LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF LEHIGH COUNTY

November/December 2023 Volume 71, Issue 3

The VOTER

President's Message

Dear Members,

As we approach the Thanksgiving season, we must ask ourselves for what are we grateful? Those things we treasure most are of course the health and well-being of family, the happiness of those around us and for peace throughout our country and world. We are being tested right now, and there are those of us who may have relatives in Israel or Gaza, or are of the Jewish faith and worry about the future of the Israelis and Palestinians. These are frightening and sad times for these peoples. It makes us appreciate the rights and freedoms of American citizens and, how we must safeguard those rights!

The League of Women Voters has taken some unfair criticisms for leaning in one direction. That is not exactly how the League sees things. We have one mission that is to **"Empower Voters,"** which includes all we do to inform and prepare voters *and* candidates.

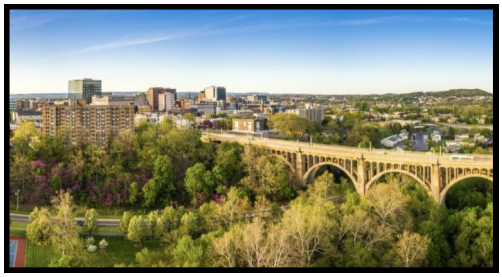
Our other side, our political side, is *issue based* and is explained by our other mission to **"Defend Democracy*!"*** That means we look at policies and laws passed by our state or federal government and study these topics when questions are raised. We *never* determine our *issues* from political parties or from politicians. We study issues that we may see as challenges to our American democratic principles, practices and policies. We study them at every level, we require consensus, and then we take action. Whether that action be in support of womens' reproductive choices, the downfalls of gerrymandering or the aspects of Voter ID laws which restrict voting instead of expanding voting; we will work for the best democratic outcomes - and that is how we lean!

I am grateful for the LWV at each level. We have great leaders, we have dedicated, long time members and we have many of our local members who volunteer, donate or serve on the Board.

I am grateful for each and every one of you. As we move forward, we need to bring some younger and more active people into our League in order to sustain the great work we all do. I ask you for your help in this project. Thank you to all, and have a very Happy Thanksgiving!

Yours in League,

Mary Erdman, President



Community Outreach Report

It has been a busy fall with numerous pre-election events and presentations. Our name is definitely getting into the community as a resource to inform voters about the voting process, potential pitfalls - especially relating to mail-in ballots, and how to access nonpartisan and accurate information about elections and candidates. Throughout the fall we have emphasized the importance of municipal elections and how decisions made locally affect our everyday life from zoning regulations to road repairs and police departments.

Constitution Day was recognized on September 16th at the Bethlehem Rose Garden, one of our favorite days to connect with voters while checking out some unique treats at the Farmers Market. We had many inquiries about The Voters Guide and when it would be available. The guide is a favorite resource for voters and always eagerly anticipated.

We also attended the Open House at Harrison Morton Middle School on September 20th and another on September 27th at Building 21, both in Allentown. A request to table at Fiesta Latina at the Lehigh Valley Dual Language Charter School in Bethlehem on October 20th presented another opportunity to talk about the upcoming election and the importance of voting. At each of these events we encouraged parents to vote, research candidates, and we provided information about available voting information resources.

Rochelle Kaplan and I attended the Adult Forum at St. John's UCC, Allentown on Sunday, October 8th. As always, questions about voting and local elections were key concerns for the most welcoming group.

On October 4th and 5th, the Political Society of Lehigh County Community College held a two-day voter registration drive on campus. We were able to partner with the students providing vote411 postcards, lists of election and voter resources, and tabling materials.

Mary Erdman and Barbara Connolly at Building 21 Open House

Thanks to Donna and Charles Barker for distributing GOTV postcards to Lehigh County libraries and the Hispanic Centers in Allentown and Bethlehem. Nearly 1000 postcards provided by the LWVPA have been distributed in September and October in this effort. Contact me with any suggestions or ideas for extending our community outreach in Lehigh County!

Barbara Connolly, Vice President, Voter Services

Hot Topics Luncheon Report

We are sincerely hoping that Congresswoman Wild will be available for our November 13th Hot Topic Luncheon. There is so much going on right now: waiting for a new Speaker, budget talks (should be going on the week she is speaking to us) and the hostilities between Israel and Hamas; we just cannot 100% guarantee that Susan Wild will be available. But we know she will try.

As soon as we know, you will know. There is so much that she will be able to share with us. This has been a very trying year; but also, a year in which many of President Biden's programs and Congresswoman Wild's work to steer a lot of those dollars to her district has been wonderful for the Lehigh Valley. Let's all hope she will get the chance to speak to us.

Congresswoman Susan Wild

The December Hot Topic luncheon brings Professor Chris Borick. He is always a favorite and there never seems to be a shortage of topics and questions to discuss when he visits. We always look froward to Prof. Borick!

Don't forget to bring a friend or friends to our luncheons. We know that some of you are working very hard on that challenge, and we are thrilled that you are. Our attendance and our membership are constantly growing because of you.

In case of inclement weather (shhh…) we will email all members as soon as a decision is made.

See you in November and December.

And thank you to Phil Armstrong for an update on Lehigh County. It is gratifying to see our commissioners working in a truly bi-partisan manner to improve life for all of us living in Lehigh County! Thank you, Phil!

Mary Erdman

Our League Holds Three School Board Candidate Forums

We are very proud of the forums we held this fall. East Penn School District, Parkland School District, and Southern Lehigh School District each fielded a group of candidates who participated in our Candidate Forums. Our committee was comprised of: Rochelle Kaplan, Barb Williams, Barb Connolly, Terri Purdy, Cheryl Winters-Tetreau, Donna and Charles Barker, and me worked together to orchestrate three well-organized, constructive forums. We were thoughtful when creating questions and kept it to the issues in which citizens are most interested. We also allowed for audience questions.

We did invite every single school board candidate from each of the three school districts; but three from East Penn and Southern Lehigh and five from Parkland decided not to participate or in most circumstances, answer our numerous invitations. We did have many candidates from *both* parties compliment us on the opportunity, our fairness, and the value of our questions. We do believe that misinformation has been a problem in some candidates not seeing us as fair. But we were very proud of the results, the gratitude of candidates, and the fairness we exhibited.

We also tried to hold a forum for our Lehigh County Commissioner candidates; but unfortunately, one party rejected our invitations. We find that upsetting because a forum enables candidates to answer why they ran, what their policies are for the future, and how they plan to improve life in the County. But fortunately we can fall back on our Morning Call Voters Guide as well as more lengthy information about each candidate on Vote411.org.

Please refer to each of these. And thank you to Julie Ambrose, our editor for the Voters Guide - good job, Julie!

Mary Erdman

Barbara Williams moderates Candidates Forum

Teri Purdy and Rochelle Kaplan are timers for the forum

A Very Short History Lesson

In early September, I was asked to speak about the League of Women Voters to a group of women who belonged to a local chapter of PEO (Philanthropic Educational Organization). The women told me afterwards that while they knew and appreciated our Voters Guide, they had not realized all the other things the league does. And, like many people, they did not understand our non-partisan policy. Here is a portion of my presentation. I thought you might appreciate a reminder of our history and our work locally as well as nationally.—Molly Faust

The League of Women Voters is a grassroots, nonpartisan organization. Its purpose is to dedicated to empowering everyone to fully participate in our democracy. To do this, we engage in advocacy, education, litigation and organizing to protect every American's right to vote.

The League of Women Voters is a direct descendant of the US women's suffrage movement. It came into existence six months before the ratification of the 19th Amendment which gave women the right to vote. Founded in 1920, it was a merger of the National Council of Women Voters and the National American Women's Suffrage Association. The organization's mission was to help newly enfranchised women learn how to register, how to vote, how to learn about their candidates, and how to learn about the workings of their governments. Women wanted to make up their own minds about how to vote without influence from the men in their lives.

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Environmental Policy Report

We held our first Sustainability Voter Education Program on Saturday, October 21st, at the Allentown Public Library on Native Plants and Pollinators for children and adults. Becky Short, Master Gardener and League Member, gave a talk about the benefits of native plants and pollinators with help from her grandchildren Violet and Iris.

Using examples from her garden, Becky talked about the different native plants, their history, and uses. She explained how native plants help the ecosystem by attracting pollinators to pollinate plants as well as insects that feed the birds. Do you know that flies are some of the best pollinators?

We learned how native plants can help the environment by absorbing water and prevent erosion with their deep root systems. It doesn't take much to get started with your own native plant pollinator garden. Even small pocket native plant gardens or container planters can make an environmental difference.

Becky Short, speaker and helpers, Violet and Iris

After the talk, the children drew pictures of native plants and made origami bees and butterflies to add the pollinators to their pictures. The adults were able to get voter information and talk to the LWV members in attendance.

In addition to the program, the League donated over 20 environmental education books to the Allentown Public Library. The event was funded by a Sustainability Grant from the PA League of Women Voters and was supported by the Allentown Public Library and the Allentown Public School District Foundation.

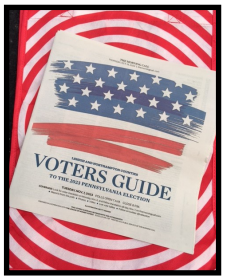
A big thanks to the League Members who helped make the event happen!

Eileen Iobst, Environmental Chair

Eileen Iobst addresses audience at Allentown Public Library

Publications Distribution Report

The week of October 16-22, Publications Distribution was busy distributing 1000 copies of the Voters Guide to various locations, including food banks, offices, public libraries, legislators, retirement communities, and community centers in Lehigh County. We added a few new delivery spots to our contacts list, specifically, Second Harvest, B'nai B'rith, and Promise Neighborhoods. In total, 1000 copies were distributed to 52 recipients by 14 members who volunteered to make deliveries.



Our thanks to the following members who made this effort a success: Mary Erdman, Rochelle Kaplan, Bob Eblich, Barb Connolly, Molly Faust, Ken Baumert, Amy Golding, Merry Landis, Georgine Miller, Cheryl Winters-Tetreau, Pat Hudson, Timku Khanwalker, Donna Barker, and Charle Barker. Thanks also to Julie Ambrose, whose editing produced an informative publication, and to The Morning Call for providing the League copies free of charge.

Donna & Charles Barker, Directors

Membership Report

It's renewal time!

After Thanksgiving you will be receiving a letter about renewing your membership in the LCLWV. Our membership is still the same- $70. You can renew by sending a check to me or doing it online through our website- LCLWV.org. If you renew online, there will be a small service charge.

Our membership is now up to 88 members, and we need every one of you! I am very pleased to announce we had 5 new members join our League: Kathryn Foster of Lehighton, Tinku Khanwalker of Allentown, Georgina Miller of Emmaus, Susan Zenck of Allentown and Jeanette Eichenwald of Allentown.

We welcome you to our League!

Margie Dunn , Membership

A Very Short History Lesson Continued from page 3

Over the years, LWV has broadened its mission and reach, with hundreds of Leagues in every state of the Union, the US Virgin Islands, and Hong Kong. There are 750 leagues in the United States with approximately 30 in Pennsylvania. We have over 500,000 members and supporters.

One of the Foundational Principles is **non-partisanship**. *The League shall not support or oppose any political party or any candidate.* The league takes very seriously its non-partisan principle. Voter Services activities and lobbying activities must be kept separate and voters' guides and other voter service materials and publications must not contain statements of League positions. In this hyper partisan atmosphere, the non partisan principle has been misunderstood. League members are not a monolith. We represent opinions and positions that can be found across the American political spectrum. What brings us together is our commitment to voter empowerment—especially empowering women voters—and defending democracy. Standing up for these values is not a partisan narrative but a way to advance inclusion.

However, **NONPARTISAN DOES NOT MEAN APOLITICAL.** League members have a great interest in public policy. In its 100 year existence, the league has studied and taken positions on many public policies to include representative government, International relations, natural resources, and many social policy issues. The League's position on these matters is explained in Impact on Issues, a publication put out by National after each of its biannual national conventions. It is available on Amazon.

The process used in formulating positions and acting at the grassroots level makes the League unique and sets the League apart from other organizations. The fact that we are a member of not only a local League, but a state League and the League of Women Voters of the United States, makes us a powerful force.

Our local league was formed in 1955 as the LWV of Allentown – it started with 33 members. We became the LWV of the Allentown Area and in 1997, the LWV of Lehigh County. Currently, we have approximately 83 members. We produce the Voters Guide twice a year, produce and distribute a Government Directory yearly. Our Hot Topic luncheon series is how we stay in touch with our membership. These are monthly luncheons with a speaker. We produce and put on a workshop every 2 years for people running for local offices. We run voter registration drives, attend naturalization ceremonies, and run candidate forums so voters get to meet their representatives. We have a bi-monthly newsletter, the VOTER.

In our 68 year existence, our league has addressed the following local issues –

Allentown's and later Lehigh County's form of government
Lehigh County's water supply and quality
Allentown Housing Authority

Currently, we are putting together an environmental committee. We have a new board member who is willing to head this initiative. The state league has expertise in this area and this is a platform of state and national.

Our mission to 'empower voters and defend democracy' has not changed in our 100 years. What has changed is the need to defend democracy, especially in the face of voter suppression.

Molly Faust

Message Board—Help Wanted

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

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF LEHIGH COUNTY

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

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 not tax-deductible as a charitable donation.

Contributions to the LWV Education Fund (LWVEF) are 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 2024

$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