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GRAWA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Ring in the holiday season, and give back

GRAWA welcomed the holiday season and toasted the end of decade Dec. 2 at our Annual Holiday Party.

As always, it was a lively event with many members enjoying delicious food and wine, and our unique camaraderie. While we often have the event at a GRAWA president's home, this year's party was hosted at the Greater Rochester Branch of the American Association of University Women's historic Perkins Mansion. Given GRAWA's core mission, the venue was particularly special and appropriate.

Founded in 1881, the AAUW is a national, not-for-profit organization whose mission is to promote equity for women, education and self-development over the life span, and positive societal change. The Greater Rochester Area AAUW Branch was formed in 1897 — before the passage of New York's Married Women's Property Act, which gave women the power to control their own pre-marital property, to contract, file lawsuits, or control any of her property, rents or wages. The chapter was also founded before women's suffrage, and at a time when precious few women even were allowed to pursue higher education. Not surprisingly, given our region's significant contributions to the advancement of women in America and abroad, Rochester's trail-blazing, 112-year-old AAUW branch is one of the oldest in the country. Still dedicated to its century-old charge, the AAUW regularly promotes and hosts many women-centered educational, cultural and social events that foster networking opportunities, leadership development and interaction. Despite their many laudable local initiatives, GRAWA specifically supported and honored the AAUW's Women Helping Girls project throughout 2009, making it both our Law Day fundraiser and the recipient of our 2009 Director's Award.

The Perkins Mansion itself also has an interesting history. It was gifted to the Greater Rochester AAUW by its original owner, Elizabeth Perkins, in 1947. Since its construction in 1906, the home has had the notable distinction of being exclusively owned by women. While she was not college-educated, Elizabeth Perkins fully supported the AAUW's core mission and later became an honorary member. On the day she formally bestowed her beautiful home upon the AAUW she said: "The world is so in need of sanity, tolerance, discretion, wisdom, faith, and love. ... I wish that this house may send out in years to come, thoughts and actions that are going to count in making this world of ours a far better one than it is today."

Helping to make the world "far better" in our own way, it is a proud GRAWA tradition to celebrate the season by giving gifts to

local charitable organizations. This year's organization of choice was the Crisis Nursery of Greater Rochester.

Officially opened in June 2006, the Crisis Nursery is a non-profit dedicated to caring for children in times of family crisis. Family crises can range from the relatively simple — an illness or extreme stress — to the catastrophic — homelessness, an unexpected death, a devastating accident or a mental health incident. In times of such crisis, small children often are at increased risk for abuse or neglect as the family attempts to cope with intense barriers, pressures and challenges. In providing children a safe place to live during this time, stress is alleviated and risk is averted. The nursery's comfortable and nurturing home is open to children from birth to age 12 and they strive to keep siblings together.

Under the care of specially-trained staff, children can reside at the Nursery for up to 72 hours. While there are many necessary and effective organizations in Rochester that provide assistance to families in crisis, the Crisis Nursery truly provides a unique bridge to address gaps in service. In addition to sheltering children, the nursery also helps its families to develop long-term plans to address their specific needs, and connect with appropriate resources and supportive services to help prevent future problems and recidivism. Open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the nursery has the capacity to serve more than 1,000 children per year and provide many thousands of hours of care.

In support and appreciation of their important work on behalf of local families, GRAWA's generous members donated more than \$300, as well as \$55 in Staples gift cards, hundreds of diapers and baby wipes, household goods and office supplies to the Crisis Nursery. I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to the GRAWA members who helped to grant the "wishes" on the Nursery's wish list. The efforts of GRAWA's program chairwomen, Kari Smoker and Stephanie McNinch-Fix, should not go unnoticed: They planned and executed a lovely event in a meaningful venue.

If you are interested in learning more about the Crisis Nursery of Greater Rochester, want to support their efforts or become a volunteer, visit their Web site at www.cngr.org.

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