

## **Detroit Chapter by Tanya Davidson**

The Detroit Chapter of the WNBA was formed in 1966 largely through the efforts of Ms. Marilyn Abel, then of Wayne State University Press. Ms. Abel attended an informal gathering along with other interested women of the area during the meeting of the American Library Association in Detroit in 1965. Out of this gathering came plans to organize the chapter.

The first meeting (for information purposes) was held on January 19, 1966, in the Explorer's Room of the Detroit Public Main Library. Mrs. Victoria S. Johnson, national president, spoke to the group about the history of the WNBA. Following her talk, a committee was set up to plan a Detroit Chapter organizational meeting and draw up a slate of officers.

The organizational meeting was held on May 4, 1966, in the McGregor Memorial Conference Center on the Wayne State University campus. Nineteen women were present. Ms. Abel presided, bylaws were adopted, and officers elected. Marian Young of the Detroit Public Library was elected the first chapter president. During the first year the chapter grew to a membership of thirty-eight. From this fine nucleus the chapter has grown steadily and has participated in the national board meetings as well as American Library Association conferences.

The Detroit Chapter was an active sponsor of the Metropolitan Detroit Children's Book Fair from 1969 until its demise in 1986. The chapter has also been involved as a major

sponsor of the Metropolitan Detroit Book and Author Society, with two representatives on its board. Since the 1990s the chapter has actively pursued charitable activities, including donating books to women's and children's shelters, donating clothes and toys to a women's domestic violence shelter, donating clothes to Dress for Success, donating items to a house for women and children with HIV/AIDS, as well as helping to reestablish an elementary school library.

The chapter has traditionally held three or four dinner meetings each year with a wide variety of presentations covering all areas of publishing, book selling, book collecting, illustrating, writing, and marketing. In recent years, the chapter has found great success with its bi-monthly book club, which focuses on reading books from the Great Group Reads annual list. While the Detroit Chapter boasts members who are involved in the book world in a variety of ways, there is a high concentration of members who are involved with libraries. Because of this, the chapter places high value on literacy causes. The chapter supports such activities by providing funds for Seedlings Braille Books for Children and RX for Reading—an initiative to bring books to children in underserved communities in Detroit through establishing free libraries in pediatric clinics throughout the city. The chapter has also contributed funds to the Write-A-House program in Detroit, a program that renovates homes in the city and awards them to writers for residency.

The Detroit Chapter recognizes women in the book community through two awards. The biennial Bookwoman Award honors a living Michigan woman in the book world who has made a significant contribution to reading, writing, libraries, and/or publishing. Recent

awardees include Mary-Catherine Harrison, founder of RX for Reading, and Rochelle Riley, an award-winning reporter for the *Detroit Free Press* who advocates for adult literacy training. The Distinguished Member Service Award is given to a member who has provided community service at an exemplary level. The chapter's most recent awardee was Margaret Auer for her tireless work over the years as the Detroit Chapter treasurer and VP for Programming, as well as her service to the WNBA National organization, having served as national president, national vice president, and national treasurer.

The Detroit Chapter celebrated its 50th Anniversary in 2016.