

From Where I Sit: Welcome to Your Renewed AWIS

By Susan M. Fitzpatrick



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After what was a colder, wetter, and prolonged early spring than I can recall in two decades of living in Missouri, the gardens and fields are blooming and greening. Finally we have both the presence of spring - and the promise of summer. Of course, this is also that time when everything seems to have been done yesterday and I am juggling, (more or less successfully depending on the day and who's judging) the demands of life with the seemingly endless springtime chores required for a successful summer time garden. In the end, I am confident it will all be worth it. By the time you read this column I have every expectation of enjoying a just picked tomato!

Similarly, following the "spade work" of analysis, planning, discussion, and consultation - and much appreciation goes to the many AWIS members and friends who generously took the time to engage in focus groups, surveys, and phone calls - I am excited to tell you about the National Governing Board's vision for renewing AWIS, an AWIS we hope will serve the current and future needs of women in science with the same passion, energy, and enthusiasm with which AWIS has championed women in science for the past four decades.

For 42 years, AWIS has provided members with the lifelong benefits of leadership, learning, and networking. We hope you'll continue to rely on us to connect you to great ideas, great people, and the most comprehensive collection of resources for women in STEM found anywhere. In the coming months, you'll notice we're 'breaking through' with new media, on-line learning programs, and public policy initiatives that positively impact your work and your life.

In part, these exciting new AWIS plans are only possible because of the progress women in STEM have made - due in large part to the courage of our mothers and elder sisters (helped of course by some of our enlightened fathers and brothers). Diversity in science = better science. Our world is finally getting it. While the progress doesn't mean the work of AWIS is done, today's issues are different and a new set of strategies are needed. There are still inequities that need correcting. There are still implicit factors for career success that need to be made explicit. There is still a need to dispel the willingness to accept that women have to be better at what they do than men to achieve the same status. There is an ongoing educational process we all - women as well as men - must be willing to engage in so we all fully value, recognize, and celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of women.

It has been gratifying for me to have the opportunity, during my presidency, to clearly see how it is that AWIS is working on behalf women in STEM at every level. If the effort to advance opportunities for women in STEM requires public policy expertise - AWIS is there. If the issue requires partnering with institutions, corporations, professional societies, or other entities to recruit, retain, and advance women - AWIS is there. If you, as an individual, need to acquire or brush up on your networking, negotiating, or other career-enhancing tools - AWIS is there. The most important insight for me has been the awareness of how much the success of each of the many aspects of AWIS are interdependent. We may each interact with AWIS in very different ways depending where we are in our lives and careers, but it is important for us to realize that AWIS can only be successful to the extent that there is ONE AWIS.

As the renewed AWIS - refocused, recommitted, re-energized - reveals itself to you over the next few months, drop me a line and let me know what you think. I hope you are as excited as I am! ■