FAUSA's Past Presidents

When a FAUSA president completes their term, they take on the honored role of "FAUSA Counselor." These remarkable and dynamic leaders continue to shape the organization's policies and vision, ensuring FAUSA thrives in its mission today.

Over the past twenty years, seven FAUSA Presidents have transitioned to becoming FAUSA Counselors. Each one reflects on FAUSA's history with a perspective uniquely their own. We invited them to share their stories about their time as president, and here they are:

Mona Garcia, 1999-2001

Mona Blocker Garcia, FAUSA's first president, was born in Houston, Texas. She attended the University of Texas, where she met her husband Rudy at a Latin-American dance party. According to Mona, he was the handsomest and tallest man there and the best dancer on the floor.

Rudy's career took their family to Venezuela, Philadelphia, Lima, Peru, Dallas, Houston, and Madrid. While in Spain, Mona became the vice president and then president of the Madrid AWC.



IncWhen Mona and Rudy returned to Texas in 1995, Mona began her involvement with FAUSA as the chair of the FAWCO Alumnae Committee. She convinced the FAWCO Board to celebrate 2000 by having a FAWCO Conference in the United States for the first time. Twenty-one committee members hosted the event in Washington, DC. On May 1, 2000, the Alumnae Committee became FAWCO Alumnae USA,, (FAUSA) when it was incorporated in the State of Texas. Mona served as the first president.

Marfa, Texas, where Mona and Rudy had settle

Jane Indreland, 2005-2009



After living in England for 12 years, returning to our original home and family in Montana in 1999 was comfortable in most ways, but I missed the stimulation of being with people who had the experience of living in another country. Fortunately, I knew about FAUSA, and I made contact with Mona Garcia, who put me in touch with Priscilla Dysart and Carol Lalani. We bonded immediately and have remained dear friends ever since. We worked together to host the 2002 FAUSA Annual Meeting in Red Lodge, Montana.

Through the years, I have had the honor of being second vice-president, first vice-president, and president of FAUSA. In 2010, we organized the FAWCO Interim Meeting in Boston, MA, with the help of many dedicated and hard-working volunteers. Among the many

technological advances that benefited FAUSA during this time was the change from paper to electronic registration using PayPal. Our numbers increased dramatically with this change.

The best part of FAUSA membership for me is working with and getting to know the bright, cosmopolitan members of the organization—both here in Montana and in the rest of the US and Canada.

d, was the home of historic Ft. David Allen Russell. In Building 98 Mona noticed murals painted by German POWs in WWII. Realizing the importance of the paintings, she founded the International Women's Foundation (IWF), which restored the murals and the building. Building 98—Hacienda del Arcon--is now the headquarters of the IWF and a training center for artistic development and healthful aging.

At the end of her term as president in autumn 2001 Mona wrote, “Founding and becoming the first elected president of this vibrant association of international American women has been a fabulous adventure for me. I have met wonderful women who have selflessly volunteered their energy, time and talent—many of whom have become dear friends. I know that FAUSA has a wonderful and bright future, and I will enjoy watching it grow . . . from the sidelines in Texas.”

Dale Koepenick, 2001-2005

Taking over as the 2nd President of FAUSA made me appreciate all the hard work that Mona Garcia, Pat Cocker, Kay Miller, Nancy Thornley, Jane Indreland and the other members of the first FAUSA Board had done. The challenge was realizing the many goals set for FAUSA within the 2001 Constitution, By-Laws and Administrative Guidelines and establishing FAUSA as a valuable asset within the FAWCO structure. With the help of the FAUSA elected officers, committee chairs and volunteers, we continued to expand our Regional Rep and Metropolitan Coordinator setup, establish and fund our first Scholarship Award under FAWCO, produce an upgraded Quarterly Magazine, launch our own website and Directory and reach out to members through a monthly email. Although unable to acquire 501(c)(3) tax status, we did receive a 501(c)(4) designation, and we pledged to continue our effort to reach full non-profit status.



Along with the work we enjoyed the company of our fellow expats and their spouses at annual meetings held in Montana, Chicago, Easton, Maryland along the Chesapeake Bay and San Antonio. It was an exciting time for FAUSA made even better by the growing number of members who also attended FAWCO conferences. In fact, FAUSA became the single largest group at many FAWCO conferences staying involved with both our national activities and the international work of FAWCO. This is never the result of a single individual, and I will always be grateful for the good ideas and support of the membership. I feel honored and appreciative of having served as a FAUSA President, I am delighted in its continuing growth and recognition.

Louise Greeley-Copley, 2009-2011



I am really proud of the outcome of discussions with The FAWCO Foundation to allow FAUSA members and their children to apply for all Educational Awards and for FAUSA to be able to nominate a Development Grant. By partnering with the FAWCO Foundation on Development Grants and Awards, FAUSA members received expanded

benefits and their donations via The FAWCO Foundation are tax deductible and eligible for corporate matching funds. FAUSA was also able to focus fundraising to sponsor a Development Grant and an Educational Award.

During this term FAUSA completed a comprehensive review and restructure of FAUSA led by Lee Sorenson and Dale Koepenick. We revised and updated the FAUSA Bylaws and Administrative Guidelines to align more closely with FAWCO.

In an effort to go paperless and reduce costs, FAUSA established our first Facebook page and put the "Highlights" magazine and the membership directory on our website in a password protected member's only section. The money saved was designated to upgrading our website to create a "virtual clubhouse" by making it more interactive and user friendly.

FAUSA celebrated ten years of incorporation by hosting the 2010 FAWCO Conference in Boston chaired by Jane Indreland. We then held an intimate getaway in 2010 in Houston. We enjoyed a performance of Madame Butterfly at the Houston Grand Opera and celebrated our final evening with a cocktail party followed by the experience of making our Southwestern style gourmet dinner at the Central Market cooking school. 2011 brought us to historic and charming Charleston, South Carolina. The event was organized by Sue and Hugh Ripps.

Thank you to my dream team of Yolanda Henry, Linda Little (RIP), Sue Ripps, Pamela Dahlgren (RIP), and Nancy Thornley for all the hard work and moving FAUSA into the new Decade.

Lee Sorenson, 2011-2013

It was a great honor for me to become president of FAUSA and to work with an exceptional board. At our first board meeting we set very ambitious goals for ourselves of renewal, regeneration and recognition, especially by FAWCO. They included surveying and serving our network of members better and increasing numbers by increasing visibility and outreach.



Serving members better:

1. I initiated monthly board meetings via Skype.
2. Periodic newsletter replaced by monthly president's news bulletin.
3. Survey was sent out, asking for suggestions from members.
4. "Highlights," discontinued periodic publication, revived and turned into polished annual magazine of photos, articles and information. Published by Clint Weber, edited by me. Advertising defrayed costs; was used also as PR tool.

Increasing visibility and outreach:

1. Major revision of website, and Facebook page updated and expanded.
2. Two brochures created, one for returning FAWCO club members, one for non-club members. Sent electronically to all club Reps and several expat organizations.
3. Logos exchanged with expat organizations for posting on their materials.
4. Monthly articles sent to FAWCO and Foundation for their newsletters.

Increasing membership:

1. 2nd VP-Membership started a campaign via Regional and Metropolitan Reps.
2. Both president and 2nd VP sent personal welcome letters to new members.
3. First book club, other new activities created.

Regeneration:

1. New special committee formed, Third Country Kids
2. Philanthropy Liaison created a committee, structure, and set up new program of giving. Contributions made to our own and Foundation and FAWCO programs, including Target

Project; continued co-sponsorship of two awards as fundraising income increased.
3. Name of the annual meeting changed to “FAUSA Getaway and Annual Meeting.”

Recognition:

1. Relationship with FAWCO and Foundation clarified and deepened: FAUSA recognized as the third “sister” arm of the organization. FAUSA president invited for FIRST time to annual meeting with 2 other presidents.
2. Members and children became eligible for Foundation awards and grants.
3. Members enabled to nominate projects for DGs and Target Program; eligible to serve on Foundation board and join/chair committees and Task Force.
4. Invited to present PowerPoint reports and workshops at annual FAWCO meetings.

My heartfelt gratitude to board members Yolanda Henry, Janelle Mason, Judith Treanor, Priscilla Dysart, Janet Darrow, and Erica Higbie. Special thanks to Janet Darrow and Rick Chizmadia for organizing outstanding annual Getaways, and Rick for help putting together an amazing PowerPoint presentation and setting to music, and singing, my little jingle, “See the USA with F-A-U-S-A,” in Bern

Janet Darrow, 2013-2017

I was elected FAUSA President in the Fall of 2013 at the FAUSA Getaway and Annual Meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio (Rick Chizmadia, Chair) and served two terms, exiting the board at the same event in Kansas City (Leslie Nelson, Chair) in 2017. In the Interim, we held Getaways in Colorado Springs (Carol Boren, Chair), Niagara-on-the-Lake in Ontario Canada (Yolanda Henry, Chair) and Scottsdale, AZ (Dolores Cuellar, Chair). During the first term, with Debbie Hasting’s help, we completely revamped the website, created the gift membership for FAWCO Members who were repatriating to the US and established a pattern of sponsoring both The FAWCO Foundation Education Award and Development Grant as well as supporting our own FAUSA Annual Grant. We also aligned several FAUSA advertisers (including myself) who committed to donating a portion of their sales from FAUSA and FAWCO members to the FAWCO Target Program.



Our relationship with our sister organizations: FAWCO and The FAWCO Foundation was strengthened with quarterly phone calls between the presidents of each group, keeping FAUSA informed and in the loop with the plans of the other groups and keeping them up to date with our goals and events.

In a survey of FAWCO conference attendees, FAUSA was rated last in interest of attendees and recognizing that we were an alumni group of an organization that had a difficult time defining itself, I tried to make my 5-minute speeches to the FAWCO Conferences as catchy and memorable as possible to raise the level of interest in the group.

During my second term, FAUSA joined FAWCO and The Foundation in re-branding with a new logo that emulated elements of the FAWCO logo yet reflected the FAUSA journey which brought our overseas experiences back to North America.

The board established that we would like to make an attempt at changing our tax status to a 501(C)(3) organization. Previous attempts had failed, so we enlisted the help of Kellie Kemp, an attorney, worked with our bylaws committee (pro bono) to completely redraft our Bylaws and Administrative Guidelines. This process took over a year, and the membership voted to accept the new documents at the annual meeting in Scottsdale.

In February of 2017, we submitted our application for the tax change which finally occurred shortly after the end of my second term. Our board had laid a strong foundation for the coming years.

Therese Hartwell, 2017-2019

In 2005, when my husband was offered a job in Saudi Arabia, I could not have fully realized what a life-changing adventure our move would be. While I am happy to be back in the US enjoying my grandchildren, I still miss aspects of our life abroad. Joining FAUSA has made the transition from my exciting life as an expat to being a repatriated American so much smoother.



FAWCO played a pivotal role in my experience living overseas and contributed significantly to my feeling of being a global citizen. I treasured the opportunity to make friends all over the world and to be involved in a coordinated attempt to make the world a better place for women and girls around the globe. Since I have been back in the States, this global connection has lost some of its immediacy, but my continued involvement with FAWCO and particularly my participation with FAUSA, have allowed me to continue to feel a part of the larger world.

Being a part of an organization in which people appreciate the impact of living in a country other than the US has been richly rewarding. We share a language and appreciate that travel stories are a part of our lives and meant not to brag but rather to share the incredible opportunities we have had to leave our comfort zones and experience new cultures. Most importantly to me, my involvement with FAUSA has given me the opportunity to continue to work with smart, committed, passionate women (and at least one rather extraordinary man!) to help create a more peaceful and compassionate world. My hope is that FAUSA will continue to bridge the transition from expat to repat for generations of new members to come, as it has done for me.

Rick Chizmadia, 2019-2021

As president of FAUSA, I am a leader and a part of our 20th anniversary of FAUSA. When I was asked if I would accept a position on this board in 2013 it scared me. How would I be accepted as a male on the board of a women's organization? After all, from the very beginning when I walked into the doors of the AWC Zurich heads were turned. I knew that acceptance would not be easy and only the more progressive members would accept me. As a musician who had to put myself outside of my comfort zone with the many auditions and performances, it was old hat.



What got me interested in FAWCO and then FAUSA when I returned home was the philanthropic aspect of the organizations. I believe as a privileged cisgendered man, I have a duty to help those less privileged than I. Most of all I believe that all of us should be treated equal regardless of sex, sexuality or race. I have spent my lifetime fighting for the rights of others less privileged than I.

For thirty years I have been volunteering for the Human Rights Campaign, concentrating on the rights of LGBTQ individuals. I spent nine of those years serving on the national board. My biggest takeaway from this experience was the need for diversity and acceptance of others who look different from yourself in all aspects of life. After all, we cannot achieve equality until everyone has equality. Thus, I definitely look different from all the members, and I bring diversity to FAUSA.

I have had the privilege to use my leadership skills with one of the best boards that I have ever worked with in my lifetime of serving on boards. Because of this talented group of women, we have been able to lead this organization through the challenges of COVID-19. We used our ingenuity to create an online Getaway and auction that not only raised record funds but reached more members than ever before.

One of our goals for our first year was to increase membership and give the members more value and we did that by adding all of the online activities that you read about elsewhere in this magazine. Our membership has never been stronger. We invited members to take leadership roles such as a newsletter editor, social media director and an activities director. By doing this it helps us achieve more and creates future leaders of the organization. Currently we are working on a complete redesign of our website from top to bottom. It is a huge undertaking, and we cannot wait to share it with you.

Liz Janson, 2021-2023

It was my great honor to serve as FAUSA president from 2021-2023 with a dedicated and hard-working board. We accomplished a great deal as the organization continued to grow and thrive post-Covid. I had three goals for my presidency: to build on the accomplishments of past leadership, work with the treasurer to structure financial record keeping and planning and put a structure of teams in place. With the help of the board and many others, these goals were accomplished.



A new FAUSA motto, “Globally Connected, Locally Active”, was adopted in 2022, tying in the opportunities FAUSA members have to meet with others in their local areas as well as continuing to participate in committees, teams and boards of our sister organizations, FAWCO and The FAWCO Foundation.

Teams were successfully implemented across the FAUSA organization, involving more members in leadership and adding to our overall connectedness as well as sharing the load and giving the nominating team a wider group of people to consider for board positions.

Membership
2022: 279
2023: 261

Leadership

- A new leadership position was added in 2022: Counselor Liaison; Jane Indreland appointed.
- The importance of the philanthropy position was recognized when the board voted to change the title to VP Philanthropy (2023).
- A new board position was added at the 2023 Annual Meeting: Director, Activities and Events.

Getaways
2022: Santa Fe, NM, 57 in-person attendees, (5 virtual attendees for the annual meeting)

- Keynote speaker: Dr. Corrine Sanchez, Executive Director of Tewa Women United
- Annual Gala: a record-breaking $23,000 was raised.
- FAUSA Annual Grants: A new FAUSA Grants team rewrote the grant application and vetted a record number of applications (12) for two $5000 Annual Grants: The Lamp Foundation, Project Beloved.

2023: Nashville, TN, 60 in-person attendees

- Keynote speaker: Sarah Beth Myers, Deputy General Counsel for the Southern Poverty Law Center and founder of AWAKE

- Annual Gala: $36,000 was raised.
- FAUSA Annual Grants: two $5000 grants were awarded: Tewa Women United, Refugee Assistance Alliance.

Other highlights

- A first-time FAUSA-wide in-person philanthropy activity occurred with seven metro groups hosting events to pack and distribute Beloved Bundles for Project Beloved, one of the recipients of the 2022 FAUSA Annual Grant.
- The monthly newsletter had a record average monthly open rate of almost 80% for both years.
- 2022: Eight FAUSA members featured in FAWCO's "Inspiring Women" magazine; 2023,14 members were featured.
- FAUSA engaged a CPA to do its taxes for the first time in 2022.
- Kathy Limbaugh, treasurer, held two information sessions for members prior to both the 2022 and 2023 Getaways.
- Interest-bearing CDs were purchased for a better return on FAUSA's cash balance.
- FAWCO's Caroline Curtis Brown Spirit Award was given to FAUSA Counselor, Rick Chizmadia in 2022, and to Suzanne Wheeler in 2023, in recognition of their dedication, enthusiasm and spirit of volunteerism.
- The Social and Speakers virtual activities series was introduced in 2023 as a result of a suggestion at the 2022 Annual Meeting.
- LUNAFEST women's film festival fundraiser: 2022, over $3100; 2023, $3270; all of which went directly to FAWCO's Target 5 Project.
- The repatriation team held its first Zoom-based webinar for FAWCO members returning to live in North America.
- FAUSA hosted its first in-person Happy Hour for all attendees at FAWCO's 2023 conference in Bratislava.
- The FAWCO Foundation Development Grants: 2022, two FAUSA-nominated Development Grants were awarded; 2023, two FAUSA-nominated Development Grants were awarded.
- A trans-Atlantic crossing (cruise) was organized on the Queen Mary 2 with 23 FAUSA members, friends and family members enjoying the week's crossing together.