LEADERSHIP NOTES: Co-Vice President, Programs

In moving to Portland two and a half years ago, I knew I needed to plug into a variety of activities in order to begin to feel like I was home. Fortunately, First Unitarian offers many such opportunities, one of which is the Alliance. I first attended the 2018 program about Northwest Women Modernists given by Grace Kook Anderson, curator at the Portland Art Museum. That spring, I came to lunch and the program by PSU professor and musician Darrell Grant on “Music as a Change Agent.”

I joined Alliance the following autumn and was interviewed by the inimitable Sally Shorr for a profile about new members. I was soon asked to join the leadership team as Co-Vice President for Programs with Carolyn Buhl.

With the staggered terms of all the Alliance leadership, I have been gently guided through the process of scheduling speakers by Carolyn. She provided me with a detailed folder of our guidelines and deadlines and we met frequently to plan this year’s program, several times with the input of Suzanne Kosanske, who had served previously with Eric Tyrrell and then Carolyn.

Mindful of the Alliance’s mission to “provide regular opportunities for fellowship, lifelong learning, and spiritual growth for its members,” we aim for a program mix of music and arts, education, science, politics and civic engagement, as well as issues of interest to our members. We try to provide a balance of gender, race and ethnicity, but for scheduling reasons this isn’t always achieved. We also try to bring in speakers from some of the non-profit groups to whom Alliance provides funds. One of the best pieces of advice Carolyn shared was to always have a couple of fallback lectures for when scheduled speakers cancel.

Are there topics or speakers you’d like to hear? NOW is the time to let us know—e-mail me at lesterlaura@gmail.com, message line: Alliance Speakers, or call me at 240-298-4211 and we will do our best to respond to your suggestion.

Indeed, the Alliance has helped me get to know lots of the church’s longtime members and leaders. I love working with so many interesting people who do so much to build our church community.

In Fellowship, Laurie Lester

MEMBER IN PROFILE: Sharon Dawson

Seeking Sharon’s front door, I read the poem tacked in her poetry post and scanned appealing book titles in her well-stuffed lending library. Inside, a smiling, life-size cardboard cutout of former President Obama welcomed me.

Sharon grew up in Fullerton, California, graduated with a BA from Occidental College and moved with friends to a Berkeley apartment while campus voices proclaimed the ‘Free Speech’ movement. She took her first teaching assignment teaching young, black children in the diverse community of Richmond; Sharon’s admission of “white privilege” began soon after.

After marriage to a graduate student, she and her husband moved to Japan and Okinawa to teach under University of Maryland’s contract with the U.S. Airforce. When they moved to Portland where both sons were born, she taught at Boise Elliot next door to Evie Zaic for 16 years.

“I had wonderful experiences with the mixed neighborhood. I always aimed for getting kids excited about school.”

Our lucky Kindergartners in the Learning Community benefit every Sunday under Sharon’s example! Noting our “appealing social justice program,” Sharon joined First Unitarian in 2005. Team teaching again with buddy Evie and buoyed by “the wonderful curriculum,” they
**Sharon Dawson, continued**

exemplify the words of author Javier Lanzon: “Most moral education happens by power of example.”

In church or out Sharon “loves to be busy.” Find her in spring in Fuller Hall, often wearing a silly hat with green feathers to advertise our auction. Now in its 8th year, the auction was re-created for us by Sharon and Evie and it is always an enormous success. Their inspirational leadership — and that of the super auction committee — has provided major funds for church projects and enlivened congregant connections. “The auction,” Sharon adds, “is my commitment to this church.”

Find Sharon year ‘round engaged in the lives of her sons and six grand-children; she provides transport to music lessons, cheering at after-school games and performances, activities for home play, “experiences” for birthday gifts, and gelato as often as possible.

Outside church, Sharon belongs to a Quilt Group that doesn’t quilt, a Friendship Force group that invites foreign travelers to home visits, a Women’s Architectural Group, and attends Arts and Lectures with UU friends. She will travel at the drop of a hat.

Profile space may be limited, but our gratitude for Sharon’s example among us is limitless.

**MEMBER IN PROFILE: Wendy Rankin**

Soon after Wendy Rankin joined First Church in 1996, her enthusiasm for the congregants and values of Unitarianism drew invitations to serve in many leadership roles: as member and chair of the Nominating Committee, chair of an Annual Fund Drive, member of the Board of Trustees, and tireless advocate with the Immigrant Justice committee. Born in Montreal and boarding-school educated, she holds dual citizenship papers in both countries and a diploma in education from McGill University. She taught 5th graders in Montreal for a few years, married, and moved west to teach in Vancouver, B.C. where their two daughters were born. They settled in Portland in 1977.

When Wendy participated with a small parent group at her daughters’ school, the group won permission to place a 4-way stop sign at a dangerous intersection. Wendy claims, “I discovered a sense of advocacy and power of coalition building I’d not known in Canada. I was learning how this country ticked!”

Though she professes to be an educator at heart, Wendy’s career path took a sharp turn when she earned a Bachelors’ degree in Health Education at Lewis and Clark; later at PSU, she achieved her Masters’ degree in Public Administration. For 23 years, Wendy worked for the Multnomah County Health Department, as community educator, manager of HIV research and community-based programs, and finally, promoting and writing public health policy for tobacco prevention and childhood obesity.

While Wendy dedicated her life’s work to the welfare of the larger community, she offers the same attention to friends and neighbors. She also holds her familial roots especially close, visits her aging ‘Mum’ in Montreal, and devotes extra nurturing to three teen-age grandchildren who lost their mother, Wendy’s eldest daughter, to cancer in 2018. Twelve-year-old Matthew will accompany her this summer for a week in London.

As summer approaches, Wendy dreams of one more leisurely road trip with husband, Dick Adams, in their ‘Westy,’ a VW camper. Rambling across this continent, they love to camp in scenic places — here Wendy finds growth for her spirit. Be well, Wendy. We wish you and “all kindred pilgrim souls” safe journeys.