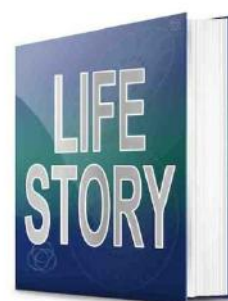




“Meet A Member” – Stories from AAUW – Saint Cloud Area Branch

We like to feature one of our accomplished members each month by asking them to tell us their stories.

Our February, 2022 Member of the Month is: Michelle Johnson



Michelle Johnson Senior Partner, WittKieffer I grew up on a dairy farm in central Minnesota and was the first in my family to pursue and obtain a Bachelor’s Degree, although I didn’t go far from home. I attended CSB/SJU, and one week after selecting Math as my major, I switched to English and ultimately to Political Science. My senior year, I completed an honors thesis on congressional redistricting—a topic that continues to enrage me to this day—for which I interviewed the first female Chief Justice of the Minnesota Supreme Court, Kathleen Blatz. Last year, 20 years after interviewing her for that thesis assignment, I connected with Kathleen again, this time in her role as Interim CEO of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Minnesota. She was happy to hear my thesis earned an A. My original plan after college was to go to law school. My academic advisor encouraged me to interview some attorneys in town to learn more and gather information. I received names of a dozen or so attorneys, and I contacted everyone. Only one of them actually encouraged me to pursue a law degree. I didn’t, but I eventually ended up going on a date with that attorney, and in June, we will celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary. Once I ruled out law school, I contemplated business school. That same academic advisor had a new suggestion for me, to look for jobs that required an MBA and try to get an interview to see if the work piqued my interest. I snagged an interview with a professional services firm in downtown Minneapolis. The

company worked with hospitals and health systems, and the work seemed interesting. I didn't have the advanced degree, but I connected with the hiring executive, and they made an exception. I've been working in the field ever since. In 2008, I accepted an offer from a Chicago-based firm and continued to grow both personally and professionally. Then three years ago, I made a third (and likely final) move in my career, to WittKieffer, a global executive search firm based in Chicago. I knew some of my current colleagues from industry events and was drawn to WittKieffer's culture and reputation for advancing women and people of color in positions of leadership. After two years of hard work, I became a shareholder in 2021. I continue to work with hospitals and health systems around the country, and I network within membership organizations such as the American College of Healthcare Executives and Women Business Leaders in Healthcare. It has always been important to me that I live in a city, and even though I wish St. Cloud was a bigger, more progressive city, it has been a good place for us to raise our two kids, initially in a modest home by the hospital and later in our current home near SCSU. Matty is now a freshman at the University of Winnipeg in Manitoba, and Sylvia is finishing her senior year at St. John's Prep. She was recently accepted into and will attend Georgetown University, in the School of Foreign Service. We also have a small 10-year-old dog, Lucy, who is snuggled beside me as I write this. My husband and I love to travel, hike, eat good food (I'm a vegetarian and he's a pescatarian) and meet new people in interesting places all over the world... and down the street. I truly enjoy being part of AAUW, knowing I'm in the company of accomplished and likeminded women, and I am grateful for the ability to participate without needing to be "all in". I hope you are all well and staying healthy.