

## **Origins of the Association of International Women**

In early 1990, Lilly Endowment was looking at globalization in Indy, including the concerns of executives from abroad who came to work in Indianapolis. (One of the key researchers: AIW Honorary Member Caterina Blitzer.)

The primary problem these expats saw was the dismal state of our schools (and, the next year, the endowment formed a Task Force that eventually established the International School).

But what caught my attention was whom they "overlooked" -- the wives of those executives. The women were often described as feeling isolated -- the proverbial fish out of water. Their husbands went off to work, their kids went off to school and they sat alone in their houses wondering where they could buy Marmite. Seriously: they had no way to connect to their new community and no help navigating this alien Midwestern culture.

At the same time, the husband of a friend of mine accepted a new job overseas, and they moved to Germany. She told me that within a week of her arrival, someone called from the International Women's Club in Frankfurt, welcoming her, offering help settling in and inviting her to their next luncheon.

An "aha" moment!

In 1990, I was president of a volunteer group called the Indiana International Council. We had just successfully established a networking group for international exchange organizations in central Indiana -- so why not start an International Women's Club?

In April 1990 I invited women I thought might be interested in the idea to a coffee. We assembled a steering committee (including AIW Honorary Member Christine Dowdeswell and our first president, Danny Clery) and went to work.

Our by-laws were adapted from those of a well-established women's group in Indianapolis, the Christamore House Guild. We established a pattern of six luncheons a year for all members plus an ever-changing roster of "interest groups" where the members could form closer bonds. By the fall we were ready to launch.

The first luncheon of the International Women's Club of Indiana was held at Woodstock Club September 27, 1990. Joining us were the wife of the governor, Susan Bayh; the wife of the lieutenant governor, Judy O'Bannon, and the wife of the mayor, Bev Hudnut.

Two years later, in 1992, the group was ready to go solo, separated from the Indiana International Council and changed its name to the Association of International Women.

*--by Susan McKee (AIW Honorary Member)*