

AAUW Texas Outstanding Member Award
Koehler—VOTE for VALERIE

Valerie

Texas branches are busy selecting their AAUW Texas Outstanding Member of the Year. However, there are circumstances when significant challenges arise and need to be addressed immediately. This is especially true in an organization like AAUW, whose priorities include "...the understanding that true equity requires a balance between the rights of the individual and the needs of the community." It is imperative and timely to support and applaud the efforts of Valerie Koehler, an exceptional member of the West Harris County Branch since 2006, to be considered for the AAUW Texas Outstanding Member of the Year Award.

Valerie Koehler is a successful business woman, an effective community leader, and a treasured member of the West Harris County Branch. She is not just an observer, but an activist who advocates for freedom of choice. She addresses current threats to democracy that attempt to suppress access to information. Her name has been in the forefront in Texas this past year for bravely and courageously joining a lawsuit regarding the possible pathway to the banning of books. As stated in Publishers Weekly, Valerie "...took a stand against one of the most high-profile state book banning laws in the nation: HB 900, Texas' controversial book rating bill." She received the prestigious Houston Chronicle's Everyday Texas Hero for 2023 designation for "...her brave and clear-headed arguments that protected booksellers from government overreach." Publishers Weekly also recognized Valerie's valiant efforts in joining the lawsuit by awarding her the 2023 People of the Year award along with another recipient. The

publication noted that there are other states in the process of drafting similar bills, and they are all waiting to see what happens in Texas. Valerie herself stated that she and others are in for the “...long haul.”

As Valerie has personally stated in her weekly community electronic newsletter, “We must ensure that all of our children have the opportunity to see themselves when they choose a book from the library. The library — both public and school — is a safe space where we can explore ideas, hard truths, and seek to understand the world around us.”

Valerie is the owner of Blue Willow Book Shop and is an independent book seller on the west side of Houston. She serves as an important literary resource in the community and for our branch. She has been a speaker at branch programs, provided recommendations to our book study groups, supports the cost of our branch’s directory over the years, given numerous book reviews, and accommodates book club requests. She is an inspirational presence in many local school districts and continuously provides and organizes a variety of authors’ events both in her shop and at local venues. Her up-to-date presentations for all ages in our diverse community solidifies the respect and support she deserves and receives in Houston and the surrounding areas. Valerie, a second generation AAUW member, follows in her mother, Elizabeth Barnes’ footsteps.

Valerie is a grassroots citizen with the civic courage and political will to make her voice heard. Rather than feeling powerless, and just “talking the talk,” she is “walking the walk,” and taking her concerns directly to policy makers. Valerie has the admiration and

backing of other independent book sellers, the community, and the West Harris County Branch.

Please consider Valerie Koehler for the AAUW Texas Outstanding Member Award. She definitely epitomizes all that AAUW advocates. Her recent stance in this lawsuit has brought her local, statewide, and national recognition, as well as given AAUW a broader platform throughout the region. For all of the above reasons, Valerie deserves serious consideration for this award. As the famous quote from the Tale of Two Cities says, "It was the worst of times, it was the best of times." Let us make it the best of times for AAUW and Valerie Koehler!

Submitted by:

Poupette Farnell, President of AAUW

West Harris County Branch 2023-2024

Rose Ennis, Past President 2021-2022

Diana Guarniere, Past President 1978-1980 and
2010-2012

