Bulletin

League of Women Voters® of Dane County, Inc.
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Office hours: Monday–Thursday, 8–1

May 2019

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Executive Committee:
Aileen Nettleton, President
Brook Soltvedt, Vice President
Helen Horn, Treasurer
Mary Anglim, Program Director

Bulletin Editor
Maria Spinozzi, bulletin@lwvdanecounty.org

Wednesday, May 15, 2019

Annual Meeting

5:30 p.m. Social Gathering
6:30 p.m. Celebration
7:30 p.m. Plan Our Future

Gerrymandering and "Lame Duck" Suits: Updates from LWVWI
Erin Grunze, Executive Director, LWVWI

Capitol Lakes Grand Hall,
333 West Main St., Madison
(Free parking in the ramp across the street)

Annual meeting materials have been mailed to members and are available on the website.

100th LWV Birthday Committee Forming

Are you a history buff who would like to gather and put together materials for a LWV History display? Do you like to put together programs, celebrations and events? Contact either Aileen Nettleton, president@lwvdanecounty.org, or Committee Chair Earnestine Moss, emoss@aol.com, if you can assist this summer/fall in getting plans underway for our Dane County Birthday Gala to be held in March.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF DANE COUNTY

Vice President's Message

Brook Soltvedt, soltvedtbrook@gmail.com

The Dane County League is lucky to have both 27 life members (50 years or more in the League) and 130 members who joined in the last year. Many of the other 280 or so members have varying degrees of experience with league. As we seek to make our League more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, we are learning to embrace cultural difference. But we also have an obligation to help new members and the community understand League culture. The message below is updated from one I wrote two years ago when I was president. —Brook Soltvedt

The work LWVDC does with local high schools was recognized in Wisconsin Watch's recent article "Civic education makes 'a powerful difference' in creating young voters".

Thank you to Sue Fulks and all of those who volunteer with the high school voter education team.

Understanding League Culture

Although the League is nonpartisan in all our activities and we never support or endorse candidates, we *do* take positions on issues—after careful study and after reaching consensus. Existing positions can also be reviewed and updated. Positions taken at the local level must be consistent with those adopted at the national and state level. Every League member is encouraged to become familiar with our positions, particularly in areas where you have a particular interest. You can find links to our positions at each level on our website. Get to them anytime by going to the **About** menu from the home page and choosing **Our Positions**. Our program and actions must be supported by positions. This is why we include League positions in the study materials for our forums.

The three (plus) levels of the League organization can also be confusing. Only a local League can initiate study and action in regard to local and county government policies and practices. So our League devotes considerable resources to understanding local government processes and advocating for change. LWV Wisconsin monitors state legislation and advocates for issues at the state level, and LWV US lobbies at the national level. Inter-League Organizations (ILOs) such as the Upper Mississippi River Region (UMRR) ILO and the Lake Michigan Region (LMR) ILO draw from multi-state regions and can act at the national, state, and local levels. Our League shares action alerts for state and national issues and we use state and national positions to support our work. We encourage all members to subscribe to and read communications from state and national and the ILOs and to be familiar with the resources on their websites. Individual members should engage at whatever level of government their interests lie, in line with League positions. Also understand that membership in a local League includes membership in the state and national organizations and the UMRR and LMR interleague organizations. Joining the national League directly does *not* make you a member of your state or local league.

The Observer Corps is a traditional way for League members to follow local issues in government. If you did not attend the recent Observer Corps trainings but are interested in learning more, contact Marilyn Stephen. Some members may wish to take a more active role when attending government meetings and can learn how to do this effectively, speaking for yourself and not representing LWVDC.

The "unit meeting" can be a cultural mystery to newcomers. The unit meeting is where members digest and discuss the information shared at our issues forums, and where they can recommend future action on a topic. Before the internet and when many women did not have full-time careers, the unit meeting was an opportunity to meet with other thoughtful and engaged women to study issues of importance to them and

plan actions to create change. For some, unit meetings were a lifeline during child-rearing years. Today, only a small fraction of our members are part of a unit. Work and family commitments as well as concerns of the aging can make it challenging to find a convenient time and place to meet. If you are interested in a unit meeting but find the current schedule does not meet your needs, feel free to organize one at a time and place convenient to you. You could even arrange a unit that meets using a Google Hangout. A unit should have at least five members who can commit to attending most of the six meetings held each year. In the last year, two new units have formed!

People learn in different ways. Some of you may enjoy a podcast created by two LWVUS board members. It's called *What Would Alice Paul Do?* Stream it from their website, or find it on iTunes and Stitcher. It's another way to learn about League culture. If you use social media, LWV chapters around the country are on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Follow or friend some other leagues from around Wisconsin and the nation and be inspired!

Linda Chhath – New Member Profile

Meg Gordon, mbgordon721@gmail.com

Two major political events a decade apart fuel new League member Linda Chhath's passion for the political equality principle, "one person, one vote." The first took place in her host country while she was studying abroad. The second she witnessed from abroad as events unfolded at home.

Linda sitting on the steps leading up to Wat Palad Forest Temple in Chiangmai, Thailand.

Originally from Fresno, California, Chhath earned a Bachelor's degree in Anthropology and Asian and Middle East History at UC Santa Cruz. As an undergraduate, she spent 8 months living in Thailand, coming home just weeks before the October 2006 ousting of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra by military coup.

Against a backdrop of clashing rural-urban ideologies, Chhath witnessed first-hand how perceptions of political maneuvering can change completely depending on one's perspective. Clarity came while studying in Bangkok with the urban elite followed by time spent conducting fieldwork with a rice farm in Isan, a village in the Northeast and poorest region of Thailand, that was using government support to transition from conventional chemical use to an organic cooperative.

The Prime Minister was paying attention to the wants and needs of the rural poor and providing financial support, Chhath explains. "Was he a great guy with genuine motives to help them? Not necessarily." But without his support the organic cooperative was never going to happen.

Bangkok elites saw the support of rural poor as vote buying and protested his shady tactics. Urban elites supported 'one person one vote' in principle, but only when the person was well educated in a broad societal perspective.

Chhath agreed with their perspective. But her opinion changed after seeing firsthand what it meant for rural communities to have their needs addressed.

"Who you are surrounded by, and who you talk to changes your perspective," says Chhath. "In Isan, my bias towards what I perceived to be a student-led grassroots anti-government movement in Bangkok was turned upside down . . . I had to step back and look at a fuller picture."

The forgotten majority was very engaged in politics but in a way that directly served their best interest, she explains. So there was no real justification for discounting rural individuals' votes despite the opposition's narrative.

Chhath began studying at UW-Madison in 2009, completing a Masters in Southeast Asian Studies in 2012. Now a PhD student, she is studying the interrelationship between language and culture with a focus on Cambodia's Cold War period and Buddhism. She is particularly interested in how religion is used to inform and justify opinions and policies.

During the 2016 U.S. Presidential election Chhath was in Cambodia conducting fieldwork. "Watching the 2016 election from overseas, where everyone was glued to what was happening in the U.S., made me feel as though I didn't know enough," says Chhath. "I was so shocked by [that election] result."

Emotionally charged false narratives that cause people to act without considering the impact their decisions will have is particularly concerning to Chhath. "Who is being impacted—sometimes it's not about your personal moral high ground," she says. "Cambodia made me see all that from an outsider's perspective. You would have to be pretty out of touch to take a moral stance politically that ends with the opposite outcome."

This past June, Chhath returned to Wisconsin. A friend working as an election official encouraged her to join the League and pulled her in to help register voters on the UW campus. She is now part of an effort to engage younger (early 20's-mid 30 year olds) and culturally diverse voters.

"Younger people are so consumed by work, school, kids, and can be intimidated by the perception of another burden being added on—though in reality it really is not," she says. "There must be a way to encourage people to not feel like it's some kind of added responsibility."

League Members Serving in Elected Positions

Karen Gunderson, jokarjen@gmail.com

I have known for a long time that members of the League of Women Voters Dane County (LWVDC) are also involved in many other community organizations. It was recently pointed out that we have a number of members (and past members) who have served, or are currently serving, in elected positions in our communities.

Below is a list of current and past LWVDC members who either have held or currently hold elected positions. These are just the members that I personally know of, there may be a few more. Names in **BOLD** are current LWVDC members:

> **Yogesh Chawla**, **Kelly Danner**, **Julie Schwellenbach**, **Michele Ritt** , Dorothy Krause (Dane County Board Supervisors), **Donna Moreland**, Lindsay Lemmer (Madison Common Council), **Charlotte Jerney** (Verona Common Council), **Barbara Feeney** (Oregon School Board), **Marilyn Townsend** (past Shorewood Hills Municipal Judge), Beth Cox (Oregon Municipal Judge), **Carol Carstensen, Barbara Arnold**, **Marjorie Passman**, **Ruth Robarts** (past members of the Madison Metropolitan School Board),

Dorothy Wheeler (past supervisor, Dane County Board), **Ellen Lindgren** (past President, Middleton-Cross Plains Area School Board)

I was curious if being a member of the League impacted their decision to run for office and whether being a League member was helpful as an elected official. I contacted several of our members who currently hold an elective office and asked them the following questions:

1) Did being a League member influence your decision to run for office?
2) Do you think the League's *Candidates' Answers* and *Know Your Candidates* interviews are effective in informing voters about qualifications of candidates? Do you think the LWVDC should make any changes to either of those?
3) Do you think being a League member is helpful in your elected position?

The members I was able to engage with for this article are: **Yogesh Chawla**, **Charlotte Jerney**, **Barbara Feeney**, **Donna Moreland** and **Julie Schwellenbach**. I thank them for taking the time to respond to my questions.

Yogesh said that being a League member definitely influenced his decision to run for office. He appreciates the League's efforts to make public meetings more accessible by having them recorded so that all members of the community have access. He said responding for *Candidates' Answers* forced him to be concise in his answers. He suggested that it would be useful to have a way to provide more detailed answers in a separate on-line space.

Donna joined the League after she decided to run for office, feeling that she could gain a wealth of knowledge from the League, especially because she was a woman and this was the first time she'd run for office. She is looking forward to getting more involved in the League.

Barbara traced her decision to run for office back to her initial involvement with the League years ago and how that involvement influenced many life decisions that led up to running for office. Being concerned about low voter turnout, she wonders if there are any innovative techniques organizers and voter advocacy groups could be doing to help the public engage with elections, while realizing there are no easy answers.

Julie's League membership did not influence her decision to run for office; she agreed to run when she was asked. She thinks that the League's *Candidates' Answers* and *Know Your Candidates* interviews are effective in informing voters about qualifications of candidates and that being a League member provides access to more information about issues.

Charlotte feels it is definitely an advantage to be a League member, providing good networking opportunities and informative forums and events which are good resources for making informed decisions. She feels that the *Know Your Candidates* interview was very beneficial in her campaign and had a significant role in getting her information out to voters.

There were some common themes in the answers. Most respondents feel that being a League member allows them to gather information about current issues, helps them make more informed decisions in their elected positions and provides networking opportunities. Several mentioned that they have used and continue to use *Candidates' Answers* to get information about candidates when they are deciding who to vote for. And, all of them feel that *Candidates' Answers* and the *Know Your Candidates* interviews are useful in getting their message out and connecting with their electorate.

Program Subcommittees Forming

Mary Anglim, program@lwvdanecounty.org

LWVDC members received their Annual Meeting materials by U.S. mail recently. They include information about a vote on the proposed Program for 2019-2020. Please take a look before the meeting.

If the membership approves our proposal, the Program Committee will form two subcommittees, one to work on Making Democracy Work at the Local Level, convened by Bonnie Chang and Janine Edwards, the other focusing on Climate Change issues affecting Dane County, convened by Georgiana Hernandez and (hopefully) Laura Grueneberg. Each group will meet by June 15 to set a meeting schedule, select a meeting facilitator and a liaison to the Program Committee and get started on its work.

Under the general direction of the Program Committee and the LWVDC Board, each subcommittee will further define its goals and plan and offer events that educate and spur action. To share the work, each group should have at least four or five members, but eight to ten would be even better. Events should include two or three forums plus several other non-traditional/experimental gatherings (e.g., book or film discussions, review of League positions, brown bag meetings with elected officials, observation of government meetings, collaborations with other community organizations, action alerts). Varying formats, times, and locations are encouraged—2019-2020 should be a year of experiments!

You don't have to be an issues expert or experienced event planner to join a subcommittee! These groups are an opportunity to make a manageable contribution to the work of the League. You will have an opportunity at the Annual Meeting to sign up to be notified of one or both of the first meetings. If you cannot attend the Annual Meeting, watch for sign-up opportunities in our weekly Monday email. Learn more about the subcommittees to see whether one is a good fit for your talents and interest. Questions? Contact Mary Anglim.

Remembering Sally Phelps

Sally in 2015 as she received the Carrie Chapman Catt award.

Sarah "Sally" Phelps died at Capitol Lakes on April 18, 2019, at the age of 91. Sally joined the League of Women Voters in 1974, becoming a driving force in supporting the cause of voter equality.

She served as president of both the Dane County (1978-1980) and Wisconsin (1985-1987) Leagues. Sally served on the state legislative committee as well as the national nominating committee.
Sally was the worthy recipient of the Carrie Chapman Catt award in 2015.

Sally worked to make sure the Wisconsin Marital Property Act became law. A strong advocate for women's rights, Sally thoroughly enjoyed her participation in the 2017 Women's March. A memorial service will be held at a later date.

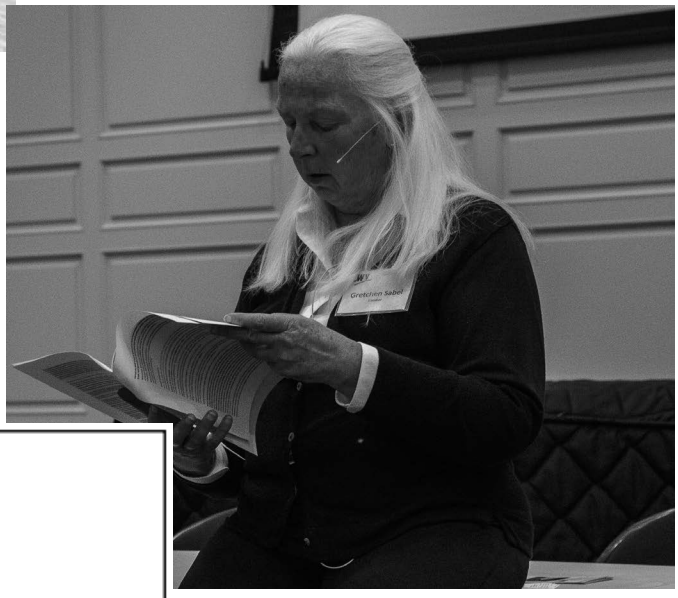
April Forum in Photos

Photos by Ingrid Rothe and Sally Gleason

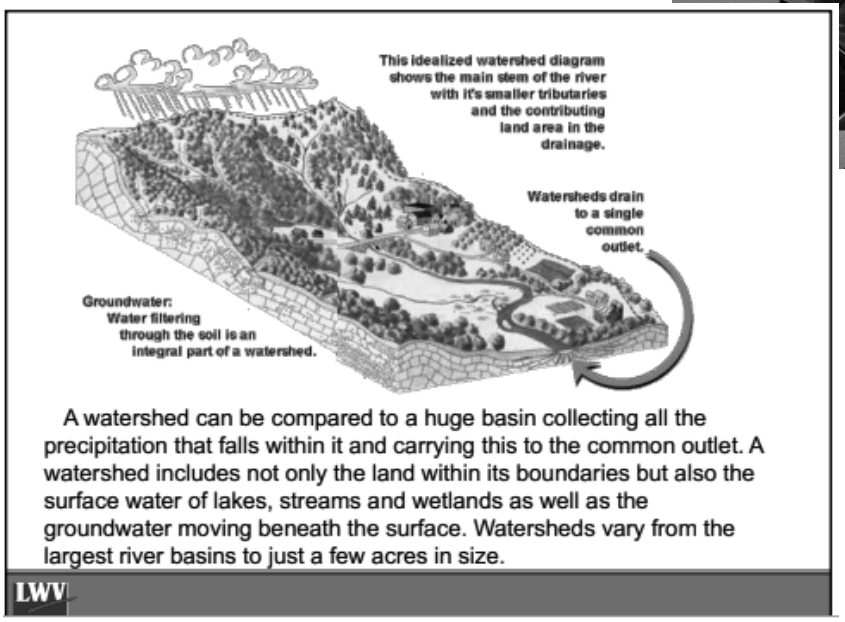
Interested in writing for the *Bulletin?*

Contact bulletin@lwvdanecounty.org to be added to the writing pool.

Karen Gunderson at the Northeast side unit meeting playing the Watershed Game, an interactive game designed to help participants understand the connection between land use and water quality. This game has been highlighted by the LWV Upper Mississippi River Region Inter-League Organization as a valuable educational tool to advance the understanding of best practices to protect our watersheds.



Ms. Gretchen Sabel, chair of the LWV Upper Mississippi River Region Inter-League Organization (UMRRILO), presents on the threats to our watersheds at the April forum.



Access the full set of slides from Ms. Sabel's educational and engaging presentation. Audio of the forum will be uploaded here once available.

New Members

We welcome these new members who joined us in March. An updated member directory is available on our website. If you have forgotten the password, there is a link to contact the webmaster for help.

Linda Chhath
Jade Fea
Janice Greening
Helena Mannarino
Pamela Pfrang
Jennifer Stedman

Contributions

Our work is supported by financial contributions beyond membership dues. Thank you to these members (bold) and nonmember supporters who donated in March.

Valentines

Jan H. Blakeslee
Sally H. Carpenter
Claire M. Rider

Candidates' Answers

Barbara J. Arnold
Richard A. Askey
Paul G. Buckner
Elizabeth Conklin
Jean E. Espenshade
Ilse Hecht
Eleanor McEntee
Linda Olson
Patricia L. Roder
Andrew Ruis
Joyce Tikalsky
James Werlein

General or Other Donations

Doug Knudson in memory of Lyn Knudson

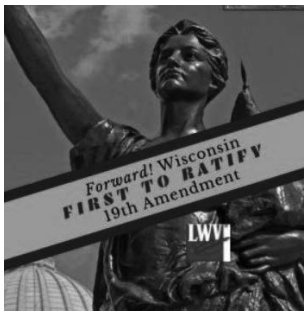
Thank You to Volunteers

Thank you to the following members who volunteered in the office in March.

Judi Dilks
Kathy Dutilly
Janine Edwards
Christine Einerson
Margaret Fuguitt
Eileen Hanneman
Philip Heckman
Pam Hennessey
Georgiana Hernandez
Janet Kane
Joyce Knutson
Pat Levin
Caryl Terrell
Jan Van Vleck

A special thank you to **Joy Cardin** and **Melanie Ramey** for volunteering at the High School Civics Games finals.

Upcoming Events



May 8 Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.
May 15 Annual Meeting, Social Hour 5:30 p.m., Program 6:30 p.m.
June 8 State Annual Meeting, 8:30 a.m.
June 12 Board Meeting, 1:30 p.m.
June 20-23 Two Steps Forwards Monologues: Forward Theater celebrates Wisconsin Ratification of 19th Amendment
June 23 Wisconsin First to Ratify Parade, Forward Statue, Capitol, 12 p.m.