



LEAGUE OF
WOMEN VOTERS®

90 Years and Still Going Strong

This is our League's 44th Annual meeting, but it is the 90th Birthday year for the League of Women Voters of the United States. It is not the same League that the suffragists formed when they finally won the right to vote. We no longer refer to ourselves as Mrs. John Doe, we welcome men into our ranks, we communicate electronically rather than by typewriter and mimeograph, we support equality of the sexes, rather than special legal protections for female workers.

But we are not so different either. Our main focus is still on extending access to the ballot box, on safeguarding the vote, on creating informed voters. We still believe that the purpose of government is to do those things that we cannot do as individuals: things like protecting the environment, making sure everyone has access to healthcare, regulating banks and financial institutions, supporting a system of courts and law, supporting public schools, protecting our country from invasion, creating public infrastructure, providing public safety, regulating utilities and public carriers, creating a fair system to fund our governments.

And we still believe that civility has a place in the decision making process. We believe in discussion, in figuring out what the relevant facts are, in cooperation and compromise, in trying to discern what is in the common good, AND THEN WE BELIEVE IN TAKING ACTION TO REACH OUR GOALS.

So what have we been working on this year?

VOTERS' SERVICES

Candidate Forums are the activities that are practically synonymous with the name LWV. This year was a local election year and our co-chairs Ann Kril and Mary Lou Classen arranged seven candidate forums in the Towns of Milton, Ballston and Charlton, Stillwater, and Clifton Park and in the cities of Saratoga Springs and Mechanicville. We also moderated a school board candidate event.

Fair Campaign Practices Committee for the Capital Region, Inc. heard complaints arising in the Town of Malta and the City of Mechanicville. This non-judicial group which is composed of members of area Leagues and the Interfaith Alliance of NYS works to educate the public about unfair campaign practices by publicizing its decisions.

Voters' Guides prepared by LWVNY were distributed through Southern Adirondack Library System and the Farmers' Market to 3,000 folks. The cost of these guides is underwritten by Adirondack Trust Company.

An Online Voters' Guide located on our website, was designed and successfully piloted by Francine Rodger and Chris Alexander.

Voter Registration forms were made available at community events and completed ones were returned to the Board of Elections.

GETTING YOUTH INVOLVED IN THE CIVIC PROCESS

LeaderSpark is our intensive program to build leadership skills in high school sophomores and juniors drawn from throughout the County. Led this year by Jane Weihe and Kristin Overholt we had 28 participants, more than ever before, more diversity, and more volunteers.

Students Inside Albany is a LWVNY program that brings high school students from across the state to Albany to learn first hand how lobbyists and legislators interact and how the public business does or doesn't get done. One of our LeaderSpark grads, Liz Besozzi, attended and got to shadow her Senator and Assemblymember.

TAKE ME TO VOTE! This year 177 fifth grade students went to the polls with an adult in this program that introduces students to voting and also encourages voter turnout. TMTV's chair, Cindy Sodher, arranged for Assemblymen Tony Jordan and Bob Reilly to visit the classes with the highest percentage of participation, which were at Chango and Okte schools.

First Vote was designed by Helen Crawshaw to connect high school seniors with their responsibility to become participating members of the voting public and to get them registered to vote for the first time. For the past seven years, she has led the project which provides pamphlets and a voter registration form for each student whose teachers request it. We reach between 1900 and 2000 students each year.

FUND AND FRIEND RAISING

Lincoln, Liberty and Liberation was a rousing success thanks to the hard work of Kristin Overholt and Bill Crawshaw and the talent of Phil Jessen, our President Abraham Lincoln. It was a fitting celebration of our 90th Birthday at the beautiful Saratoga National Golf Club and it raised needed funds.

State Farm is an important funder of our Candidate Forums and Youth Programs.

Adirondack Trust Company underwrites the cost of all the Voters' Guides we distribute.

Individual contributors were solicited, and thanked, by Pat Reed and Marian Potter.

Membership We can't keep on keeping on if we don't maintain and increase our membership, particularly the pool of active members who are willing to show up at meetings, staff activities and most importantly, take a leadership role. Lori Dawson has been leading us in implementing the LWVUS Membership Recruitment Initiative. You will have noticed a sign in sheet at every meeting, a renewed emphasis on ASKING people to join, on providing a number of ways and times for people to get involved. We all enjoyed the friendly and informative membership orientation, Fanning the Flames of Democracy. We hope others feel more connected through our pre-meeting meals and our Walk and Talk group.

Visibility and Communication Pat Nugent works diligently to keep our face in public through press releases. Pattie Garrett organizes our presence at the Farmers' Market, and has also been the prime mover behind our Facebook pages (LWV has one, and so does LeaderSpark). Christine Alexander designed our website and keeps it updated. Margot Ammon, although she insists on being called the Art Director, is really the force behind our Bulletin.

We have undertaken an audit of our present and possible future communication modes. We'll hold a meeting in the Fall to help us reach some decisions about future directions (and maybe learn how to use some of the newer methods).

We marched in the Saratoga Springs Memorial Day Parade to get a little more visibility. Please be on the lookout for opportunities in your locality!

Observer Corps members attend County Government committee meetings and report to our chair, Denny Finneran. It keeps the observers informed, but we still haven't figured out how to share our information with the rest of you.

Sustainability We kicked off an interest in sustainable communities by listening to Melissa Everett from Sustainable Hudson, who encouraged us to seek environmental harmony, energy off the grid, locally supplied food and local economic interdependence.

We celebrated the passage of a slightly watered down Bigger, Better Bottle Bill. We met in July to follow up on Melissa's suggestions and decided to work with Sustainable Saratoga. LWV held two other public meetings on sustainability, Caring for the Environment and Greening Your Household. On the national level we lobbied for bills to combat climate change and against weakening amendments to the Clean Air Act.

State Study of Consolidation, Dissolution and Shared Services for Government Entities

was ably led by Francine Rodger and Margie Van Meter, with most of the members of last year's County Government committee participating in the study and presentation to the membership.

Marriage Equality First we held a public information meeting on the subject of same sex marriage, ably put together by Janice Burns, Millie Green and Selma Harwood. Then we decided to work for a concurrence with the position of LWV of Maine. Lori Dawson is leading this effort at the LWVUS convention this month.

Healthcare At every level, LWV provided information to the public and its members on the implications of the various and constantly changing proposals for a Health Care Bill and urged us all to lobby for our point of view. Pat Reed has been leading the effort for a single payer solution such as *Medicare for All* for many years. As our League's chair for Healthcare we can count on Pat to keep us updated on the implementation of the Health Care Reform Act, and proposals for amendments.

Domestic Violence Selma Harwood arranged an informative program that drew many non-LWV members.

Action This year we had some legislative successes on items that we'd been lobbying on for almost twenty years. Check out your May/June Bulletin, or www.lwvsaratoga.org. for these successes. And then we put a lot of effort into traveling to Albany to demonstrate our support for pay equity on April 20th, for redistricting, lobbying and ethics reform on February 9th, and again on May 5th for Albany on the Record. So far those efforts haven't brought results. But in addition to integrity the LWV has tenacity.

I'm sure I haven't mentioned all the things that we've worked on this year – but it is obvious that we are still going strong. I want to thank every member of the board for all their dedication and hard work. And I want to thank all of you for every thing you have done, including showing up today.

Now, if you have any direction you want to give to the board this is your opportunity.

Barb Thomas
President

