

# AIWAV NEWSLETTER

April 2026



Sending you all good wishes  
for Easter & Passover.

## NEWS FROM THE LEADERSHIP TEAM

This has been an exciting month. We really feel we're getting our stride. Thank you to everyone making an inclusive and supportive environment for all.

Comfortably into the second half of the year, we're beginning to think about summer. Please let us know if you'll be in town and can pencil in a date to host an event for any members wanting to connect over the holidays.

We're also thinking about next year. After a small tweak in roles, and having concluded this year's Carnival event, we're in the market for a new volunteer to lead the 2027 Carnival team. Getting a head start on this important fundraising event has been a key recommendation since its inception. But don't feel you need an excuse to get in touch — we're always available.

## FAMILY CYCLING DAY

Fiona is leading a **Family Cycling Day** to Lio Piccolo to see the flamingos. We would love you to bring your kids so they can meet each other. We'll stop for lunch and then meander, or race home, depending on your inclination.

**Event details:** Sunday, 19 April, meet at Fondamenta Nove "B" at 9am. Boat no.12 arrives at Treporti at 10.04am — if you prefer to meet there. BYO bikes, or contact Fiona who's organising rental bikes to be delivered to the vaporetto stop at Treporti.

**RSVP here** by 10th of April, so we can make a plan and have the best day possible.

And, check out this site for more on [Lio Piccolo](#) and this [site](#) which details other birds you might see on the day.



Winter tourists since 2007  
Read more about *Phoenicopterus roseus* in the  
lagoon [here](#).

*"The opposite of fear is not courage, but love" -*

*Rudolf Steiner, Austrian philosopher*



*Ca d'Oro renovation began in January 2023 opening in 2027 and coinciding with it's centennial anniversary.*

## with BEHIND THE SCENES VENETIAN HERITAGE

*by Gillian Longworth McGuire*

Venetian Heritage is a preservation organisation born out of Save Venice in 1999. It considers the entire Venetian Republic part of its domain. Over the last 25 years they have restored significant cultural heritage including interventions at San Zaccaria, Palazzo Ducale, the Ghetto and the Scuola Grande San Giovanni Evangelista. These interventions may be restorations of buildings, sculptures, paintings or liturgical items. It may also be funding for promotion of exhibitions or advocacy.

Who doesn't love watching a home renovation project? The dated before, the chaotic middle and the dramatic final reveal are entertaining and satisfying. On a blustery March morning the locked carved wooden doors of the 600 year old palazzo, Galleria Franchetti Ca' d'Oro, were opened just for AIWAV members to see the progress in the chicest cantierie in town. The Director of the Venice office of Venetian Heritage, Toto Bergamo Rossi is the one with the keys.

The Ca' d'Oro was built by Marino Contarini between 1421 and 1440 with funds from the dowery and on the foundations he received through his marriage to Soradamore Zeno. Contarini was a wealthy and powerful Venetian merchant. Like there were eight doges in the family between 1043 and 1676 powerful.

**Did you know?** Palazzo Santa Sofia is the original name.

The reason it is known as Ca d'Oro? Contarini had the facade that faces the grand canal lavishly decorated with gold. The house had the unusual function as a casa-fondaco, a combined warehouse, trading post, and residence. The purpose of the open loggias facing the grand canal was to project the safety and power of La Serenissima.

Venetian weather and time wore away the gold and the glittering palace was all but abandoned until 1846 when the Ca' d'Oro was bought by a Russian prince, Alessandro Trubetzkoi, who was besotted with the ballerina Maria Taglioni. He gave the house to her and she was radical in her vision for the place. Her restoration had new windows cut into the front and she discarded many of the original architectural elements.

**Baron Giorgio Franchetti** bought it in 1894 and spent his life and fortune hunting for the lost treasures, restoring the building and filling the house with art. The marvelous floors of polychromatic marble that look like jewelry and the chapel with the magnificent painting of San Sebastiano by Mantegna are his. After his death the house and his art collection were donated by his heirs to the state. His ashes are underneath a fragment of a porphyry column.

Our gracious and garrulous host shared tales of Venetian construction bureaucracy as he led us through the partially finished rooms with shimmering jewel toned marmimo walls that will soon be covered with paintings and carpets and gilded altar pieces that were safely bundled and boxed up on the just restored soft pink terrazzo floor. He pointed out ceilings taken from other Venetian houses while he explained how the Carlo Scarpa inspired staircase will be extended to the highest floors and how they have made room for an elevator large enough to move enormous and heavy pieces of art. He showed us a terracotta Bernini and let us take pictures on the glassed in loggia on the piano nobile.



## FEATURED MEMBER FIONA McOMISH

Hardworking and enthusiastic Business Manager of Algaescope, a Venetian blue economy start-up, Fiona is our only Scottish member. Resident in Cannaregio, she keeps regular contact with home and its culture – having recently returned from the Olympic curling event! As well as her melodic accent, you will know her by her bubbly personality and helpful disposition. Her family bike day in the lagoon is sure to be well organised and guaranteed fun.

### *How did you end up living in Venice?*

I spent over a decade working in HR at the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service before moving to a demanding role at a local council during Covid, which left little time for family life. When my husband was awarded a Marie Curie fellowship at Ca' Foscari University, we embraced the opportunity and relocated to Venice with our two sons (then 12 and 6). That was six years ago.

### *What are your favourite spots in Venice?*

Pinpointing a favourite spot in a city like Venice is not straightforward as there are so many! My favourites have shifted a bit over the years and nowadays, I tend to gravitate towards churches and benches: the benches at Sant'Elena at sunset, Campo Sant'Alvise on a Sunday morning, and sitting in Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari in front of Titian's Assunta. These are places where I like to pause, live in the moment and feel complete gratitude to be a part of the city around me.

I recently came across a YouTube video of Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield describing how Earth looks from space and it struck me as a good description of Venice too. He talks about a sense of interconnectedness, of a living system held within something much larger and more fragile than it appears from the inside. Going back up the Campanile at San Marco for the first time in nearly twenty years brought that into focus for me, as did finding quieter vantage points across the city: the spiral staircase of the Scala Contarini del Bovolo, the Torre at the Arsenale, the terrazza at Palazzo Pisani. From each of them, the city becomes quieter and the connections are easier to read. The lagoon frames it all. I have spent time working with Algae Scope, a Venetian seaweed startup that replaces chemicals with safer alternatives made from seaweed - a hugely promising sustainable resource for the city and the ecosystem. This has also enhanced my connection to the city and its broader environment.

### *AV: Is there a hidden gem that you would recommend?*

I love exploring the lagoon and mainland by bike—the slower pace helps you notice so much more. On the Lido, our favourite family rides are along the beach, from San Nicolò to the lighthouse or down to Malamocco. From Punta Sabbioni, I especially enjoy the circular Via dei Forti route, passing through nature and historic forts and museums dating from 1845 to 1917.

### *What do you do when you feel homesick?*

Thanks to WhatsApp, FaceTime and the fact that the Venice to Edinburgh flight time is only 2.5 hours, homesickness has been manageable. Like many expats I know though, I sometimes crave international foods. Caberlotto in Mestre usually sorts that out: Heinz baked beans, Branston pickle, custard creams and curry pastes!

### *Coffee or spritz and where?*

Both. For coffee — Pasticceria Pitteri in Cannaregio. For spritz — Osteria al Ponte at Campo Santi Giovanni e Paolo on a summer evening, or Cantine del Vino già Schiavi in Dorsoduro.

# WHAT'S HAPPENING WITHIN AIWAV

BY DIAHANN HUGHES HAWKINS

Thank you for your support! It has helped us flourish this year.

To be able to keep up with membership growth, we needed to bring our web-based communications under one platform that our small volunteer team could better manage in less time. As AIWAV's website is hosted on Wix, we decided to utilise their suite of tools for managing the entire Membership system. Hermione outlined the requirements of the new system, then Clarissa helped with member database migration. Diahann worked on moving the domain, setting up the new platform for automatic communications and migrating more Member services. The advantage? Less time required for our volunteers and better services integration. In the future, any AIWAV volunteer will be able to take over one of the many jobs like newsletters, membership communications, annual fees and AIWAV resources with a single point of login and minimal training.

Thankfully, we caught Wix's special promotion that enabled us to purchase the Core Business plan for €436 for three years. It's a reliable, drag and drop interface that anyone can learn, plus we now have our domain name directly linked to our website. We're in the process of setting up better events management and email communications using all their built-in tools.



We will share some of the features with you in the upcoming months, but wanted to first let you know that these changes are helping to ensure improved communications, easier membership renewals and hopefully more members!

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This last month there has also been a little role shuffle. As Secretary, Gina will in fact continue to act as Treasurer. (This transpired largely because the bank account we currently use is in her name so it made the most sense—until we officially incorporate when we will be able to open an account in our Association name.) Diahann will instead act in a secondary finance role, providing oversight and enabling us to continue operating at all times. Diahann has also taken on the full mantle of Membership and streamlining onboarding and will be kept very busy!

Politics has been a topic of discussion this month. We are living in political times and although we recognise political expression as important we have a club rule to limit public discussions, in Whatsapp communities for example.

This was agreed as a safeguard for our members, along with the simple and wise Member Commitments developed by the club founders. Respect being of primary importance, as well as being an ambassador for the club, supporting those who volunteer and contributing to the community by taking part in events and shared spaces.

## WELCOME CLARISSA GAYTON

We are super happy to let you know **Clarissa Gayton** has come onboard to the **Leadership Team** as an Advisor/Technical. Clarissa is a **Web Developer** with a Masters of Philosophy in Comparative Literature from Trinity College Dublin and a Bachelor of Arts from Hampton University. Thank you Clarissa!

# FAWCO CONFERENCE



*Irene in Malta  
Irene split the costs with  
AIWAV in order to have a  
representative present.*

*Thank you Irene.*

“FAWCO Fever” they call it. It’s when you go to a FAWCO Conference and come back completely energized – ready to save the world. Or at least you know some of the steps forward in that direction to take back to your community, wherever that is in the world. We came together as 155 members from a dozen European nations, plus Jordan, Morocco, Kenya, and India.

Three workshops and seven hours of general meetings over three days from March 20-22 allowed me, AIWAV’s FAWCO Rep, to learn more about this organization celebrating 95 years of action and community. We were updated on the fantastic activities FAWCO does for Women’s Rights at the United Nations in New York and Environmental work during the COP conferences.

The conference included strong messages about the importance of giving a voice to women and children, especially related to the concepts of inclusion, equality and peace, by Malta’s former president Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca. We were inspired to rise as women, with our voices and our might, through the poetic words of a writer and performance artist Peju “The Spark” Abuchi.

During the gala dinner on Saturday night, FAWCO raised US\$50,237 in donations through a live and silent auction, raffle and private donations. Those funds will go to winners of the Education Awards and Development Grants in 2027. This year’s recipients were announced. There were 48 applications to receive 12 Education Awards and 28 applications for 9 Development Grants in 5 areas.

The winner of the new 2026-2028 Target Project 6.0 with a Human Rights theme was announced: Power Her Path. FAWCO’s support will deliver trauma-informed, survivor-centered reintegration support to women and girls who have survived human trafficking, forced labor or forced marriage, as well as those at risk of exploitation.

The conference weekend featured networking, dancing, singing, fundraising, brainstorming, crafting, learning, and eating, of course!

## & NEWS CORNER

BY IRENE WOODBURY, FAWCO REP

It was wonderful to finally meet representatives from other regional clubs and especially the ones in Italy. Make sure you get in touch with other clubs when visiting Rome, Florence, Turin, Milan, Genoa and Naples.

### SISTER CITIES

We’ve signed up to be paired with another FAWCO club for three months. The initiative is designed to inspire new ideas as well as closer connections. There is no required commitment just as much as each pair of Clubs decides – some ideas of how you can get to know each. Then it is up to you how or when you decide to meet. Some great club connections developed from the pilot programme so FAWCO are hoping to do this every year.

### Would you like to lead the Sister Club initiative?



*AIWAV’s first  
attendance at the  
FAWCO conference.*

### FAWCO 101

Don’t forget to sign up for the online introduction to Fawco. You’re a member of this organisation as a benefit of your AIWAV membership. This is a chance to learn about all their activities and the benefits and resources available to you.

This global organization focuses on: building networks, improving the lives of women and girls around the world, advocating for US citizens abroad and mobilizing the skills of the membership. Remember that each one of you makes up FAWCO. Get involved!

I encourage you to sign up on the FAWCO website today.

Once you login to your account, you can sign up for the various newsletters that may interest you: FAWCO News in Brief, UN Liaison Bulletin, US Liaison Bulletin, Target Bulletin, Inspiring Women magazine.

[Read FAWCO NEWS on our website.](#)



### VENICE TRIVIA

When are the next Municipal elections?

## NEW GROUP KID EVENTS

Moms & minis: a dedicated group for members with kids to connect through relaxed, kid-friendly meet-ups and outings. Join us for easy, social gatherings where children can play and parents can enjoy time together. Look out for the new Whatsapp group.

## SIGNED UP FOR THE NEW DIRECTORY?

We transferred our database to WIX and along with it goes the [Member Directory](#). You can choose your own password or keep the one we currently use. As well as uploading a photo and updating your profile, you can manage your preferences. And, as soon as we are able we will add more features.

## THINKING OF SUMMER

Our last regular aperitivo of the year falls on a public holiday, 2 June, but we're organising a fun finale. After that, until September, we're relying on members hosting a morning or afternoon tea, an aperitivo or dinner date over summer for any members who'd like to connect. Please let us know if you can help. [Email us](#).

# APRIL CALENDAR

WED 1 TBC	<b>Leadership Team</b> time and location TBC.
TUE 7 1pm	<b>Lunch!</b> Dinner club was too hard: let's lunch! New Greek, Campo Sta. Margarita.
S11/ S12 TBC	<b>Book Club</b> currently being polled for Saturday or Sunday.
TBC	<b>Moms &amp; Minis</b> (see details top left)
TUE 14 from 6.30pm	<b>Social Aperitivo</b> , always Second Tuesday of the month. This month in San Marco. <a href="#">RSVP</a> to receive the address the night before. You will not receive confirmation unless at capacity.
WED 15 11am	<b>FAWCO 101</b> Virtual Meeting, see p.5.
WED 15 1pm	<b>Let's Cook:</b> Go-to 10 minute or less favourite dishes created by 3-5 guests as tasting plates for everyone joining us. Join the Let's Cook WhatsApp group for info.
SUN 19 All day	<b>Family Day Out Bike Ride to Lio Piccolo</b> , see p.1.

Last two Aperitvi before Summer  
12 May, TBC, San Polo

2 June, Park Groggia, Cannaregio\*

\*NB. Last aperitivo before summer on 2 – not 9 – June

## GET INVOLVED

TAKE OVER OUR INSTAGRAM  
ACCOUNT

WRITE SOME WEBSITE  
RESOURCES

CONTRIBUTE TO OUR NEW  
CONSTITUTION

American &  
International  
Women's  
Association  
Venice

AIWAV.ORG

New members always welcome.  
Bring someone to an aperitivo or ask  
them to first [making an enquiry](#). and  
then [RSVP](#).

P.S. We do not reply to RSVPs —  
unless there is limited capacity..

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