

Message from President Denise



Dear Soroptimists,



I love Spring. It signifies growth and new beginnings, renewal and hope. I found this quote that I love “Hope is a force of nature. It pulls us through tough times and gives us the strength to keep going.”

The Women’s History Conference which occurred on March 7, 2026 was an extremely positive and hopeful event. Over 100 girls from the local high schools were in attendance. This was the 30th year that Rio Hondo and Soroptimist partnered to hold this event. The keynote speaker was Supervisor Hilda L. Solis. She spoke to the girls about having “Ganas,” the desire to prepare for the future and attain the goals that they set for themselves. When Supervisor Solis was young, she was told that the best job she would be able to attain was to become a secretary. Supervisor Solis was selected by President Obama to be Secretary of Labor and now is a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors.

Supervisor Solis was truly inspiring. Her message was clear...it’s ok to hope and reach for the stars. She repeatedly encouraged the girls to pursue educational opportunities and not to give up. Goals that they set for themselves are attainable if they approach everything with “Ganas”...desire.

The girls had a chance to attend a variety of different classes: Self Care (delivered by Lorraine Quiros), Human Trafficking Awareness, Self Defense, Financial Literacy to name a few. Before lunch they were invited to participate in Petra Schmischke’s Zumba class. Over 31 girls participated and danced joyously to Latin rhythms.

Our sincere thanks to Martha Carreon for helping to co-ordinate the Women’s History Conference. As I was walking to my car, I felt hopeful and proud.

In addition, March 10, 2026, Soroptimist International of Whittier received a proclamation from Mayor Joe Vinatieri and the Whittier City Council in honor of Women’s History Month. Soroptimist International of Whittier was recognized for its dedication to empowering women and girls and for its meaningful contributions to the community.

What a joyous and hopeful month this has been.

President Denise N. Fasheh

Celebrating 100 Years Of Soroptimist



A global volunteer organization that provides women and girls with access to the education and training they need to achieve economic empowerment. Our name means “best for women.” And that’s what we strive to be—women at our best, investing in other women and girls to be their best.

SI WHITTIER NEWSLETTER 2026

CLUB CALENDAR

APRIL

- 21st – **SIGNATURE AWARDS LUNCHEON**, 12 noon, Doubletree Hotel, Uptown Whittier
- 23rd – Board Meeting, 12 noon, Chamber office
- 28th – Program Meeting, 12 noon, Mimi’s Café

MAY

- 1st-3rd – DCR Annual Spring Conference, Hotel Zessa, Santa Ana
- 5th – Business Meeting, 12 noon, Chamber office
- 12th – Program Meeting, 12 noon, Mimi’s Café
- 19th – DARK
- 26th – Program Meeting, 12 noon, Mimi’s Café
- TBA – FINES Fun Evening, stay tuned!
- TBA – Joint Board Meeting

JUNE

- 2nd – Business Meeting, 12 noon, Mimi’s Café
- 11th – Annual Installation of Officers, SAVE THE DATE
- 16th – DARK
- 18th – Board Meeting, 12 noon, Chamber Office
- 23rd – Program Meeting, 12 noon, Mimi’s Café
- 30th – DARK

JULY

- 7th – Business meeting, 12 noon, Mimi’s Cafe
- 22nd-25th – 49th Biennial Convention, Incheon, South Korea

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- *The Next Big Thing!*
Signature Awards Luncheon pg.2
- *Music Bingo Success pg.4*
- *Meet Our New Member pg.5*
- *Women’s History Conference..... pg.8*



UPCOMING EVENTS

The Next Big Thing!!!

Signature Awards Luncheon, April 21, 2026

Submitted by Liz Camp, Director SI/SIA

This year at our Annual Signature Awards Luncheon on April 21, 2026 at the DoubleTree Hotel we will be recognizing 29 amazing women pursuing their education at local high schools and colleges.

LIVE YOUR DREAM Award

The purpose of the Live your Dream Award is to provide funding to women who are the primary source of financial support for their families by giving them the resources they need to improve their education, skills, and employment prospects and to rebuild their lives.

The Live Your Dream Award is one of two Signature Programs in all of Soroptimist International of the Americas Federation wherein each club in the federation selects heads of household women with children to receive funds and support helping them continue their education to better fulfill their dreams. A total of \$20,000 will be awarded to our LYDA recipients.

Jennifer Osuji is our club's top winner and her name was sent on to the Desert Coast Region District I level competition. Additional awardees are Beauty Garcia, Fatima Ramos, Crystallyn Orozco, Guadalupe Guillen, Joanna Saucedo, Chanel Gomez, and Sara Turcios.

LOIS NEECE Award

The Lois Neece Award was named after a Past President of our club who herself overcame health issues. The Club makes a monetary gift to each student to recognize her outstanding efforts and to provide funding for high school girls who have overcome major physical, emotional or

PRESENTS

Our Signature Awards Celebration Luncheon

Tuesday, April 21st, 2026 at 12pm

DOUBLE TREE HOTEL WHITTIER | **7320 Greenleaf Ave. Whittier, CA 90602**

\$45 per person
For reservations to this event go to www.siwhittier.org or scan QR code

RSVP by April 15th



THE NEXT BIG THING - SIGNATURE AWARDS LUNCHEON CONT.

social adversities to be successful, productive individuals in their high school and/or community. A high GPA is not considered essential in the selection, although evidence of wanting to attain success in their studies is considered. A total of \$10,500 is to be awarded.

These seven (7) girls are each receiving the Lois Neece Award: Alondra Ruiz-Michel, Belen Duque, Brooke Chancellor, Destiny Parra, Audrie Perez, Delilah Morales, and Bryanah Gutierrez Gil.

RUTH WHITE MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

The purpose of the Ruth White Memorial Scholarship, named after the first president of our Whittier club, is to recognize and support the continuing higher education of women preparing for business and professional careers. A total of \$10,000 will be awarded this year.

These are the names of the four (4) young women who each are receiving the Ruth White Memorial Scholarship: Chelsea Castaneda, Jamie Luna, Irene Mahlow, and Emily Maldonado.

SIW MENTORING AWARD

The purpose of The Soroptimist International of Whittier Mentoring Award, in which our Club makes a monetary award to each recipient, is to recognize women and girls who have previously received an award from SIW, who continue on a successful career path, and who qualify for needing additional assistance. A total of \$17,000 will be awarded this year.

These are the names of the nine (9) women who each are receiving the SIW Mentoring Award for 2026: Cynthia Nava, Itzel Camarena, Janine Cottini, Christina Garduno, Deserie Vidrio, Jazlyn Cadena, Jenna Serrano, Amanda Galvan, and Maricela Vazquez.





SI WHITTIER CLUB NEWS



3RD ANNUAL MUSIC BINGO VALENTINE'S DAY FUNDRAISER A RECORD-BREAKING SUCCESS

Submitted by Ruthie Flores Retana, Fundraising Director

Our hearts are full as we reflect on the incredible success of our 3rd Annual Music Bingo Valentine's Day Fundraiser, held on February 12, 2026 at the DoubleTree by Hilton Whittier. Thanks to the passion, dedication, and generosity of our community, we are thrilled to share that this year's event raised a record-breaking \$110,000+ in support of our mission, that of improving the lives of women and girls through programs leading to social and economic empowerment.

The evening was more than just a fundraiser—it was a celebration of connection, community, and collective impact. Dressed in festive Valentine's hues, guests filled the room with energy, laughter, and joy as they came together for a meaningful cause. From the inspiring story of our Keynote Speaker Oralia Alcorta (a Live Your Dream Award honoree from 10 years ago), the live auction excitement, to the warm conversations shared throughout the night, the atmosphere was truly unforgettable.

This success was made possible by an extraordinary group of committed Soroptimist women and supporters who gave their time, talents, and hearts to make the evening shine. From selling

tickets and securing sponsorships to transforming the space with thoughtful décor, welcoming guests, managing logistics, and staying until the very last moment—every contribution played a vital role. Every effort made a difference.

What stood out most was the powerful reminder of what happens when a community comes together with purpose. We didn't just host an event—we created opportunities. Because of this collective effort, we will be able to expand our impact and provide even more scholarships, more than ever before, to women and girls in our community.

To everyone who attended, supported, volunteered, sponsored, and believed in our mission—thank you. Your generosity and joyful spirit made this record-breaking fundraiser possible.

We are deeply grateful and proud to serve alongside such an inspiring community. Together, we are truly making a difference in the lives of young women and girls.

Thank you!



Meet Bonnie Charlotte Bilitch, our newest member!



Bonnie Bilitch is a California native who has lived in Whittier for over 30 years, where she and her husband raised their three adult children. Bonnie's professional career as a healthcare executive was spent with the Los Angeles County Department of Health Services where she held leadership positions at both LAC General Medical Center and Olive View-UCLA Medical Center. She retired in 2020.

While attending nursing school in the early 80's, Bonnie began her commitment to community when she lived as a houseparent in a residential home providing respite to Whittier area families with diverse abilities. After retirement, she continues community involvement as a volunteer court appointed special advocate (CASA) for a youth in the dependency system. She serves on the board of The Whole Child and is an ambassador for the Whittier Local Wellness Foundation. Bonnie participates in the annual Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count in the East LA area. She enjoys practicing yoga, reading books, and traveling with family and friends.

Having been invited by long-time friend Cynthia Nickell, Bonnie attended several of our meetings at the end 2025. After careful consideration she decided to join SIW and was inducted on February 2, 2026. Welcome, Bonnie!



THANK YOU TO ALL WHO MADE THE “DREAM IT, BE IT” PROGRAM A SUCCESS!

Submitted by Liz Camp, Director SI/SIA 2025-2026

On March 20, 2026 in collaboration with Soroptimist International of Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs and a member with Soroptimist International of Fullerton we met in the library at Norwalk High School. We were honored to welcome Interim Superintendent Tania Magana and Principal Dr. David Olea at the beginning of the morning. SI Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs President Dora Sandoval kicked off the day with a get acquainted exercise to know each other’s names and what they are passionate about. 21 female students representing all 4 grades participated. Carol of SINSFS discussed the ground rules and asked the young women what they thought was important. A few were “what is said here stays here”, respect one another, listen to each other, participate, give acceptance, and have fun!

We did some team building and discussed what and who we admire and who we can depend on.

The first speaker Rosalie Barcinas shared her story of working part time answering phones at Southern California Edison while going to school over 20 years ago. What helped her move up in the company was that she continued to ask questions and showed she wants to learn more, she was given a full time job and more responsibility. She now holds the title of Director of Electrification and Customer Services Policy and is one of the few Latina directors.

We did an exercise on top rated values and traits for various employment opportunities and career planning. Another exercise we did is what is a value? We learned what similarities and differences we had comparing things like are you an early bird or a late owl? Do you like salty or sweet food? Hot or cold weather? Do you like very structured and organized versus going with the flow and flexible. Noting there were no right or wrong answers, each of these helped the young women think about careers that would fit their personalities!





“DREAM IT, BE IT” PROGRAM SUCCESS CONT.

The second speaker is Patricia Yoon, who is the owner/operator of Yoon Family Restaurants which owns 15 McDonalds. Her story started as a 2-year-old only child immigrating from South Korea with her parents who didn't know English. She has proven that perseverance, entrepreneurial spirit and opportunity were her keys to success. Her father had hoped for a son which was hard for her, so she worked harder to impress her father. She never felt like she belonged but through hard work and training she proved to McDonald's Golden Arches that she could own and operate a franchise. It took 5 times to qualify but now she owns 15 different McDonalds fast food restaurants. She is the only female Asian American McDonald's franchise owner. One of the girls asked her what was important to her and what would she say to herself at their age, she said money isn't everything, work to surround yourself with a strong team of dedicated workers and treat them right! At the end of her talk she offered to give each of these young women a certificate treating them to a meal!



Dream Boards were created for the girls to take home as reminders of what their dreams were and to help them focus on their future. For participation they were given raffle tickets each time they shared or contributed. There was a drawing at the end. Goody bags with journals, energy bars etc. were given to each who turned in an evaluation at the end of the day along with a \$10 gift card to Starbucks from SI Whittier.



We are thankful and grateful to NHS Assistant Principal Christina Moreau, A/P teacher Natalia Valadez, the Library and IT staff.

Thank you again to Sorooptimist International of Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs letting us experience the DIBI program. Thanks to President Denise, Elaine Kindle and Elizabeth Camp for participating. We all need to remember for everything we do to inspire and empower our young ladies. Please let Elizabeth Camp know if you are interested in participating in a similar program on June 19th of next year!





A DASH OF SOLT

SOROPTIMIST ORIENTATION AND LEADERSHIP TRAINING

30TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S HISTORY CONFERENCE INSPIRES LOCAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



Keynote speaker L.A. County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis highlights opportunities for education and career pathways during milestone conference.

Río Hondo College welcomed students from the Whittier Union High School District to campus on March 6, for the 30th Annual Women's History Conference, an annual event dedicated to inspiring and empowering young women through education and community building.

Hosted in partnership with the Whittier Union High School District and Soroptimist International of Whittier, this year's conference theme – Three Decades of Honoring Our Past and Empowering Our Future – celebrated three decades of uplifting young women while encouraging them to pursue higher education, leadership and career opportunities.

The conference featured Los Angeles County Board Chair and First District Supervisor Hilda L. Solis as keynote

speaker. Chair Solis delivered an encouraging message to the students, reflecting on her decades-long experience in public service, which began as a Board of Trustee for Río Hondo College, and urged students to believe in their potential to pursue their aspirations.

"Leadership requires persistence, coalition-building and lifting others up, and Los Angeles County is proud to see vital school partners like Río Hondo College create space for young women to understand the resources and pathways available to them," Los Angeles County Board Chair and First District Supervisor Hilda L. Solis shared. "Events like these are vital opportunities for young women and girls to feel inspired and empowered to pursue their aspirations while making meaningful connections with peers, mentors and their community. This is a powerful testament that the change starts with all of us."



Throughout the day, students participated in interactive workshops designed to build confidence, practical skills and career awareness. Sessions included Financial Literacy, Self-Defense, Career Dream Boards and Mindfulness/Stress Relief, along with other activities



30TH ANNUAL WOMEN'S HISTORY CONFERENCE CONT.



aimed at helping students prepare for their future. Attendees also took part in a thought-provoking panel discussion highlighting Women in Technology, where professionals shared insights about careers in fast-growing industries.

The event embodied the spirit of Women's History Month, celebrating the achievement of women while encouraging students to pursue leadership and educational opportunities.

"This conference shows the power of education and mentorship in helping young women see what's possible," said Río Hondo College Superintendent/President Teresa Dreyfuss. "By connecting students with inspiring leaders, we're helping cultivate the next generation of leaders in our community."

Río Hondo Community College District Board of Trustees President Rosaelva Lomeli highlighted the importance of partnerships that make the annual event possible.

"This conference is a powerful example of what can be achieved when educational institutions, community organizations and local leaders come together to support young women," Lomeli said. "It is especially meaningful to partner with First District Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, a former Río Hondo Community College District Board of Trustees member, whose leadership continues to positively impact our region and inspire future generations."

Now in its 30th year, the Women's History Conference continues to provide a space where students can explore their interests, connect with mentors and gain the confidence to pursue their goals.

Río Hondo College offers a variety of programs, including associate degrees, university transfer pathways, career education and two bachelor's degrees in Electronic Digital Instrument and Automotive Technology. For more information, visit RIOHONDO.EDU.



SI WHITTIER CLUB NEWS

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS FOR MEMBERS
JANUARY, FEBRUARY AND MARCH



JANUARY:

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| Wendy Kreider 1/2 | Veronica Franco 1/27 |
| Teresa Molina 1/3 | Natalia Duarte 1/28 |
| Ellen Hardeman 1/5 | Lori Eshilian 1/28 |



MARCH:

- | |
|-----------------------------|
| Susan West 3/22 |
| Susan Halliday 3/30 |
| Dolores Gonzalez-Hayes 3/31 |



FEBRUARY:

- | |
|------------------------|
| Maria Maestas 2/3 |
| Teresa Dreyfus 2/9 |
| Catalina Gonzalez 2/14 |





WHITTIER CLUB ACTIVITIES AND MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS



Recognition by Whittier City Council in honor of Women's History Month



The District 1 Meeting was held March 7, hosted by SI Fullerton.



Rio Hondo CARE \$5000 presentation



Former member Joyce Kaufman stopped to visit us when she was in Whittier on business on March 10th.



CONGRATULATIONS to our outstanding members!



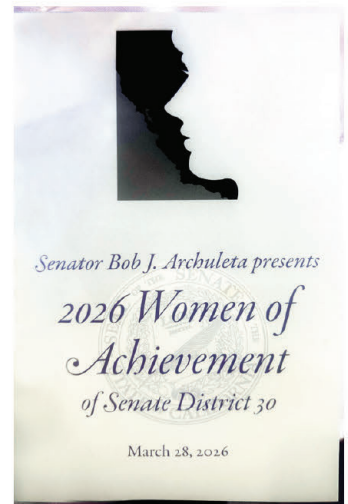
Elizabeth Camp has assumed the role of Chairman of the Board of Credit Union of Southern California. She has served on the board since 1991.



Karen Bjorkquist RN, BSN has celebrated 46 years of employment at PIH Health Whittier Hospital. A career in nursing has been her goal since 8th Grade.



Liz Apodaca was installed as President of the Whittier Area Chamber of Commerce on April 8th.



Mary Ann Pacheco was recently honored as a Woman of Achievement by Senator Bob Archuleta of the 30th Senate District of the State of California.



YOU MISSED A MEETING? HERE'S A RECAP OF BUSINESS MEETINGS

HIGHLIGHTS OF BUSINESS MEETINGS JANUARY - MARCH 2026

Please refer to the Official Meeting Minutes as distributed by President Denise

JANUARY 6, 2026

President Elect Ana Maria Ramirez invited all to Save The Date for Desert Coast Region Annual Spring Conference May 1-3 at the Zessa Hotel in Santa Ana.

President Denise Fasheh presented a Board of Directors motion to change our meeting schedule going forward, until the end of June, when the change will be evaluated. The motion passed. Effective February 1 meetings will be held only 3 times per month: the 1st, 2nd, and 4th Tuesdays at noon. Board Meetings will continue the 3rd Thursday of the month with no Tuesday club meeting that week. Any 5th Tuesday of the month will be DARK.

President Denise provided copies of the official Soroptimist Protocol from the President's Handbook which delineates proper Soroptimist Custom and Protocol. Extra copies are available as needed by members.

FEBRUARY 3, 2026

A guest today is Crystal Torres, owner of ARAS in Whittier, a marketing and event production company. Welcome, Crystal!

President Elect Ana Maria, per Denise, shared information about the DCR SHOE DRIVE. Please bring gently used shoes to our March business meeting. Terry Welter, DCR Governor Elect's goal is to collect 25,000 pounds of shoes to distribute to other countries whose populace may need shoes, especially utilitarian style shoes.

NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE is being formed now to assemble a new Board of Directors for 2026-2027. The Chair is Diane Britton, Cynthia Nickell is the Board representative, and Carolyn Theisen volunteered to be the Club representative. The election will be held at the April Business Meeting.

Membership Director Veronica announced there will be a Fines event in April. Stay tuned for details.



RECAP OF BUSINESS MEETINGS

MARCH 3, 2026

We are pleased to welcome Crystal Torres of ARAS as a guest again today.

March birthday celebrants are Susan W, Susan H and Dolores H.

The final Fines Committee event for fundraising this year will be held in April and Membership Director Veronica will welcome assistance in planning this fun social event.

June 11 will be the Installation of incoming President Ana Maria Ramirez and her Board. Save the Date.

PROPOSED SLATE OF DIRECTORS AND OFFICERS FOR 2026-2027	
President:	Ana Maria Vazquez-Ramirez
President Elect:	Dolores Hayes
Immediate Past President:	Denise Fasheh
Recording Secretary:	Martha Carreon
Corresponding Secretary:	Bonnie Bilitch
Treasurer:	Kathy Dowling
Assistant Treasurer:	Petra Schmischke
Director SI/SIA Programs:	Jeannie Williamson
Director SIW Programs:	Liz Apodaca
Director of Fundraising:	Carolyn Theisen
Director of Public Awareness:	Jane Dicus
Director of Membership:	Diane Britton
Non-Board Positions for 2026-2027	
Soroptimist Village Director 1-year	Veronica Franco
Soroptimist Village Director 2-year	Teresa Molina
Soroptimist Village Proxy Director 3-year	Cynthia Nickell
Submitted by Nominating Committee 3/24/26: Diane Britton, Chair Cynthia Nickell, Member Carolyn Theisen, Member	



Some Thoughts For Today

“Take the attitude of a student, never be too big to ask questions, never know too much to learn something new.”

— OG MANDINO
American writer

“Don’t let making a living prevent you from making a life.”

— JOHN WOODEN
American basketball coach