

Laura Wittenberg - AAUW-OML Distinguished Woman of 2024

Laura has lived a life of empathy, resilience, dedication, and service demonstrated in her family, work, friends and community relationships. She joined AAUW-OML in 2009 and immediately immersed herself in Sister-2-Sister, utilizing her key skillsets. She's become one of our most active and effective members, taking on many important roles, including President for two years, liaison with Saint Mary's College, a developer for our major fundraiser events, and many other contributions.

Laura was born in St. Louis, Missouri, a middle child of 10 children, which may explain her determination, tenacity, and sense of fairness. After a BA degree from St. Louis University, she moved to San Francisco, where she met her future husband Werner. They married two years later, moved to Orinda, and had three children – Heidi, Wendy and August.

She was hired by PGE as a Secretary right out of college, but was given a Fortran manual and learned to program, setting her up for a future career in the computer sales industry. She took several years off to raise her children. When she went back to work, she accepted a job selling computers to large corporations, including Chevron and Lucky Stores. She moved up to Sales Manager, Operations Manager, then developed and executed a new business model of renting computers to small companies who couldn't afford to purchase outright, and large companies who wanted flexibility with computer inventory. This business was very successful, allowed her to use her sales skills, and develop administrative and management skills and experience.

Laura's beloved husband passed away when she was 45 years old. Laura was his caregiver, their kids were teenagers, and this of course impacted her life trajectory. When her youngest child went off to college, her mother needed caregiving support, and Laura needed a change, so she moved back to St. Louis to be near family. She started working as sales manager for a senior housing facility and loved it. She recreated her career as a Senior Housing/ Assisted Living Administrator and became a Certified Geriatric Care Manager. She eventually moved back to Orinda and became the Administrator at Mercy Care Retirement Center in Oakland.

At 63, she again re-imagined her career to become a Life Coach and went back to college for a Master's Degree in Marriage & Family Therapy. Laura is a life-long learner and has many professional certifications and licenses. She is now fully retired from paid work, but is not retired as a volunteer. Lucky for us, most of her volunteering is for AAUW-OML.

Laura has supported if not all of our branch priorities in significant ways. For the STEM Conference, she helped develop the Ambassador program and created the Parent Program for parents of the middle school girls attending the conference. This program runs concurrently and includes a keynote speaker, a professional panel and a student panel. Over 60 parents attended this year.

Laura has used her marketing and sales skills to raise funds for our community outreach projects. She advocated for a branch-wide fundraiser for years, and has chaired a holiday party fundraiser the last two years that raised \$15,000. Laura is a tireless advocate for AAUW-OML. She will talk to any person or group about us and her enthusiasm is contagious. She will co-chair membership next year and we are looking forward to her results.

Laura also served on the Scholarship Committee for several years and through that developed a relationship with Saint Mary's College where she mentors college women student leaders, encouraging them to attend AAUW's National Conference for College Women Student Leaders. Laura was President for two years, has served on the Program Committee, provides the A/V at our meetings, and volunteers for other initiatives – always there when needed. She knows that community is developed through working AND playing together, so she participates in many OML social groups, making many close friends and making many new members feel welcome.

Laura lives our motto of advancing equity for women and girls. Congratulations Laura, our 2024 Distinguished Woman.