

From Our Branch Archives: The Eureka Project

By Gudrun Hutchins

After my retirement in 2000 and travel with my husband to several foreign countries high on our wish list, I finally had time to seriously think about bringing a STEM project for girls to the Bennington area. I had served on a national AAUW panel evaluating proposals for Community Action grants from 1990 – 1994, so I had a good idea of the type of proposal that might receive funding.

After branch president Judy Murphy and I discussed the possibilities, I searched for a young female scientist who would be a better role model for young female students than a sixty-six-year old woman. CJ Brownell was the perfect choice. She was a chemical engineer with ten years of industrial experience who worked at the battery plant in Bennington at the time. She also had some experience with the school and workforce partnership which helped with our planned field trips to local businesses with the students. CJ and I wrote the grant application together and our AAUW branch was awarded \$3000 by National AAUW for a two-year-long project with eighth grade girls at the middle school.

The principal of Mt. Anthony Middle School was very supportive of a series of after-school science activities for girls and promised us any assistance the school could provide. He certainly kept his word: a classroom with two sinks was reserved for us every Tuesday afternoon, the school paid for T-shirts with logos the girls had designed, and he even arranged for transportation home for some of our students living in adjacent towns. CJ and I spread posters around the halls advertising the Eureka Science Club and soon heard from a group of girls who were interested. We were ready to go.

We named our science club Eureka (Greek for “I have found it”), because we wanted our students to make scientific discoveries on their own rather than be told what the answer was to a specific problem. We achieved that and the students loved the process.

In this newsletter and some future ones, I plan to describe some of the activities of the Eureka Science Club in words and pictures. I also want to thank Judy Murphy and Jennifer Kern for their assistance during the two years. Both attended nearly every session and took most of the photographs.