LWV LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LEHIGH COUNTY

September/October 2021 Volume 69, Issue 2

The VOTER

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Hot Topics Lunch

New location – No stairs!

Hops at the Paddock

1945 Columbia St., Allentown,

President's Message

Dear Valued Members of the League,

This is my first correspondence since I took office in June. I am both honored and humbled to be in this position; and I intend to ***learn and lean*** on those who have come before me for your help and guidance.

I cannot do this work alone and I want you all to know that we have a very enthusiastic and skillful Board that has been working hard all summer to move our League forward as we address a number of critical issues facing the quality of our Democracy. We have been challenged both by the National League and the PA State League to become "active" advocates for the two major issues facing our country right now.

First is the **"Fair Maps For All,"** which is our national campaign to advocate for fairly drawn Congressional and State Legislative Districts, now that the US Census data has been released to the states. The last five years we have been working very hard on this issue as Fair Districts PA (Part of the League) has become the most respected grass roots organization in Pennsylvania with over 100,000 citizens who have joined our ranks through many advocacy avenues. But, now we need our Lehigh County members to help prevent the egregious gerrymandering that took place in 2011 making Pennsylvania one of the most gerrymandered states in the entire nation!

The second issue is to strongly promote the **"For the People Act"** and to be aware of changes which may be on the horizon regarding voting/election issues and voter rights. There is an unfortunate trend in this nation right now to create bills which limit access to voting. As of June, 17 states have passed 28 bills to limit voter access, and there are roughly 61 bills which are being considered in 18 different states. Pennsylvania is one of those states with about 22 bills which have been introduced that can potentially: limit access to voting, abolish mail-in voting, limit the number of drop boxes and the time in which they are available, and to possibly remove the Department of State/ Executive Branch from overseeing state elections, just to name a few. (Source: Brennan Center for Justice.). The "For the People Act," if passed, will block many of these state-level restrictive bills.

Our mission is simply stated yet requires us to work hard at advocating: **"Empowering Voters. Defending Democracy."**

We have some ideas of how we can work as a League to advocate in many different ways, whether from the comfort of your home, on your computer, attending hearings, testifying, submitting written testimony or simply writing a letter-to-the-editor as well as contacting legislators about your interest in preserving or Representative Democracy. You will hear more about these ideas and will shortly receive a survey about a post card campaign.

Some of the items our Board has been working on this summer include:

1. Developing a list of speakers for our Hot Topic Luncheons.
2. Finding a new location (without steps) for our luncheons - Hops at the Paddock, near 19th and Walbert Avenue in South Whitehall.
3. Creating a voter registration/voting campaign called: "Voting is Your Super Power," in both English and Spanish.
4. Participating in unique tabling events.

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Board Notes

The Board of the Lehigh County League of Women Voters met twice since the last *VOTER*. The meetings were held on July 8 and August 12. Due to COVID 19, the meetings were held virtually. The following are highlights of the two meetings which are not being addressed in other articles in the newsletter.

Barbara Williams, Treasurer, reported that the League has a balance of $ 15,351.42 in assets for the month ending July 31. Our final financial report for the 2020-2021 fiscal year showed that the League received $11,745.25 in income, which was higher than the $10,250 that was budgeted. Moreover, there was $9,785.88 in expenses, which was below the $10,250 that was budgeted.

The Board approved giving members the option of paying dues and signing up for membership online or via regular mail, as well as the option of signing up to attend the Hot Topic Luncheons online or via email.

The Board established a "Government Directory" subcommittee to look at printing costs for yearly printing of the publication and distribution avenues. Delivering the Directory to organizations that work with underserved communities in Lehigh County is a priority.

Terri Purdy will be sending out a survey to members asking them to participate in a postcard campaign to encourage our legislature to create fair maps and end gerrymandering of state house and senate, and congressional districts.

Rochelle Kaplan, Secretary

Membership

We will have our first in person Hot Topics Luncheon this month! We will finally be able to see each other in person. We were one of the few Leagues in our state that had meetings virtually each month but it's always better to see each other in person and socialize around a table with good food. This is an opportunity to invite someone you know to our luncheon so they can see first hand what a great League we have.

As of August 16th, we have 82 members. With our website, Twitter, and Instagram accounts we are really getting the word out virtually. We had two new members join our League: Kim Gobreski from Center Valley and Dianne Howlett from Northampton. I hope to see you all at the luncheon!

Margie Dunn, Membership Chair

President's Message continued from page 1

5. Updating our all-inclusive website and making it more user-friendly with "buttons" for our social media and online registration/PayPal payment, as well as online registration for our Hot Topic Luncheons.
6. We are working on expanding our Diversity, Equality and Inclusion policies.
7. Work has begun on Vote411.org and the Morning Call Voters Guide and an overview of our Government Directory.
8. Preparing the September/October issue of *The Voter.*

As you can see, we have all been very busy and now we are excited to include you in our advocacy projects. We now have 82 members and we hope to see as many of you become active in some way as we tackle these projects together. We want to meet you, get to know new members and, see our long-time members again since Covid interrupted our HTL. We are proceeding with every caution and CDC recommendation as we try to complete this season in person.

Our first Hot Topic Luncheon will be the story of the Justice Bell prior to the adoption of the 19th Amendment. You will enjoy the 19-minute documentary and discussion conducted by Amanda Owen. Amanda is a scholar, an author and a film maker of women's history in Pennsylvania and the Executive Director of the Justice Bell Foundation.

Hopefully we will see you there and have time to say hello and catch-up with our members. A buffet lunch begins promptly at 11:30 am sharp and costs $15.00. Please wear a mask until you sit to eat and use hand sanitizer as you enter the room.

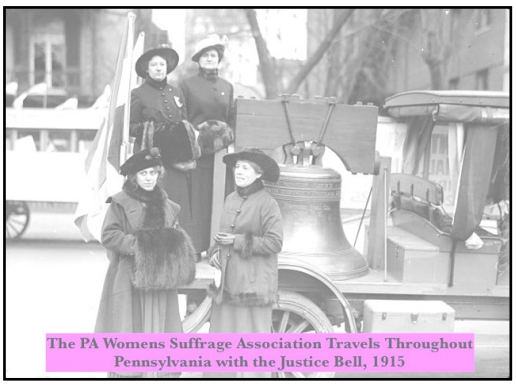
Again, I am honored to be in this position and to carry-on our traditions. Our Board members are looking forward to engaging with the membership and making this a year of "Empowering Voters and Defending Democracy!" Welcome Back!

Gratefully,

Mary Erdman, President

September Hot Topic: Justice Bell

On Monday, September 13, 2021 at 11:30, we are planning to go live for our Hot Topics Lunch! The cost is $15. Register at www.lwvlehighcounty.org, the League website or contact Chris Herbener. Please note our new meeting place: Hops at the Paddock in Allentown. Masks should be worn until we are seated to eat, and hand sanitizer will be supplied at the dining room entrance.


The PA Womens Suffrage Association Travels Throughout Pennsylvania with the Justice Bell, 1915

We will be hosting a presentation on the rich history of the Justice Bell in the suffrage movement of the early 20th century.

In an effort to raise awareness for women's suffrage, the bell went on a 5,000-mile tour in 1915, visiting all 67 Pennsylvania counties, on the bed of a modified pickup truck. The bell's clapper was chained to its side as a symbol of how women were being silenced by being unable to vote. The truck carried a sign with the slogan of the suffragist moment: "Votes for Women", a phrase coined by Mark Twain. Amanda Owen, who is the director of the Justice Bell Foundation, as well as the producer of the movie she will show, will be our speaker.

It is exciting that we will be able to see each other once again!

Chris Herbener, Vice President Program

Voter Registration and Tabling

The kick-off to our **"Voting is Your Super Power"** campaign took place at Sacred Heart Community Day held at Sacred Heart Hospital, Allentown on July 17th. The LWVLC joined with numerous local organizations to share information about our mission and programs.

Our postcard initiative is designed to help citizens easily access answers to voting questions. Using a QRI printed on the postcard, potential voters can open the www.votespa.com website for voter information and online registration.

September will be a busy month for voter registration and tabling activities. We have been invited by the Bethlehem Area Public Library to hold a tabling event concurrent with the library's book sale on Saturday, September 11th from 10 am to 1 pm.

The next day, September 12th, we will be participating in Rally in the Valley at ArtsQuest Center, Bethlehem from noon to 5:00 pm. We are excited about the opportunity to share information about the LWVLC, the coming municipal election, and even register new voters.

The Bethlehem Rose Garden Farmers Market will celebrate Constitution Day on Saturday, September 18th from 9 am to 1 pm. The market is located in Bethlehem between Broad Street and Union Boulevard. The LWVLC will be available to answer voter questions and register voters on this special market day.

Parkland Community Library will host a league presentation on September 18th, National Voter Registration Day from 2 pm to 3 pm. *The Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How of Municipal Elections of 2021* will be an in-person program. See Parkland Community Library/ Events/RSVP Adults page for program information and registration. A good day to check out the newly remodeled library and participate in a league program as well!

Thanks to our members for their ongoing assistance in a busy election season.

Barbara Connolly, Vice President Voter Services

HOT TOPICS LUNCHEONS

September 13, 2021
The History of the Justice Bell

October 11, 2021
The Extensive Projects of the Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley

November 8, 2021
State of the County 2021-2022

December 13, 2021
Election Trends and Midterm Challenges

January 10, 2022
An Introduction to the Work of the Valley Against Sex Trafficing Organization

February 14, 2022
Addressing the Drug Issue in the Lehigh Valley & What are We Doing Locally and Statewide to Help People Suffering from these Disorders?

March 14, 2022
Habitat Creation for Native Beneficial Insects

April 11, 2022
Massive Shale Gas Transport Through Lehigh County - Public Safety Risks

Hops at the Paddock
1945 Columbia St.,
Allentown

Redistricting Update—How You Can Help

The LWV of Lehigh County needs your help to make sure we have fair maps drawn. The US Census bureau delivered the census data to states on August 12, 2021. Prior to the delivery of this data, the Pennsylvania governmental entities responsible for redistricting had already begun their work. Before we dive in to how you can help, a short refresher on the redistricting process in Pennsylvania and what has transpired so far.

For US congressional districts, the State House and Senate pass legislation drawing the congressional district map. The Governor then receives the legislation for signature or veto. Because of the decline in Pennsylvania's population, the state will have one less congressional seat. This means that our congressional delegation will be reduced from 18 to 17 seats. Currently, the House and Senate State Government Committees are responsible for holding hearings and getting citizen input on the new congressional districts. On August 4, the Senate State Government Committee held a public hearing on congressional redistricting. The committee heard from specialists in mapping, representatives from good government organizations, and Pennsylvania residents. To listen to the testimony go to https://www.pasenategop.com/blog/stgov-080421/ The schedule for future public hearings can be found here for the House at http://paredistricting.com/hearingschedule and here for the Senate at https://www.legis.state.pa.us/cfdocs/cteeInfo/Index.cfm?CteeBody=S&Code=41.

The hearing for our region will occur on September 21 at 1:00 pm at the Spinnerstown Hotel, 2195 Spinnerstown Road, Spinnerstown (Quakertown).

The Legislative Reapportionment Commission (LRC) draws the maps for the State House of Representatives and State Senate. Since we have two hundred and three (203) PA State House members, one map divides the state into 203 voting districts. The PA State Senate has fifty (50) members, thus, the second map divides the state into 50 voting districts. The commission has five members- two leaders of the Republican caucus, two leaders of the Democratic Caucus, and one nonpartisan member who is the chair. The LRC recently hired a mapping expert to help them draw maps. The maps they create become law without the vote of the General Assembly or approved by the Governor.

On July 29, the LRC held its first public hearing featuring presentations from representatives of National Conference of State Legislatures, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania, and the Legislative Data Processing Center. Thereafter, on August 3, the panel heard from Carol Kunihom, Fair Districts Pa; Khalif Ali, Executive Director, Common Cause of Pennsylvania; and Pennsylvania residents. To listen to the testimony, go to: https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/commission/article/1067.

The schedule for future public hearings for the LRC can be found at https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/commission/hearings. No future hearings have been scheduled at this time. But there is every indication that Chair Nordenberg will be scheduling them in the near future. You can sign up to receive notification of future hearings at the LRC website.

While most of the testifiers discussed specific concerns about their districts with the State Government Committees and the LRC, they also raised other concerns regarding the redistricting process such as, keeping communities of interest together, defining communities of interest, prison gerrymandering, transparency in the decision making regarding the final maps, using a blank map when drawing districts, and citizen participation before and after the maps are drawn.

We encourage all of our members to submit testimony, either in person or in writing. The maps that are created will substantially impact our ability to have fair elections for the next 10 years, so it is vital that we have a voice in the process. If you want to submit written testimony to the LRC go to https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/comment/. If you want to submit testimony to the House State government committee, go to http://paredistricting.com/input and to the Senate State Government committee go to https://www.senatorargall.com/contact-me/ of dargall@pasen.gov.

For samples of testimony, the LRC has posted all of the public comments submitted to date at https://www.redistricting.state.pa.us/comment/ As Fair Districts Pa advised, if you cannot think of something to say just say this:

> "Start with a BLANK map-- don't build districts around incumbents' home addresses. Put voters and communities FIRST."

That said, if you are interested in submitting testimony and want help, contact Mary Erdman or Rochelle Kaplan.

Why Should You Care about Gerrymandering and Redistricting?

The best way to understand why you should care about these issues is to look at the detrimental results of the worst gerrymandering in Pennsylvania history, which took place in 2011. As a result of the redistricting in 2011, Republicans were unfairly over-represented by about 20% Congress, Democrats were under-represented by about 20% for three consecutive Congressional elections, and the 15th District stretched from the Delaware River to the Susquehanna. This took away our "community of interest" known as the greater Lehigh Valley. A lawsuit brought by the PA League of Women Voters and Common Cause succeeded in having our congressional districts redrawn to be fairer. The lawsuit restored that community and created fairer representation. The newly drawn district made much more common sense for our area. Despite this victory for fair districts in Pennsylvania, our legislative districts remain terribly gerrymandered.

Here is how gerrymandering hurts each of us:

- It creates and enhances **hyper-partisanship**. Parties more likely to go to their "corners" and fight over legislation that could benefit our citizens.
- **Compromise** has become a dirty word. Often, if a legislator tries to compromise too often, they may be "primaried," or have their own good legislation ignored for not following the "party line."
- Undeserving legislators are returned to Harrisburg simply because their districts are so gerrymandered that they barely have to campaign. Over 35% of state legislative seats went **uncontested** in the last election!
- Those same legislators find it unnecessary to answer our *Vote411.org,* participate in our Legislative Interviews, answer questions in The Morning Call Voters Guide, refuse to participate in candidate forums and/or debates, and generally seem very disinterested in what their constituents want, need, or have to say. Remember: they do work for us!
- Legislators in **"safe"** districts often lack the motivation to really get things done, because they know their chances of returning to Harrisburg are strong.
- Not nearly enough gets done because legislating becomes deadlocked due to a lack of compromise.
- Property tax reform has been promised, but will not be reformed if we continue to be gerrymandered.
- School funding in PA is ranked about 46th out of 50 states in how well and how equitably schools are funded. We need to do better.
- Our environment is taking a hit as we cannot seem to agree on what is the best path for PA to take regarding fossil fuels and renewable sources of energy. Our air and water are among the dirtiest in the US.
- Our minimum wage is the lowest of all surrounding states and has not budged for over 10 years at $7.25.
- PA has no sensible lead testing program. We have some of the highest rates of lead in our water and our old homes and apartments in the entire country. Lead poisoning causes neurological, behavioral, and learning issues in our youngest children and cannot be reversed. Despite this, we do not do universal lead testing like many other states. New Jersey does universal testing of all young children.
- As climate change calls for bolder moves and decisions, our governor is struggling to rally support for joining the RGGI, (Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative) a group of neighboring states seeking to develop creative, beneficial ways to protect our environment and control greenhouse gases. Again, we are the only one of the states in our region which does not belong to this consortium.
- The current majority party wants to create laws that usurp power from the other two branches and create subtle forms of voter suppression. This is not how a representative democracy should look.
- Gerrymandering stifles accountability in our legislators. The United States is the only democracy in the entire world which tolerates gerrymandering. Computer software programs make gerrymandering easier to do and harder to detect than ever. The new maps will influence our government until 2031!

There are many other examples of how gerrymandering hurts PA citizens, but the most important is that gerrymandering attacks our most sacred belief in "one man (person), one vote, which is the foundation of our representative democracy! The only ones who realize any benefits from gerrymandering are the members of party in control at the time. Maintaining that power becomes more important

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Please consider joining us for one or both of the following:

- **A Voter Registration Drive at the Rally in the Valley (ArtsQuest, 101 Founders Way Bethlehem) on September 12, noon to 5 pm**

- **A Postcarding Campaign for a Fair Redistricting Process– see the details at lwvlehighcounty.org/volunteer/**

Let us know, at email@lwvlehighcounty.org, if you want to get involved in either or both of these activities.

Let's Get Postcarding for Fair Redistricting in PA

The League of Women Voters of Lehigh County is actively involved in Fair Districts PA, a project of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania that is pushing for redistricting reform in Pennsylvania. Harrisburg will be drawing 17 new Congressional Districts, 203 new PA legislative districts, and 50 new PA Senate Districts which should fairly represent each of our citizens. This is critically important because we will have to live with these districts for the next 10 years. Pennsylvania deserves a redistricting process that is *transparent*, *accountable*, and *responsive*.

If you are interested in helping the cause, please consider participating in our postcarding campaign. Studies have shown that handwritten postcards are an effective way to get your message "heard" by the postcard recipient.

You can do the postcarding on your own or you can invite friends to a postcarding party. If you are interested, the League will provide you with the postcards, stamps, and pens. We will also provide you with steps on what you will need to get going, a script for the postcards, and a list of names and addresses.

Please let us know if you are interested in helping by responding to our survey at the link below:

https://forms.gle/yDCmXscMxuG4YfC97

Voters Guide

We are in the process of gathering all the information for candidates that will appear on the ballot for the General Election in November. I have contacted the Voter Registration Office to review candidate nomination petitions in order to have the necessary information to compile a complete Voters' Guide.

The deadline for the candidates' information to be provided to The Morning Call is Monday, September 27th with the publication of the Voters' Guide expected on Thursday, October 14th 2021. The Guide is being published a few weeks prior to the General Election in order to give constituents an opportunity to review the Guide prior to completing a mail-in or absentee ballot.

Please check out vote411.org at anytime prior to the publication of the paper Voters' Guide for updated current information on candidates in contested races in Lehigh County.

Michelle Graupner, Voters Guide Editor

Gerrymandering continued from page 5

than anything else, and it heavily damages our principle of representative democracy. Democracy is greatly suffering at the present time, both in Pennsylvania and throughout the entire nation. We can celebrate democracy only when the greatest number of our citizens' voices are heard.

"The foundation of Democracy, in large part, rests upon the pillars of transparency and fairness. Our system of government is benefitted by seeking and incorporating the input of the greatest number of citizens possible to build consensus and honor those foundational ideas." These are the words of our own Sen. Pat Browne (R) in his support of an open and transparent redistricting process this past spring. We need to put these words into action now!

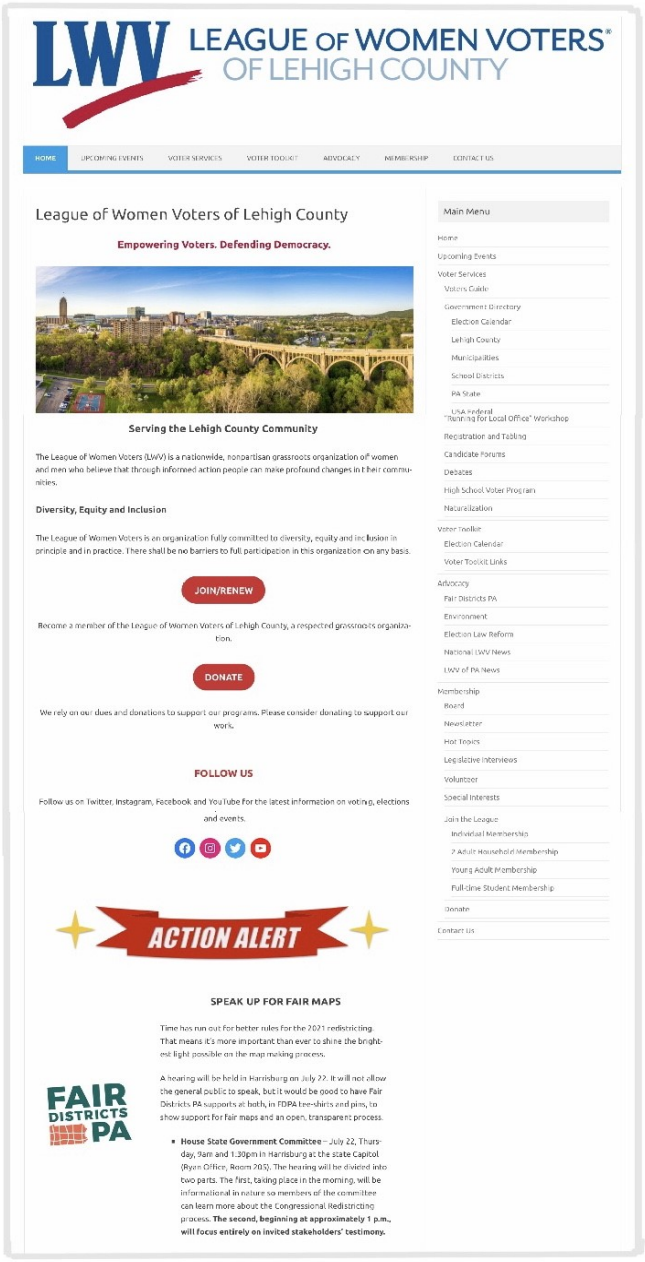
Please become an "active" advocate and do whatever you can to bring this message to the forefront - redistricting needs to be fair. Whether you send postcards, emails, letters, letters-to-the-editor, rally, or testify in person or through written testimony; allow the Legislative Reapportionment Commission and the House and Senate State Government Committees to hear your voice about the redistricting process. The US Census data has been released which signals to us that this is "go time," to advocate for fairly drawn districts.

The League is here to assist you in any way we can.

Mary Erdman, President

Our Website Got a Facelift

Please visit our League's updated website at lwvlehighcounty.org. We hope you will find something that interests you and that you will become involved with.



Picture of a Lifetime!

League members Dorothy and James Shackelford are greeted warmly by President Joe Biden on the day he recently visited Mack Trucks in Macungie. The photographer was our own Congresswoman Susan Wild, who commented that this was her favorite photo of the day. We totally agree. What a wonderful keepsake, Dorothy and James!

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

LWVPA Equity Diversity Team led by Jennifer Hauf has continued to meet monthly through the summer. The state league is encouraging local leagues to consider DEI in all their activities.

Team members have been encouraged to put together informal meetings with members to reflect upon how labels color our perceptions of people.

The current goal for the DEI committee is for team members to gain experience in leading a small informal group through reflection and sharing. Team leader Jennifer suggested materials that could be used. The materials can be customized to be appropriate for the group in beginning an equity/ DEI discussion.

The next meeting is early September.

Molly Faust, Past President

Interested in voter registration and tabling activities?Have suggestions, ideas, referrals or contacts? Contact Barbara Connolly, Chair of Voter Registration and Tabling

email@lwvlehighcounty.org .

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LEHIGH COUNTY

League of Women Voters of Lehigh County
P.O. Box 3275
Allentown, PA 18106

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LEHIGH COUNTY

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LEHIGH COUNTY

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Membership dues include membership in the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) and the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania (LWVPA) and a subscription to the local and state *Voter.*

League dues and contributions are <u>not</u> tax-deductible as a charitable donation.

Contributions to the LWV Education Fund (LWVEF) <u>are</u> tax-deductible.

Membership in the League of Women Voters is open to all citizens. Voting members must be at least 16 years old.

ANNUAL DUES 2021

$70 individual $105 household $25 full-time student

$35 if 35 years or younger

Please make check payable to LWVLC and mail to:

LWVLC
c/o Margie Dunn
8411 Carpet Road
New Tripoli, PA 18066