

March 2019

Open Letter to WIT Chapter Liaisons

To truly promote the involvement of women in woodturning, a few chapters have established a scholarship for women or underrepresented populations to attend a symposium or class. We encourage you to approach your own chapter to ask that a scholarship be established designating a female recipient. This could be a scholarship to attend the EXCHANGE, the national symposium, or a regional symposium.

Some have asked: “As a 501(c) 3 organization, can we legally establish a scholarship for a specific group? Isn’t this discrimination?” In response to a chapter that asked exactly these questions, the AAW president, Greg Schramek, wrote: “As a point of reference, a non-profit organization, 501(c)3 and others, can give special consideration to underrepresented groups and provide unique benefits to those groups without impacting its tax status. In the case of AAW, women and minorities would have that special entitlement, and, I believe, your chapter would be in the same situation. In fact, WIT (Women in Turning) has restricted funds that are used to provide educational opportunities focused on, but not limited to, women. Recent AAW boards believe there is a huge opportunity for membership growth by encouraging women to be involved in turning and leadership in its organization and local chapters.” If your chapter has the funds, please ask your board to consider this!

Many of us have heard and read comments from women who say they don’t belong to a chapter because they were intimidated when they walked into a room of predominantly “old, white men.” Often there are few women present. WIT committee member Jean LeGwin says, “When a chapter reaches a ‘critical mass’ of women, it is easier to attract and retain women.” So how does your chapter reach that critical mass? This is where you have a role. You can ask for time at a chapter meeting and explain that we are trying to attract more women to turning. Invite or challenge those present to bring a daughter, a granddaughter, a neighbor – any woman who might have an interest in turning. And when she shows up, welcome her personally! Let her know you are glad she came. You can introduce her to others in the chapter. Make a point to give her your contact info.

If we are going to grow our female membership we need to foster a strong learning environment and a sense of community. A positive first impression could be the key to building a more diversified membership base for your club.

If you have questions, challenges or success stories please reach out to any of the committee members.

The WIT Committee

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