



League of Women Voters®
Austin Area

www.lwvaustin.org 512.451.6710

Voter

December, 2011

Volume 16 #5

Holiday Party and Program Planning
Sunday, December 4, 3 - 5:00 pm
at the home of Nancy Neavel -- 2905 Scenic Drive

Please join your fellow Leaguers at our annual holiday gathering. Bring your ideas for Austin League local programs for 2012-2013, and a snack or your favorite cookies to share, if you like. We will enjoy holiday refreshments and discuss new ideas for advocacy that could improve Austin and Travis County. Please review LWVAA's *We Support* publication for ideas.

Our Program planning for the next fiscal year starts at this meeting. From your ideas, the Board develops program initiatives and presents them to the membership in the Annual Meeting Workbook sent out in April. This is a member's best opportunity to steer the Austin League in a new direction. At the Annual Meeting in May, you will vote on the program or programs you wish to study or review. All of our League's current positions came from such studies, and without them we would have no authority to advocate.

Our League is better off if we have the advantage of your participation. If you can't attend, you may submit your ideas to the office by mail or phone. See you there!

~Stewart Snider and Nancy Neavel (206-0164)

Elected Officials Reception
Wednesday, December 7, 5:30 - 7 pm
Austin City Hall Atrium, 301 West Second Street
Free parking in City Hall Garage

Come meet and greet the Austin City Council, Travis County Commissioners, Judges, Constables, Justices of the Peace, AISD Board and ACC Board at this League event. Tell local officials about the issues that concern you and/or find out from them how things are going. A good turnout here will help keep LWV in their sights. Refreshments will be served. Bring a friend or neighbor. Event is free and open to the public.

~Betty Williamson, Adriana Cox, Frances McIntyre, Phyllis Portnoy

Note to Readers

Beginning this month, your hard-copy Voter will be a printout of the version created for email. This will eliminate the work involved in creating a distinct hard copy version of the Voter. Voter Editor Judy Clack is also our office manager, and all this together was just consuming too much of her time. I hope you'll allow us this small cosmetic concession to avoid "burning out" one of our very valuable volunteers. Thank you.

~ Stewart Snider

Save This Date: Wed. Feb. 8
State of the City Dinner and Auction
University of Texas Club, 6:00 pm

We are planning an entertaining and educational evening. We are delighted to have as our keynote speaker **Linda Watson, President and CEO of Capital Metro.** Prior to coming to Austin, she was CEO of the Central Florida Regional Transportation Authority as well as past chair of the Transportation Research Board.

After an informative talk by Ms. Watson, we will have the auction, a fundraiser for our LWV activities. Start thinking of items and services for the auction and pass on your suggestions to the committee. In the past we have had donated wine and food baskets, certificates for dinner at restaurants, tickets for local entertainment, jewelry and artwork.

This event is open to the public.

~Phyllis Portnoy, Adriana Cox, Alison Dieter

Join LWVUS Study:
Privatization of Governmental Functions

- Frances McIntyre

LWVUS has adopted a national study on privatization, the transfer of government services to the private sector. LWVUS provides League members with all the study materials.



Do these topics interest you?

- Subcontracting Public Education
- Privatization of Prisons
- Privatization of a Publicly Owned Waste Water Treatment Plant
- Deregulation of Railroads
- The Legal Framework of Transparency and Accountability within the Context of Privatization

Call or email me if you are interested in joining this group: 512-451-1551 or mcintyre.frances@gmail.com

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Voter Registration Grant Awarded to LWVAA (Volunteers and Intern Needed)

- *Dianne Wheeler*

Our League has been notified by **LWVUS** that we have been awarded a **grant of \$1000** to help register high school seniors in 2012. The schools selected for this project have student populations primarily from **underrepresented populations**. The grant application and ground work were done by **Frances McIntyre, Jacklyn Williams, and Dianne Wheeler**.

We are currently contacting administrators at Akins, Crockett, Garza Independence, Eastside Memorial, Lanier, LBJ, McCallum, Reagan, and Travis High Schools plus Austin Community College and Huston Tillotson University. We plan to work with the social studies departments and set up one-day visits in the spring of 2012.

Several of you have already indicated an interest, but we can certainly use more help. We will need a designated volunteer team leader to help with scheduling and to maintain the records at each school visited. We will also need help with follow-up for the various elections in 2012. If you have an interest in working with a particular school, please tell me.

We now have opportunities to assist at ACC. If you are a sworn Volunteer Deputy Voter Registrar in Travis County and would like to help, please contact one of us.

Deputy Voter Registrar Training will be provided possibly in December and in early January. All who have volunteered for this project will be notified of the training.

We are **looking for an intern** to help with setting up **Facebook and Twitter** accounts. If you have suggestions for an intern or are a League member (or have a grandchild!) with this expertise, please let me know!

~**Dianne Wheeler**, Chair, dwheeler3@sbcglobal.net, 512-346-7634.

~**Jacklyn Williams**, jacklynwilliams@aol.com, 512-452-5968.

Calendar

Tues. Nov. 29, 10:30 am, Privatization Study Group at the home of Frances McIntyre, 6305 Treadwell Blvd., 512-451-5810, mcintyre.frances@gmail.com.

Sun. Dec. 4, 3-5 pm, Holiday Party and Planning Meeting at the home of Nancy Neavel, 2905 Scenic Drive, 512-206-0164. League members and guests invited.

Wed. Dec. 7, 5:30-7 pm, LWVAA Reception for Elected Officials of City of Austin and Travis County; City Hall, 301 W. Second Street, Austin. League members and the public invited.

Tues. Jan. 3, 6:30-9 pm, LWVAA Board Meeting. Site TBA. Open to all members.

Wed. Feb. 8, 6-9 pm, State of the City Dinner and Auction. University of Texas Club, 6th Floor, DKR Memorial Stadium on Robert Dedman Drive. League members and the public invited.

Mon. Feb. 14, Tues. Feb. 15, Wed. Feb. 16: Unit Meetings on Reproductive Rights and Family Planning. Details in Jan. and Feb. Voters.

March, General Meeting, Human Trafficking. Details in Feb. Voter.

April, Units and General Meeting, LWVUS Study on Privatization of Governmental Functions. Details TBA.

May, Annual Meeting, Details TBA.

President's Letter

- Stewart Snider



Dear members:

I attended a day-long civic engagement conference on November 12th that was organized by UT's Annette Strauss Institute for Civic Participation. Many of the presenters were under 30, presumably because most new ideas either come from younger folks or are of more interest to them. A couple of presentations were only about the interests and priorities of the Millennial Generation, which turned out to be far more interesting than I had anticipated.

From the "horse's mouth" I learned that today's youth are more engaged with each other, with their parents, their educators, and with other demographics than any other generation. They volunteer more and care more about each other and are perhaps less peer-competitive than were previous youth. Maybe you have noticed what I have: when you speak to someone under 30, they're likely to address you as a peer, not as an historical artifact. They just seem to see people as people and not members of demographics. Their comfort with and reliance on technology is still alien to me, but it is as **integral** to them as the telephone is to us. The more I thought about them, the more I began to see "their" world less as a curiosity and more as an evolution of my own generation's embracement of technology and change.

Most Leaguers have heard that Millennials don't usually participate in retail politics. There have been exceptions, but no established political reform organization that I know of has more than a trickle of students and young adults showing up. During the conference, I began to wonder why a smart, more culturally engaged population typically does not engage more in the reform process. Don't they realize that politics affects education, the workplace, jobs, the environment, and social equity? If they really understood politics, Millennials would be voting in record numbers, right?

Well, maybe. But before we try to make our case to them, perhaps we should try harder to understand the case they seem to be making to us:

Imagine coming of age today, when the only politics you see is based on vitriol. Cable news, the Sunday morning network political shows and even PBS shows focus on either the presidential horse race or have politicians talking past one another instead of engaging collaboratively. If you're young, you've likely seen very little genuine civic dialogue or statesmanlike behavior. Those of us who have decades of experience know about real political discourse and still have emotional ties to that kind of politics. To younger folks this is just an abstract idea, no matter how many times they hear us reminisce about McGovern and Goldwater. Can we really blame them for looking for alternatives to the old ways of political advocacy?

I'm convinced that Millennials see the same failed political system that we do. They know about traditional reform groups such as the League, and many of them know us to be thoughtful and smart. But in a political world that's on fire, they may see us as fire safety specialists and not the fire **fighters** they think our country needs. If the Occupy movement is any indication, Millennials want to put their own stamp

The League shall not support or oppose any political party or candidates. It may take action on governmental measures and policies in the public interest.

The VOTER is partially funded by the League of Women Voters of Austin Education Fund.

Honors and Memorials

The League notes the passing of **Ronya Kozmetzky**, born 1921, who died on Oct. 25. Ronya was a long-time League member and generous contributor who left a legacy of public service as a teacher, in women and children issues, in social studies, and in entrepreneurial interests involving women. To make a donation in honor of or in memory of a League member, [click here](#) for the form. Then mail with your donation to LWV-AA Office, 1011 W. 31st St., Austin, TX 78705.

on political activism. But I don't think this means they want to go it alone. One Millennial presenter said, "**Don't leave this mess for us to fix!!!**"

If my narrative is accurate, we have a bit of a paradox: Millennials have the energy and connectedness but seem uninterested in traditional activism. Could they benefit from the experience of Leaguers to help navigate the complexities of today's political machine? How could the League make its breadth and depth of civic knowledge available to Millennials without sounding like we just want them to do the same things we've always done? A joint voter education project? A Voters Guide that makes use of Twitter or Facebook? "Millennial style" instructional events on running for office, drafting legislation, lobbying and testifying at the TX Legislature? What would create symbiosis between the generations?

I have another idea I'll share with you next month. In the meantime I'd like to hear your ideas. s2snider@gmail.com or 512-345-7047.

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Should Water Be Treated as a Commodity? Panel and Consensus Summary

- Pat Bennett

"Reliability!" The word that the opening speaker, **Carolyn Ahrens**, a water lawyer with the firm Booth Ahrens Werkenthin, left with us as her expression of our needs for water. As the first to speak at the LWV Open Meeting, November 4, her presentation covered Water Marketing by describing the different sorts of court cases with which she has been involved, on various sides of the issues. Ahrens' stories plunged us immediately into the chaotic eddies of water regulation in Texas.

David Meeseey, a planner with the Texas Water Development Board, described several of the different entities which have roles in the management and planning for water resources in the state.

The middle speaker, **David Wheelock**, is currently in water and electric planning with the LCRA. He described the Surface Water Supply, with details on the state of the current drought. David is a licensed professional civil engineer who has worked in the private consulting business with HDR infrastructure and with the Brazos River Authority.

John Dupnik, a licensed professional geoscientist is also the Senior Regulatory Compliance Specialist with the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District, the GCD (Groundwater Conservation District) for our area. This GCD is charged with protecting groundwater in southern Travis and northern Hays County for residents and Barton Springs, the discharge indicator of a healthy aquifer.

Brian Hunt, the closing speaker, is a senior hydrogeologist and registered professional geologist with the Barton Springs Edwards Aquifer Conservation District. Hunt brought the presentation to a close with visual reminders of the importance to us of the recreational aspects and beauty of our bodies of water.

Even though the program lasted two-and-a-half hours, the audience was eager to ask many questions and discuss the issues raised for 30 more minutes. The League is very fortunate to have the opportunity for such meetings. The presenters enjoyed each other's work, were all very responsive answering the questions, and were grateful to be included.

Consensus meetings at the three units followed during the next two weeks. Although not everyone could attend the Open Meeting, most who came to the unit meetings had read the excellent materials prepared by the LWV State Study committee. After the first two consensus questions were answered, in most cases the discussion proceeded quickly with the others. Members wanted to stay late and talk about their ideas, too.

Observer Corps: Travis County Commissioners Court

- Karen Rankin

November 8, 2011, by Karen Rankin

Item 1-**Nelda Wells Spears** was recognized for her many years of service as Travis County Tax Assessor-Collector.

Item 7-A presentation from a crime lab design consulting firm stated that the **Travis County Medical Examiner's office is in danger of losing**

Membership

- Judy Parken



It was great to see so many League members and the public at the November Panel Discussion on Water as well as the three Unit Meetings on the LWVTX Water Study.

Thank You, Renewing Members

Many thanks to the following who also renewed this month -- Kathy Akers, Terrell Blodgett, Sue Caldwell, Alison Dieter, Frances McIntyre, Janice May, Janet and Neil Martin, Hugh Moore, Belia Nichols, Marilee Phillips, Daniel Robertson, Peggy Stewart, and Amy Taylor. We depend on your support and timely renewals.

Thank You, Sustaining Members

Special thanks to our renewing Sustaining Members-- Carolyn Baker, Mescal Evler, and Nancy Hoffman. We are grateful for your additional financial support for our local League's activities.

New Membership, Renewal Dues Payment, Address Changes

Please send your name, address, phone number, email address, household member (if applicable) along with your dues payment

accreditation. The five medical examiners are currently performing the maximum number of autopsies allowed by accreditation standards. Although the space in which these five examiners work is designed for only two. However, a sixth can be accommodated there in the short term. Long-term forecasts indicate that a larger facility is necessary. Design and construction are expected to take three years and up to \$27 million once a location is found.

Item 22-Representatives from Travis County Transportation and Natural Resources outlined the alterations being made in the program that **allows citizens to purchase non-potable water** from the county. A large sign will be posted next to the standpipe, located at the Satellite 4 Office in the southeast area of the county which will advise purchasers on how to purify the water for drinking. Prices for residents, agricultural users, and commercial users were also established.

Item 25-Representatives of Parking Mobility Initiative briefed commissioners on **problems encountered by the disabled community** when trying to access spaces designated for them. A successful program that trains and deputizes citizens to report violations was established through Constable Bruce Elfant's office in 1995, but improvements to that program were recommended. The on-line application that was described would make reporting violations much faster and easier for those deputized. Action was postponed in order to confer with county attorneys.

and/or any changes to the LWV-AA Office, 1011 W. 31st, Austin, TX 78705. Checks may be made out to Austin League of Women Voters. Of your regular dues, \$52 goes to LWVTX and LWVUS, and only \$8 is left to support our Austin League. **Paying at the sustaining level** (see below) greatly benefits the Austin League because the extra money stays in Austin and supports our local League's activities. In either case, the League is grateful for your support!

Membership Dues

Individual	\$60
Household	\$90
Student	\$20
Sustaining Ind.	\$100
Sustaining Hhld.	\$150

Thank you for your membership!

Maxine's Musings:

Uniquely American - Volunteering ~Maxine Barkan



A few years ago, I was attending a workshop in San Antonio presented by the League of Women Voters of the United States. One of the attendees was telling us that when she went on an extended stay in Russia, she met and married a Russian. After they came to the United States, she began to spend some time and effort as a volunteer for the League of Women Voters in San Antonio. Her Russian husband was very unhappy that she was spending so much time as a volunteer and not getting paid for it. Volunteering was not part of his culture and he did not understand it.

My volunteering began with the **League of Women Voters** when a friend suggested I join. I said I did not join women's clubs but she reassured me this was not a club but something that would tap my brainpower and would make a difference to the public. Since all I heard all day was baby babble from my two infant daughters, I was hooked. A couple of years later, we moved to Columbus, Ohio, and soon I was at the state capitol and persuading the Legislature to change the governor's term from two years to four. As president of the Columbus League, I was appointed to be on the Mayor's Advisory Committee. The League was for open government so I took the mayor to task publicly for not having open meetings. This drew the attention of the newspaper and produced front-page headlines of my fight with the mayor, and the League won. I volunteered in an organization that did and still does make a difference in promoting good governmental public policy.

When I retired in 1984, we moved from Houston to Austin. I thought it would be lovely to be a volunteer so I called the then **Volunteer Bureau** in Austin. After we went over my credentials, I told the counselor I would like to be a docent at a museum or some related work in the arts. She said she had just the job for me, salvaging food at the local food bank! I was astounded. What had that to do with the fine arts? In fact, I don't think I ever heard of the food bank. After I recovered my equilibrium, I agreed. The **Capital Area Food Bank** was located then in South Austin in an old warehouse on Industrial Blvd. HEB's 18 wheeler trucks delivered food that was good but not salable on the shelves. Dented cans, some a little outdated but still good, anything that a supermarket stocked. We evaluated every item according to health codes either to keep or throw away. We were able to salvage about 50% of the food. Eventually, I became the trainer for upcoming food salvagers.

I did finally volunteer in the arts when I was appointed to the **City of Austin Arts Commission**. The city has over 30 volunteer boards and commissions who advise city council to help them make decisions on public policy. I served for 15 years, was chair for four years, and chair of a task force that developed an arts plan for the city. During that time I represented the Arts Commission on the board of the Austin Convention and Visitors' Bureau for six years, even rising to be the Interim Chair when the chair left. I had a hard time convincing the board that the Live Music Capital of the World must include the classics as well as Sixth Street stuff!

Many people who retire are drawn into volunteering. When my husband retired, he became a volunteer mentor and storyteller for **Zavala Elementary School** in East

Austin for 18 years. He did the same for sick children at Children's Hospital when it was located in Brackenridge. He received the Five Who Care award from KVUE for these efforts. My neighbor and her husband deliver Meals on Wheels to those in need. Another neighbor and Joann Lovelace both volunteer at the Assistance League of Austin whose mission is to help those in need. The organization operates with no paid staff. It's not only retirees who volunteer. My daughter, who works full time, volunteers every Saturday taping textbooks for blind students at the Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic.

Recently, I have become a volunteer in the office twice a month at the **Austin Memorial Information and Burial Society (AMBIS)**, whose mission is to provide nonprofit, non sectarian, educational information for end-of-life issues. We have over 3,000 members in this area. The organization relies totally on volunteers and has no paid staff. Most people don't like to think about these things and often have no clue about what do if someone in their family dies. That's where this organization can help.

My volunteering at the **League of Women Voters** has given me the opportunity of meeting lawmakers of all kinds, testifying before City Council and the Texas Legislature, meeting the movers and shakers in the city and state, working with colleagues in the League and the larger community, and having the great satisfaction of doing my best to be a responsible citizen.

In particular, many of our social service organizations would not be able to do the jobs they do if not for their volunteers. I believe volunteering is an American phenomenon. How else would you explain the **thousands who came to Bastrop**, an obscure Texas town, from all over the country to help those who lost everything in the recent wildfires?

~Maxine Barkan