

LWAWBO empowers women at annual auction, dinner

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When New Lenox real estate agent Cheryl Colanto pondered going back to school a decade ago, it was a \$500 scholarship from a local women's organization that made it a done deal.

"I think it's great, women helping other women and just the whole sisterhood behind it is very rewarding," Colanto said.

The group, the Lincoln-Way Area Women's Business Organization (LWAWBO), has for years awarded multiple \$500 and \$1,000 scholarships to female high school graduates from Lincoln-Way District 210, Providence Catholic High School and to adult women returning to school to continue their education.

The LWAWBO held their annual holiday auction Dec. 7, continuing a decades-long effort to support a scholarship fund for Lincoln-Way area women.

As the major funding source of these scholarships, the success of the auction is crucial in determining how many will be awarded. Last year, the group raised a record \$15,000, resulting in 16 women receiving scholarships. Applicants must be from the Lincoln-Way area, be in the top half of their graduating class and have a record of service in the community.

The group appeared on track to do well as more than 250 women, a sellout, packed the New Lenox Harry E. Anderson VFW Post 9545 to show their support.

"As you see, this place is going to sell out, we're packing the entire room," said organization president Michelle Kerfin. "Women love to get together and have a night away or just have a night like this where



Jill Ames (left), Stacy Miller (middle) and Lynore Taylor, of New Lenox, check out the auction items.

they can give back to the community and also hang out with some friends."

Founded in 1971, the LWAWBO lists its main goals as supporting the interests and networking of businesswomen in the workplace, extending opportunities to local business women through education, and helping area women continue their education.

"A lot of girls really didn't get much in scholarships," said longtime LWAWBO member Charlene Carpenter. "We needed to have more of a focus on women because, excuse me, the men have always had some sort of scholarship. So this helps."

With the group formed to support local businesswomen, this only made sense, according to Colanto, who is now the scholarship committee chair.

"In the 1970s, women weren't really in business, so in the community, there was a small group of businesswoman and they wanted a club to get together and network, share their ideas and their stories and stuff like that," Colanto said. "So then, it kind of morphed into, 'now what can we do?' And it was decided that they

wanted to help girls and older ladies to kind of get going on their careers."

Some members, like Sue Wolf, have been with the organization from the very beginning.

Wolf, a teacher in Lincoln-Way Community High School District 210 for three decades, was able to see the first hand how scholarship recipients benefited from the organization.

"We just wanted to be a little business organization of women to do good in the world," Wolf said.

One the other end of the spectrum is Stacy Miller, who joined last year after her daughter, now attending Augustana College in Rock Island, received a LWAWBO scholarship in 2015.

"I think it's a wonderful organization. Because she got the scholarship, I then since joined," Miller said. "I was not a member when she won a scholarship, but it's so great that that's why I'm here, I'm trying to get money for the next set of girls that are graduating."

Items up for auction took a decidedly holiday theme with items and gift baskets donated by members and local businesses taking up a whole corner of the room.



Linda Bianconi (left) and Jennifer Maertín, both of New Lenox, look at some of the auction items available Dec. 7 at the LWAWBO's annual holiday auction and dinner in New Lenox. PHOTOS BY LAURIE FANELLI/22ND CENTURY MEDIA



Jeni Ozark (left), of Homer Glen, and Maureen Broderick, of New Lenox, register for the auction.

While it is not yet known how much the group raised, Kerfin said the turnout and enthusiasm were encouraging, though not unexpected.

"I think that's how (we)

started from day one, how can a group of women get together and give back to the community?" Kerfin said. "And it's powerful."

Those interested in apply-

ing for the scholarship can find the application on the LWAWBO website at www.lwabwo.org. 2017 recipients will be announced in June.