



CELEBRATING CONNECTION AT THE SIU WOMEN'S CLUB WINTER LUNCHEON



Despite a winter storm forcing a reschedule, the SIU Women's Club Winter Luncheon on February 7 at The Meeting Place at the Gower Center brought together 45 members for a lively afternoon of connection, updates, and even a little friendly competition.

Interest Group Highlights

Two of our Interest Group leaders shared updates on their activities:

- Donna Wilson spoke about the Adventure Gals, a group dedicated to exploring new experiences and outdoor activities.
- Susan Walch-Pimentel shared insights on the Suitcase Sisters, a group of travel enthusiasts who enjoy discovering new places together.
- Additionally, members suggested two potential new interest groups—one focused on painting and another on photography, highlighting the club's continued growth and evolving interests.

Membership and Engagement

The club is actively working to recruit new members, and as part of this effort, a special drawing was held for members who brought a guest. Elvira Muckelroy was the lucky winner and took home a beautifully scented candle as her prize.



A Game of Wit and Competition

A table-top game challenged attendees' knowledge about the SIU Women's Club, leading to some competitive spirit among members. It was a fun and engaging way to test historical and organizational trivia while fostering connections.

WINTER LUNCHEON CONT.

A Tour of Innovation

Following the luncheon, several members had the unique opportunity to tour the Gower Translational Research Center. Still undergoing renovations, the center is poised to become the only facility in the nation to house all aspects of fermentation under one roof—including biochemistry, fermentation science, an industrial kitchen, and wine, beer, spirit, and cheese production. This tour provided a fascinating look at SIU's contributions to research and industry.



Supporting Scholarships

Thanks to the generosity of our members, the event also raised \$762 in donations for the SIU Women's Club Scholarship Fund, helping to support future Salukis on their academic journeys.

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars for our Spring Business Meeting at the Scholarship Reception, happening on Thursday, April 24, 2025, from 4:30–7 p.m. This is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our scholarship recipients, reflect on the year, and look ahead to the future of our club.

Looking Ahead

The Winter Luncheon was a wonderful success, demonstrating the strength, curiosity, and camaraderie of the SIU Women's Club. With new interest groups on the horizon and continued efforts to expand our community, we look forward to more exciting gatherings in the months ahead.

Thank you to all who attended and contributed to making this event a memorable one!



INTEREST GROUPS BRING FUN & CONNECTION

The SIU Women's Club has been active over the past few months, with several interest groups gathering to share food, fun, and friendship. From adventurous outings to cozy gatherings, members have enjoyed a variety of social and cultural activities.



Adventure Gals Take to the Skies – October 26, 2024

The Adventure Gals interest group had an exhilarating day at Shawnee Bluffs Canopy Tour on October 26. Members zipped through the beautiful fall landscape, sharing laughter and excitement while creating new memories.

New Members Social – November 21, 2024

The SIU Women's Club Board of Directors hosted the New Members Social in the home of Membership Director Olga Weidner. The evening provided an opportunity for new members to meet and connect with one another while enjoying delicious food and drinks. Olga's hospitality set the tone for a warm and welcoming atmosphere, ensuring that everyone felt at home.



"What a memorable way to give new members a warm welcome. It was great fun!" said Nancy Mundschenk.



Suitcase Sisters Celebrate the Holidays – December 2024

The Suitcase Sisters gathered for a festive holiday celebration, featuring a Secret Suitcase Sisters gift exchange, delicious food, and reindeer games with prizes. The event was filled with joy and laughter, making for a perfect end to the year.

Earlier in November, the group also enjoyed a Christmas Barn Craft Tour in Massac County, visiting eight or nine different stops featuring antiques, upcycled goods, and handmade crafts. Many members found treasures to take home, but humorously noted that they did not purchase the lovely sweaters they tried on.

Meet n' Eat Holiday Gathering – December 11, 2024

The Meet n' Eat interest group met at St. Nicholas Brewing Co. MDH on December 11, where members enjoyed a festive meal together. Sue Burroughs brought Santa hats, adding to the holiday cheer.



INTEREST GROUPS CONT.



Winery of the Month Visits Alto Vineyards and Owl Creek – November & December 2024

The Winery of the Month group enjoyed a November visit to Alto Vineyards, where Karen Renzaglia shared its history, led a wine tasting, and hosted a production tour before members relaxed with wine, snacks, and live music by Ivas John.

In December, the group gathered at Owl Creek Vineyard for an afternoon of conversation, wine, cider, snacks, and live music in a cozy setting.

Scrabble Group Welcomes New Member – November 2024

The Scrabble interest group met at Lilly Crane's home in November for a highly competitive game. Mary Pohlmann and Kitty Trescott tied for first place, with Lilly Crane finishing just one point behind. The group also welcomed new member Emi Hayashi.



Knitting & Stitching Group – January 2025

The Knitting & Stitching interest group met at the home of Kristine McGuire for a cozy afternoon of needlework and conversation. Members worked on various crafts, including needlepoint, cross-stitch, knitting, and thread art. The gathering included breaks for socializing and enjoying treats provided by the hostess.

Welcoming Newcomers Dinner Group at Tres Hombres – January 2025

The Welcoming Newcomers Dinner Group kicked off the new year with a gathering at Tres Hombres in January. Ten members attended, enjoying lively conversation and getting to know a few new members.

The restaurant had recently renovated its dining room and updated its menu. The evening was a wonderful success, with friendship and connection taking center stage.



Cinema Group Sees "A Complete Unknown" – January 26, 2025

The Cinema interest group watched A Complete Unknown on January 26. Though only two members were able to attend, the film was described as incredible and well worth the outing.

Save the Date! The **Spring Business Meeting** at the Scholarship Reception on **Thurs, April 24, from 4:30–7 p.m.** This will be a wonderful opportunity to celebrate our scholarship recipients, reflect on the year, and look ahead to the future of the SIU Women's Club.

MEMBERS MATTER: THE POWER OF CONNECTION

At the SIU Women's Club, our members truly matter. We're excited to highlight some of our new and long-standing members who make our club so special!



Member Spotlight: Stellah Nakiranda

Stellah, a 2024 SIU graduate in Professional Media and Media Management, is already making an impact as the Social Media Coordinator for the SIU Foundation. She joined the SIU Women's Club in 2025 and is excited about the friendships, activities, and leadership opportunities the club offers.

"I love the idea of women coming together to support each other in all aspects of life while having fun," she says. "Even though I just joined, I'm excited to meet more amazing women and learn from experienced members."

In her free time, Stellah enjoys evening walks, movies, reading, singing, and dancing—a talent she puts to use when she needs a mood boost. "Whenever I'm stressed or sad, I make dancing videos—it always cheers me up!"

With her passion for creativity and connection, Stellah looks forward to growing within the SIU Women's Club and taking on leadership roles in the future.

Member Spotlight: Elvira Muckelroy

For Elvira Muckelroy, life is a journey of creativity and transformation. A 2004 SIU graduate, she is the founder of Sunflower Girl Skincare and a photographer dedicated to helping women embrace their beauty. Since joining the SIU Women's Club in 2016, she has cherished its sisterhood and support.

"It's a ready-made circle of friends where women come together to support one another and share fun experiences and passions," she says.

Since leaving the traditional workforce in 2021, Elvira has redefined free time, balancing homeschooling, creative projects, and entrepreneurship. Whether behind the camera or crafting natural skincare, she thrives on self-growth and innovation.

At 25, she made the bold move from Russia to Southern Illinois, and now, in 2025, she reaches a unique milestone—equal halves of her life spent in both countries. "I thrive in challenges that push me to grow and remind me of what I'm capable of," she shares.

Through her entrepreneurial spirit, artistry, and deep connection to others, Elvira embodies the heart of the SIU Women's Club—always evolving, always inspiring.



To become an SIU Women's Club member, scan this QR code with your smartphone or visit bit.ly/siu-womens-membership.

MEMBERS MATTER CONT.

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Member Spotlight: Evelyn Aden

With three SIU degrees (2015, 2020, 2022) under her belt, Evelyn Aden stays busy as a tutor at RLC and the owner of Eaden Imaging, LLC. She joined the SIU Women's Club in 2024 and has found a welcoming and supportive space.

"Social gatherings can be overwhelming for me, but when I asked for help, the club organizers were so kind and supportive," she shares. "Each time I meet new members, it just gets better. Everyone is so genuinely interested in making me feel at home."

A multi-passionate creative, Evelyn enjoys photography, design, illustration, crafting, reading, and gaming. She also loves visiting breweries, wineries, and coffee shops and hopes to explore more trails and bike paths this year.

She has a knack for learning big words and forgetting their meanings, but one thing she'll never forget is her childhood dream of becoming a Mighty Morphin Power Ranger. And while she didn't join the Power Rangers, she embraced her artistic side—even if it took until her late 20s to confidently call herself an artist.



Member Spotlight: Carly Holtkamp

As Director of External Relations for the SIU Simmons Law School, Carly Holtkamp is passionate about building relationships—a skill she brings not only to her career but also to the SIU Women's Club, which she joined in 2019.

"The club gives me the chance to meet women I wouldn't have connected with otherwise and spend time with colleagues outside of work," she says.

With a second child recently added to her family, Carly's free time is rare, but when she gets the chance, she loves a girls' night out or a date night with her husband. One of her special talents is connecting people, both personally and professionally, and she has a unique hobby—collecting bells from nearly every place she's traveled.

One day, she'll officially be a Saluki alumna when she completes her EdD at SIU, adding to her degrees from SIUE (2010) and Ball State (2011).



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EMPOWERING DREAMS: THE IMPACT OF THE SIU WOMEN'S CLUB SCHOLARSHIP



For Jessica Hardges, the SIU Women's Club Scholarship was more than financial support—it was a vote of confidence in her dreams. As a nontraditional student pursuing a BA in Fashion Merchandising, Jessica is passionate about business, creativity, and community impact. She plans to further her education with a Master's in Public Administration or Business, equipping herself to create sustainable programs for underserved communities.

"This scholarship reaffirmed that my goals—to break generational barriers and create opportunities for low-income individuals and families—are not only possible but supported by an incredible community of women who believe in empowerment and education," she shared.

Turning Education into Action

Jessica's time at SIU has shaped her vision for change. She is currently developing a nonprofit Emergency Resource Center to support low-income and nontraditional students, families, and individuals through financial hardship, disaster preparedness, and workforce transition.

Through roles with SIU's TRIO Program, Nontraditional Student Support Services, and Student Government, Jessica has gained experience in event coordination, student advocacy, and resource allocation. Her leadership has strengthened her commitment to building long-term support systems for underserved communities.

"The skills and connections I've gained at SIU have given me the confidence to take action and create meaningful initiatives," she said.

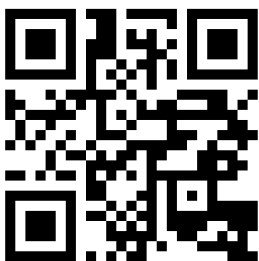
A Call to SIU Women's Club Members

To those considering donating to the SIU Women's Club Scholarship Fund, Jessica emphasizes its life-changing impact:

"Your donation isn't just financial support—it's an investment in students determined to break cycles of hardship and build better futures. Your generosity creates real, lasting change."

"Because of you, I can pursue my education, advocate for others, and build programs that will empower individuals for years to come. Thank you for believing in students like me."

Jessica's story is a testament to the power of scholarships to transform lives—enabling students to achieve their goals while giving back to their communities.



Support Students Like Jessica

Your generosity can help empower SIU students to achieve their dreams and create lasting change in their communities. Make a gift today by visiting siuf.org/give and entering **SIU Women's Club Scholarships Fund** in the designation field.

Or simply scan the QR code with your smartphone to give directly. Every contribution makes a difference! **If 160 members gave at least \$25, we'd raise \$4,000! This would fund two \$2,000 scholarships.**