is, until her fourth attempt.

Frederic Franklin gave the audition class. In 2013, just before Mr. Franklin passed away, Wilkinson went to visit him in the hospital. He said that the day of that audition, he went to the company staff and said, ‘You just have to take her—she’s a beautiful dancer.’ That was the first time he’d ever told her that... Mr. Denham took his advice. After the audition, he said to her, “How would you like to be in the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo?” She remembers that she almost fell over!

Wilkinson’s entrance into the company in 1955 marked the first time the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo hired a black dancer—in the height of the Jim Crow era.

Wilkinson’s first two years in the company passed without incident. She performed across the United States and was promoted to soloist in her second season. There was a number of international dancers in the company, “so most of the time [she] didn’t have to worry too much” about discrimination or racial prejudice. But when the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo toured the South in the 1950s, problems started to arise.

“I remember one time in Montgomery, Alabama, the tour bus rolled into town, and everyone was running around with white robes and hoods on. They stopped traffic, there were so many of them. There was a rapping sound on the bus door, and this man jumped on in his hood and gown. Several big strapping male company dancers got up and moved toward him. He threw a fistful of racist pamphlets all over the bus before they chased him out.”

When such incidents occurred or appeared likely, Wilkinson’s peers stepped in to protect her. “If it looked like there might be trouble after a performance, company boys would appear at the stage door to escort her back to the hotel.” Although she wasn’t always welcome in the American south, she always felt at home with the company. In a time when her own country rejected her for skin, the dancers were her family, her protectors, and her biggest fans.

After seven years of dancing with the company, Wilkinson resigned, much to the chagrin of Sergei Denham. She searched for work in other companies, but was never offered a contract—New York City Ballet’s George Balanchine told her she “was not his type of dancer”, American Ballet Theatre’s Lucia Chase “barely looked” at her, and the Met Opera Ballet’s Alicia Markova “acted as if [she] didn’t even exist” during her audition. After one brutal rejection after another, Wilkinson chose to retire her pointe shoes and entered a convent. Two years later, she had an epiphany:

“Shortly after that I realized I had to look more closely at myself. The idea of working in a convent to glorify God made me see that I had been given a great gift, a wonderful opportunity to dance, and I had not yet used that gift to its fullest. I needed to go back and fulfill what I’d yet to fulfill. So that’s what I did.”

She began by doing a simple barre at home, and later returned to formal classes. Soon after, Sylvester Campbell of the Dutch National Ballet suggested she dance in Holland.

Her experience in Europe differed greatly from that in the United States. Wilkinson danced with the Dutch National Ballet from 1967-1974. She faced little to no racism in Holland because a “history of slavery didn’t exist there and, by implication, the institution of racism” was also non-existent. The Dutch people were “more

concerned about who you were than what you were.” After 7 years with the company, dancing everything from *Sleeping Beauty* to *The Firebird*, she retired at 39 due to a mandatory retirement age. Although the company offered to pay for her teacher training, she yearned for home. She returned to the United States 1974, and joined the New York City Opera, where she still experienced racial prejudice from artistic staff members. Nevertheless, she asserted that she is glad she returned to the US.

“I love my country and I’m glad to be living here. Whatever the problems are, and there are many, at least people are trying to do something about them. That’s the kind of spirit I love about this country.”

Wilkinson continued to perform at age 82, although she “organically retired” from the Opera in 2011 when it folded. She served as a mentor to American Ballet Theater principal dancer, Misty Copeland, until her passing in 2018.

excerpts from biography by *Victoria Holmes*

Ballet Program Senior

Founding President Dance Studies Working Group

Calendar

December 1,2	Book Group
December 8	Fruit Bag decorating
December 11	Fruit Bag packing

Coordinating Council 2025-2026

Council Voting Members	
Judy Prono	Facilitator
Linda McLellan	Secretary
Mary Ann Lindahl	Membership/Treasurer
Judy Prono	JEDI justice, equity, diversity, inclusion
Denise George	Newsletter/WEB
Nina Thayer	Public Policy
Marilyn Doolen	Historian
Bev Cooper	Publicity
Appointed positions	
Carol Neal	UNM-LA Scholarship
Helena Whyte	STEM
Karin Roberts	Hospitality
Open positions	
	University Relations
	Nominating
contact: AAUWLA@icloud.com	