



Catherine Cox, President

HAPPY NEW YEAR  
2024!

AAUW  
Corpus Christi (TX) Branch

Jan/Feb Edition 2024

## President's Message

There is something truly absurd about the recent fervor to ban books in our country. The situation would be comical, if it weren't so tragic. Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning *Beloved*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Delia Owens' *Where the Crawdads Sing*, and Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* have been recently banned from some of our nation's schools. These as well as many new coming of age novels have been thrown on the bonfire of intolerance. Are our children so impressionable that they can't be trusted to read literature, history, psychology, science, and health without succumbing to the "dark side"? Apparently, not.

If any individual or small group can challenge a book's place in a school library or curriculum or in our community libraries, where might the banning logically end? Ray Bradbury portrayed this extreme in his *Fahrenheit 451* published in 1951, a book that I taught in the 70's, ironically, to Florida high school students. I say "ironically," because Florida is now the epicenter of book-banning, with Texas not far away.

In this dystopian, perhaps prophetic, novel, books are all considered "heretics," because the totalitarian government cannot abide people thinking for themselves. If a book is discovered, it is literally set ablaze. To hide a book is a punishable offense. Once fear, authoritarianism, and ignorance set in, Bradbury's novel implies, the fire grows ever hotter. Intolerance feeds on itself. I hope that my former Florida students remember this novel's warning, and I shiver to think that some might be caught up in the current fever sweeping the state.

A report by PEN America has counted a shocking 3,362 instances of book censorship at public K-12 schools for the 22-23 school year. During this time, our own state has banned 625 books (see link below). If Texas law HN900, currently being challenged in the courts, is found constitutional, students will be allowed to read books rated "sexually relevant" (that is, books with some sexual content, but having artistic or other merit) only if given special permission by their parents. Shakespeare, the Bible, and many other valuable works may be, for many, placed out of reach.

The laws that conservative states are passing, according to PEN America, are having a chilling effect on school administrators, librarians, and teachers, as they feel great pressure to comply with these laws. Some school libraries have been closed for collection review, and some have put orders for new books on hold. (If you are interested in learning more about this topic, please google: <https://pen-org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor>.)

*(Continued on next page)*

(President's message continued)

Fear of knowledge, intellectual curiosity, and the "Other" (those different from oneself) seems to be feeding this crusade for culture cancelling. *The Bluest Eye* is one of the nation's most "challenged" novels. While there is sexual content in the novel, the real reason, I suspect, for its banning is that it tells the story of a Black girl in the 1940s who was psychologically damaged by racism. The novel comes too near the truth of racism to be tolerated. White adolescents might empathize with the Black protagonist and wonder about equality in America, in the past and now.

There is a clear prejudice working in the book banning business, for not only is sexual content taboo, considerations of race, women, gender, and history are all suspect. According to PEN America, the books targeted are "overwhelmingly" on "race/racism and feature characters of color, in addition to LGBTQ+ characters. The vast majority of titles banned are written by authors of color or who identify as LGBTQ+," and many are women. No one's words (liberal or conservative), as former Fox host Bill O'Reilly, much to his dismay has discovered (Filip Timotija, *The Hill*, 01/13/24), are safe until America awakens from this feverish delirium.

Book banning today is a highly organized enterprise. Our own community has been targeted by organizations ironically boasting a desire for liberty, and yes, I am now thinking of the recent [turnover on the Corpus Christi Library Board](#). These new board members will likely in the months ahead be inspecting our collections to see what should be done about the "heretics" on the library shelves, works that voice their own personal truths.

I salute those who are challenging book banning in our courts and those in our community who by their presence and words seek to end the feverish intolerance that is engulfing our nation. I hope that AAUW Texas and AAUW National will take a firmer and more open stand on this issue in the days ahead. In a 2023 survey, AAUW California's membership "made it clear that they were alarmed by the nationwide movement to ban books and censor curricula in K-12 schools. . . ." As an organization that promotes the interests of girls and women, we should follow California's lead.



FYI

## Date Change for April Branch Meeting

**The date of the April meeting has been changed to  
Saturday, April 13, 2024.**

The AAUW Texas Conference is scheduled for April 6, our original meeting date, and moving our branch meeting to a later date offers an opportunity to attend the state conference and our meeting. Since the conference is being held electronically, more of our members have the opportunity to go. The theme of the conference is "Charting a Course through the Challenge of Change." Check the state website [aauw-tx.aauw.net](http://aauw-tx.aauw.net) for details.



Corpus Christi Branch Meeting  
Saturday, February 3, 2024, 10:30 a.m.

YWCA, Community Room  
4601 Corona Drive

Topic: Nurturing an Appreciation of Poetry

Speaker: Robin Carstensen  
Associate Professor of English (Creative Writing)  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi  
Poet Laureate of Corpus Christi



**Robin Carstensen** is the 2023-2024 Poet Laureate of Corpus Christi and has served on the People's Poetry Festival Committee (now the People's Literary Festival) of Corpus for nine years. Her poetry manuscript, *In the Temple of Shining Mercy* earned first-place award and was published in 2017 by Iron Horse Literary Press. Her poems are published in *Dream of a River: Queer in the New Century*; *Odes and Elegies: Eco-Poetry from the Texas Gulf Coast*; *Good Cop/Bad Cop* and *Dreaming: A Tribute to Selena Quintanilla Perez*; *Cloud Women's Quarterly*; *Eco-Theo Review*, *Lone Star Poetry: Championing Texas Verse*, *Community*, and *Hunger Relief*; *Corpus Christi Writer's Anthology*, and many more.

Carstensen directs the creative writing program at TAMU-CC where she is faculty advisor for the Islander Creative Writers and the *Windward Review: Literary Journal of the South Texas Coastal Bend*, and co-founding, senior executive editor for *Switchgrass Review: Literary Journal of Healing and Transformation*.



## YWTeens Holiday Shopping Spree

By Vickie Natale

The AAUW Corpus Christi Branch has an annual tradition of spreading holiday cheer by sponsoring a "Holiday Shopping Spree" for the YWCA YWTeens program. The event is structured to provide five holiday gifts that the ten-to-twelve-year-old girls in the YWTeen program can give to their family members.

On December 9, 2023, we had 41 pre-teens participate in the event. As families arrived and signed in, we had a separate room where the girls could enjoy a mug of hot chocolate and other goodies. Families were provided with supplies to make a few keepsake ornaments while the girls were shopping.

The girls took turns going upstairs at the YWCA to select presents for their family members. Then, each girl selected bags, tags, ribbons, bows, and paper to wrap their presents. AAUW Branch members assisted girls with the wrapping process, teaching about measurements of paper and ribbon and how to fluff tissue for maximum effect.

Nancy Wesson-Dodd, president and CEO of the YWCA, stated that selecting and wrapping (or bagging) gifts for family members is an uplifting event for these girls and that "the smiles on their faces said it all. This day of being lifted up will be with them forever."



# 2023 December Holiday Luncheon

By Vickie Natale

The Corpus Christi AAUW Holiday Luncheon was held on December 2, 2023, in the Retama Room on the Del Mar College Heritage Campus. Members brought their favorite holiday side dishes to share with each other. Several members donated funds to purchase a ham, and Deanne Purcell prepared the scrumptious entree. Members enjoyed the festive meal and the opportunity to socialize. We had 37 members plus one student member from the Del Mar College student organization attending.

A silent auction had members browsing items and bidding to see who would be the lucky one to take home a new treasure. Silent auction items included original artwork, handmade items, stained glass lamps, and other assorted gems. The monies raised from our silent auction help fund activities sponsored by the branch.

This year, we included several unique prizes for the traditional raffle. Janet Blanke contributed two stunning pieces of pottery, one for the first prize and another for the second prize, and Catherine Cox contributed two beautiful handmade jewelry sets that included necklaces and earrings. In addition, two poinsettias were donated for prizes, and the branch underwrote two gift certificates for \$100 and \$50 worth of books to be selected from our quarterly book sales. Funds raised from the raffle are dedicated to the activities hosted by the Community Outreach Committee.

The first-place ticket winner was Catherine Cox, and the second-place ticket winner was Sharon Trott. Congratulations, ladies!



## CC AAUW Holiday Smiles





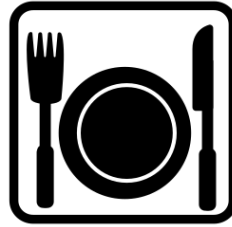


From Michelle Balis

Here's a picture of **Playgoers** at **Aurora Arts Theatre for the Winter Wonderettes**. We had a wonderful time.



L to R: Michelle Balis and Susan Birchfield



### The Lunch Bunch

will be meeting on Tuesday, February 20th, at 12:30. We will be meeting at Chili's, located at 5542 S. Padre Island Drive.



### Wine and Cheese

will be meeting on Sunday, February 11th, from 5 to 7 at Catherine Cox's home. Everyone is asked to bring an appetizer or a bottle of wine.

FYI



## People's Literary Festival

Feb 22nd - 24th

Feb 22, 11:00 am, Session 1  
Del Mar College

## Literature Exploring Mythologies and Literary Villians

Moderated by Kent Lenz



Full Schedule, Location  
Information, and more at  
[peoplesliteraryfestival.com](http://peoplesliteraryfestival.com)



### Wes Jamison

Author of the  
award-winning  
"Carrion"



### Paul McCann

Author and  
Professor



### Annie Huckabee

Author of "Such  
Character"





# BOOK SALE



# Feb. 8-10

*Thursday- Friday: 10 – 5 pm*

*Saturday: 10 – 1:30 pm*

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## *Featured Books*

*Texana, Children's Books,  
Biographies & Memoirs, and  
Judaic Studies*

### ***Neyland Library***

*1230 Carmel Pkwy 361-826-2370*

### ***For more information, contact:***

*Kristin Conlan 361-548-0282*

*corpuschristi-tx.aauw.net*



*All proceeds benefit the Corpus Christi Public Libraries, local women's scholarship funds, and AAUW Community Outreach projects for women and girls.*

*Persons requiring an accommodation should contact the library 48 hours in advance: 361-826-2370.*