

Blanche Rebar's Lasting Legacy

by Sharon Perrino

The AAUW Greater Naples Branch lost a valued member in July of 2017 when Blanche Rebar passed away at the age of 94. An immigrant from Czechoslovakia pre-WWII, Blanche followed her American dream. She received a Bachelor's degree in Microbiology from the Illinois Institute of Technology and a Master's degree in Bacteriology from Loyola University. She met and married John Rebar, Jr. in Chicago, raised two sons, Robert and Alan, and taught Medical Technology.

Throughout her life, Blanche was committed to the advancement of women through education, a founding goal of AAUW. She championed a woman's right to choose and picketed for that right. She encouraged young women to pursue an education in the sciences—like the Branch's STEM Girls Count program does today.

Blanche was a model of lifelong learning and commitment to education. She was a skilled linguist, having mastered seven languages. Even in retirement, she enjoyed teaching English as a second language and learning. Her son Alan commented "Around the time my mother was retiring from teaching medical technology, she became acquainted with a young blind child. One of the challenges the child faced was a shortage of textbooks in Braille. My mother's response was absolutely typical—she learned to type Braille and proceeded to translate textbooks into Braille that would carry the child through high school."

Blanche exemplified the principles of AAUW, and John supported Blanche's endeavors and AAUW's mission of promoting equity for women and girls. To honor them, their sons and daughters-in-law, Robert W. Rebar, MD, Margo S. Rebar, Alan H. Rebar, DVM, PhD, and Susan A. McLaughlin, DVM, have established The Blanche and John Rebar Scholarship Fund of the Greater Naples AAUW Charitable Foundation, Inc., an endowed fund to provide scholarships for local women pursuing, or intending to obtain, a bachelor's degree or a master's degree in one of the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) disciplines and who otherwise meet the criteria for such scholarships as determined by the Foundation's Scholarship Committee. The generosity of the Rebar family will allow Blanche Rebar's commitment to education to continue for years to come.

Through 2025, Blanche and John Rebar STEM Scholarships have been awarded to:

Avorie Anderson—2019 & 2021. Avorie pursued a degree in Aeronautics with a double minor in double minor in Aviation Safety and Emergency Management at Embry Riddle. She earned a 3.882 cumulative GPA and graduated in May 2022. She planned to become a wilderness pilot EMT. In embarking on a career in aviation, she was keenly aware of the challenges women face in joining a male-dominated field. While attending high school and working at a veterinary clinic, she maintained a 4.9 GPA and a ranking of 21 out of 379 in her high school class. When presented with her first scholarship award, Anderson commented that she was inspired to pursue a career in a STEM field when she attended the Annual STEAM Girls Count! program of the AAUW Greater Naples Branch as a fifth-grade student.

Rebecca Paul—2019. Rebecca Paul graduated in May 2019 with her high school diploma and a dental certificate from Lorenzo Walker. She was also dually enrolled in Florida Southwestern and obtained her Associate of Arts degree in General Studies at the same time she graduated high school, with a GPA of 3.91 and a class ranking of 6 out of 145. She did that while volunteering at Grace Place for Children & Families, where she was in the Academy of Leaders Program, and the Golisano Children's Museum of Naples. She pursued a Biology major, with a minor in Chemistry & Entrepreneurship, at Florida Gulf Coast University. and planned to become an orthodontist.

Lianna Larson—2023. Lianna, a previous recipient, was pursuing a degree in Biological Engineering at the University of Florida. At the time of the award, she held a research position and a part-time job on campus along with her rigorous class load. In Lianna's words, "My chosen major is biological engineering with a specialization in Biosystems. The reason I chose this major is that the career that I want is to conduct research into the world of biofuels and help create more sustainable sources of energy. The work of a biosystems engineer is to bridge the gap between the engineering world of figuring out solutions to problems for the benefit of users and the betterment of daily life and the search for knowledge and understanding that the traditional field of biology is rooted in." She graduated from Lely High School in 2022 with a class ranking of 3 out of 301.

Lian Paje—2025. Lian is a senior at Immokalee High School where she ranks 17 out of a class of 422 and carries a 3.89 GPA. She will be attending Florida Gulf Coast University this fall to begin her studies in nursing with the goal of becoming a labor and delivery nurse. Lian has overcome many challenges; she and her family moved to Immokalee from the Philippines when she was nine years old. Her recommendation letter stated, "Lian is a determined, motivated and hard-working student who will not let you down."