



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SARATOGA COUNTY

P.O. BOX 1029, SARATOGA SPRINGS, NEW YORK 12866

President's Report to LWV of Saratoga County for the year 2010-2011

By Barbara Thomas

Dinosaur? No Way!

LWV Saratoga Embraces 21st Century Technology Remains True to its Principles and Goals

We use cell phones!

For the first time ever LWV Saratoga has its own phone number, 728-0237. It is a cell phone that can be passed from president to president, or to a backup person. It is already listed on our website, our membership brochure, on 211, and in other directories. It makes it much easier for someone wanting to make contact with our League to Google us up, get the number and get a prompt response from a real person.

We have a great website that our webmaster, Christine Alexander, is constantly updating. There is a wealth of information at www.lwvsaratoga.org, from our by-laws to our Youth Programs, from our position on solid waste to our calendar of events; it is all there.

New on the website this year was a **voter's guide** that covered all the races from Assembly member on up to Governor. We collaborated with the other four Leagues in this area to contact the candidates and make sure that they posted their pictures and responses to our questions. Francine Rodger and Chris Alexander provided the technical assistance for the candidates, and made the Vote 411 system provided by LWVUS function properly. All that a voter had to do was type in their ZIP code, and they got screens comparing all the candidates on their ballot. Almost all of the candidates participated- the highest rate of response in NYS- because of persistent follow-up by the cooperating Leagues.

Our Facebook page is constantly updated by Pattie Garrett. See pictures from our events, find out what we have planned, link to related clips on YouTube. Friend us and you'll be in the know.

We just started a blog! The Education study committee wants to make it easy for you to share your thoughts about the topics that are being studied. The actual study materials will be posted on the website, but your comments and questions will be discussed on the blog. We're trying this because it is so hard to get together in person in the summer for an actual meeting. More about the study and the blog address are in the Annual meeting packet.

We now use **Mail Chimp to send messages** to our membership! There are lots of pluses to this way of communicating: the emails of our members are stored in the Mail Chimp system, so

more than one person is able to send a message to all of you; the sender is clearly identified as the League of Women Voters of Saratoga County; the formatting is professional looking.

Although we are taking advantage of 21st Century technology we are mindful that not all of our members are comfortable with every bit of this technology, and we continue to provide **opportunities for people to interact face-to-face and by phone** (that's why we mailed you the membership list) , and to keep you up to date via our Bulletin.

Speaking of the **Bulletin**, our Art Director, Margot Ammon, brought you seven issues chock full of information, eye pleasingly arranged.

The League's overriding goal is to build an active informed electorate. To that end we brought you **five different candidate forums** – almost all of them in conjunction with the Spotlight Newspapers.

We helped the LWV of Warren County put on a forum at the Queensbury High School that drew over 700 people, including Tea Party demonstrators who arrived more than two hours in advance, for a debate between Scott Murphy and Chris Gibson.

We hosted debate at the Maple Avenue School between Susan Savage and Hugh Farley for the 44th NYS Senate seat, and one between B. K. Keramati and James Tedisco for the 110th Assembly seat. This event drew about 125 people and was also carried on YNN and channels 6,10,and 13.

The Malta Community Center was the site for a standing room only crowd of more than 300 who compared candidates for the 43rd NYS Senate District: Roy McDonald and Joanne Yepsen. Also on the bill were the candidates for the Saratoga County Family Court Judgeship.

In conjunction with the Chambers of Commerce of Colonie and Southern Saratoga County and the Spotlight News, the Leagues of Saratoga and Albany hosted a forum between candidates for the 109th Assembly District and for County Family Court at the Century House. It was attended by about 50 (mainly members of the chambers).

LWV Saratoga and Albany also cooperated to present a forum with the candidates for the 109th Assembly District and the County Family Court at the Clifton Park-Halfmoon Public Library for about 125 attendees.

Due to the cooperation of the Spotlight News, all the **forums were covered by television news media and the print press**. Many of the events were on the internet in their entirety. Ann Kril and her fantastic Voters' Service Committee (Janice Burns, Mary Lou Classen, Donna Dardaris, Amy Durland, Terry Lowenthal, A.C. Riley) also arranged school board candidate forums for the Saratoga Springs and Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake School Districts.

We were proud to win the **LWVNY Voter Service Award**, presented at Convention 2011, for all of our Voters Service Activities - registration, voters guides and forums.

LWV Saratoga has three youth oriented programs aimed at building lifelong civic participation. Under the Direction of Mary Ratzer our **TAKE ME TO VOTE!** Program utilized the BOCES school library system, making each school librarian a contact person for their school. Response

was significant, with **1,440 students** going to the polls, taking an adult with them, and receiving a *Take Me To Vote Again* button. Sixty-one grade five teachers in 17 schools participated. Assemblymembers visited the school in their district with the highest percent of participation so James Tedisco visited Stevens; Bob Reilly visited Skano and Tony Jordan visited Dorothy Nolan.

LeaderSpark, this year under the direction of Kristin Overholt, provided high quality, interactive skill building leadership training workshops, based on an awareness, practice and application curriculum, completed by 16 high school sophomores and juniors. Volunteers from State Farm, Skidmore College, the League and Leadership Saratoga assisted in the program and mentored students in the development of action plans to help their community, some of which have already been implemented.

First Vote provides voter registration forms, the pamphlets First Vote, and Q &A for College Students – materials distributed to high school seniors through the teachers in their schools – to give them hands on experience with registering to vote and to answer their questions about voting and whether to register at home or at college. This year Helen Crawshaw’s committee delivered the materials to 12 schools, reaching **2150 students**.

We believe that the civil **discussion of public issues** builds an informed citizenry. To that end we presented

- *The Pro’s and Con’s of the Proposed New Charter for Saratoga Springs*
- *New Ways of Communicating*
- *Redistricting: Who should draw the lines?*
- *What’s the Fracking Fuss? (Hydrofracturing for natural gas)*
- *Let the Sunshine In! (FOIL & open meetings)*
- *Tough Talk about Hard Decisions(end of life issues)*
- *Guns ‘n Roses (gun control) and today’s program*
- *Who Speaks for Me? Free Speech, the Constitution and Corporations.*

We engaged in **advocacy** for some of the things we believe in: environmental protection, fair and independent redistricting, ethics reform, open government, gun control, marriage equality, pay equity, the Disclose Act, single payer health care. And we met with our NYS Legislators over breakfast to discuss issues we care about (thanks to Pattie Garrett, the event organizer).

We learned some history as we had a good time celebrating Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s Birthday and the **League’s 90th Birthday with descendants of the Suffragists**. It was inspiring to hear the Declaration of Sentiments ring out in the hall that once held a suffrage meeting and to drink a champagne toast to Stanton.

More history came alive as we **met with Theodore Roosevelt** (in the person of Paul Stillman) and got his point of view on conservation, women’s rights, trusts, foreign policy. Besides raising money, this fundraising event was fun, as was our Circus themed membership recruiting event.

We had a very visible **presence at the Saratoga Farmers' Market and the Peace Fair**, where we registered voters and provided LWV info. We do many things and all of them take people and money. I thank our fundraisers, especially Francine Rodger and Marian Potter.

The League in Saratoga is not a dinosaur. We aren't afraid to evolve and adapt to changing conditions – that's what enables us to fight for our core principles, our belief in an active, involved and informed citizenry that shapes a responsive government. A government that does those things for the common good that we cannot do as individuals.

It has been a privilege to serve as the president or co-president of this League for the past twenty-one years. Together we have accomplished some amazing things. However, this is a propitious time to pass the torch. Patricia Nugent will bring fresh energy and insight to the role of the League in this county. She will be an articulate spokesperson. And she will be different. Different can be scary – but it is an opportunity for growth. Please give her the same support you have given me over the years. She will make you proud to be a member of the League of Women Voters of Saratoga County.