

Nonprofit profile:

## AAUW's Wildflower Run this year honors longtime resident Elena Moreno

by [Robert Airoidi](#), Editor | Mar 19, 2017

About 1,000 runners each year help raise more than \$50,000

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Travis Finucane came in first place in the 5K stroller/baby jogger category in a recent Wildflower Run. The annual run raises money the association uses for scholarships.  
Morgan Hill Life file photo/Susan Brazelton

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The AAUW Wildflower Run will miss one of its biggest boosters this year. Elena Moreno, the Morgan Hill branch's oldest member, died on Nov. 26, six weeks before her 95th birthday and 50 years after Elena first joined the Gilroy branch of the American Association of University Women. Moreno, a longtime elementary teacher in Morgan Hill schools, strongly supported the AAUW's mission of education and equity for women and girls. When the Morgan Hill branch first began organizing a running event in 1984 as a fundraiser for the local club's national women's scholarships, Moreno jumped on board as publicity chair, coining the name "Wildflower Run," said AAUW member Elizabeth Mandel, an organizer of the annual event.

"Elena even scattered wildflower seeds along the route with the hope that the flowers would cheer on the runners," she said. Moreno also supported the run both as a race day volunteer, preparing food for runners, and financially contributing funds for scholarships, she said. AAUW Morgan Hill has offered local scholarships since 1990, when a single scholarship was established for Gavilan Community College students. It was designated for women returning to the community college for career advancement after a break in their education.

About 1,000 runners of all ages participate in the annual run, which each year raises more than \$50,000 in entry fees and business sponsorships to support educational opportunities for

The 34th annual run will take place the morning of March 26 at Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill. The 5K and 10K courses pass through scenic local back roads and orchards. The 10K run is USATF certified for competitive runners. There are also runs organized for kids, seniors and babies in strollers.

"Over the past 30 and more years, the Wildflower Run's success, combined with generous business sponsorships and individual donations like Elena's, has enabled us to continually increase our number and types of scholarships," Mandel said. "Today, we offer 20 scholarships annually to women who are continuing their education and to students graduating from high school and going on to college."

The AAUW club's unique "Keeping In Touch" grants are given to past scholarship recipients. These provide students with both encouragement and financial assistance for their educational journey.



Elena Moreno

“With the generous ongoing financial support of Comerica Bank, this year we will provide \$8,000 in KIT grants,” Mandel said. Last year, Jacquelyn Cook was the first recipient of the club’s “Lauren Jenkins Healthcare Profession Scholarship” and is one of this year’s KIT recipients.

Being accepted in the nursing program at Gavilan College meant she had to leave her full-time job as a 911 emergency dispatcher to become a full-time student.

“Every semester tuition, books, and clinical materials alone are very costly, but thanks to the kindness and generosity of AAUW Morgan Hill, I am well on my way to achieving my goal,” Cook said.

Another KIT recipient, Lydia Riojas, previously received a “Re-Entry Scholarship” when she returned to Gavilan to pursue higher education. A single mother of two young children, she has since gone on to San Jose State University to earn a four-year degree. “(The KIT grant) helps me to focus more on school and my studies and helps me to balance my time with my children instead of working longer hours or worrying about how I am going to provide for my family,” she said. “Sometimes it can be tough staying motivated, and to know I have this group of women who believe in me strengthens my drive to continue my education and not give up.”

Diana Fuentes, a third 2017 KIT recipient, received a scholarship from the Morgan Hill AAUW club when she graduated from Live Oak High School. She also attends SJSU.

“As a first-generation college student, AAUW has helped me on my college journey since the beginning,” Fuentes said. “With the help of their grant I have been able to pay off my remaining tuition fees, textbooks, and school supplies while staying away from student loans.”

In addition to scholarships such as these, Wildflower Run proceeds enable eight Morgan Hill Unified School District middle school girls to attend Tech Trek, a STEM camp at Stanford University, fund other local philanthropy consistent with AAUW’s mission, and continue to support national AAUW programs and fellowships.

“The Wildflower Run will always be Elena’s run, as we continue to raise funds for scholarships and other programs that support the education of women and girls,” Mandel said. “Elena would be proud of what ‘her’ run has accomplished.”

## **DETAILS**

**What: Wildflower Run**

**When: Check-in begins at 7:30 a.m., March 26**

**Where: Live Oak High School, 1505 E. Main Ave.**

**Registration: [www.WildflowerRun.org](http://www.WildflowerRun.org). To learn more about AAUW, go to [www.aauw-morganhill.org](http://www.aauw-morganhill.org).**

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