



50-Year League Member Recognitions 2023

The League of Women Voters has a tradition of recognizing those who have been members for 50 years. Each year, we honor these long-time members, many of whom joined a local League elsewhere, but who are celebrating their 50th year of membership with LWV Dane County.

We are grateful for the dedication of our 50-Year Members!

Carol Carstensen

My Life Before LWV

Carol grew up in a working-class family in Cleveland, Ohio. She describes her family's neighborhood as being in "the outer rim of the inner core" of the city. Her parents were active in social causes and provided early role models. While at Glenville High School, Carol was involved with the city-wide Council of Human Relations working on racial issues and concerns.

Carol first came to Madison as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin. In the year following graduation, she traveled and then worked as a social worker in Cuyahoga County. Carol attended Yale, where she earned a Master of Arts in teaching. Her husband-to-be, Peter, was attending Yale Law School. Carol taught at public schools for a couple of years in New Haven, Conn., before she and her husband moved to Washington, D.C. Carol taught for three years in the D.C. public schools. They adopted their oldest child in 1972. In 1973, the young family moved back to Madison so Peter could take a position at UW Law School. During their first year, they lived on Madison's west side.

My Life with the League

Carol actively sought out membership in the LWV Dane County. Her in-laws had lived in Madison previously and they had communicated the importance of the League. When Carol first joined the League, her west-side discussion unit provided childcare during the meetings and thus was attractive to several mothers of young children. The next year they bought a house on the near-east side and Carol became a member of the Marquette unit. As the family increased to four children, Carol added being an involved and active parent at her children's schools to her League participation.

Education concerns remained a central interest and focus for Carol. She was involved in several of the LWVDC's study programs on education over the years. One of these study groups focused on the issue of vouchers and charter schools. Carol also recalls early study groups focused on the state's welfare department and state prisons. Carol chaired panel discussions and helped to create questions for *Candidates' Answers*. One of Carol's observations regarding her early years in the League is that LWVDC was focused on a broader range of issues and areas of advocacy. In part, this was because other organizations dealing with specific advocacy concerns hadn't yet been created. The League, as a result, drew its membership from those interested in a wide range of areas.

The study process promoted by the League for approaching a topic, gathering pertinent information, creating questions, and engaging in robust discussions continues to be important for Carol. She acknowledges that this model is harder to maintain in these more partisan times, especially when many previously nonpartisan issues have become politicized. She's particularly proud of how the League has maintained its nonpartisan stance during recent challenging election cycles. She encourages others to join the League primarily because its nonpartisan role in protecting voting rights and promoting voter education is so very important.



(Capitol Police arrest Carol for singing in the Capitol during a 2013 protest.)

Carol was elected to the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) school board in 1990 and served until 2008. She served five terms as president of the MMSD school board. According to Carol, several members of her discussion unit served in other elected community leadership roles. Undoubtedly, their experiences in the LWVDC inspired them to become more actively involved in local leadership.

Finally, Carol shared how much she greatly treasures all the people she's met through the League. She admires the commitment and hard work put forth by the members of the LWVDC.



Bonnie Orvick

My Life Before LWV

Bonnie was raised in a small town just south of Rochester, Minn. When she was 10 months old her family moved off the family farm and into town, where she lived until going to college at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis/St. Paul. Bonnie recalled her mother's involvement and support of a local congressional candidate's campaign which provided an early exposure to civic engagement.

My Life with the League

Bonnie's involvement in the League has spanned several locations. While teaching at Alexandria Area Vocational Technical School in Alexandria, Minn., Bonnie and a roommate joined the League. They were motivated by a study the League was conducting about water quality. Bonnie has a vivid recollection of three nuns who were also League members. The nuns themselves waded into the local lakes with baby food jars to collect the water samples to be used to analyze the impact of the growing population on the underdeveloped sewage system. The determination and passion displayed by the nuns' actions remain a vivid memory of her first experience with the League.

Bonnie and her husband moved to Modesto, Cali., in 1972. Bonnie joined the League in California thanks to a neighbor's influence and invitation. Once again, environmental issues caught Bonnie's attention. The League in California and Modesto was involved with land use issues as well as air quality concerns. The population in Modesto, and throughout the Southern Central Valley of California, was burgeoning at this time. Bonnie recalls the vibrancy of the California League. There were many young women involved with the League who were at home raising their families. They invested their time and energy into League activities, including two- or three-unit meetings held each month.



Bonnie's family relocated to Vincennes, a small town in southern Indiana in 1977. There was no League in the community, so Bonnie joined the AAUW (American Association of University Women). At that time AAUW's main focus was to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. The local chapter of AAUW did not support the national focus. Bonnie's disappointment in this position, as well as the fact that she missed the grassroots participation and "bottom-up" structure of the League of Women Voters, moved her to help establish a local League chapter. In 1980, with the help of a friend and an Indiana state legislator, the League of Women Voters of Knox County was established. Throughout the next 30 years, Bonnie was active in the local League as well as serving on the state LWV Indiana Board for two terms. Bonnie recalls encouraging many of the young women in her community to join the League. As a result, there was a strong core of women involved with the primary focus of addressing local issues.

In 2010, Bonnie moved to Madison to be closer to family members. She joined the League here immediately. Her role has changed from being an activist in the League to being an advocate of the League! Bonnie credits the League with helping her to gain leadership skills. She greatly appreciates the extensive knowledge she has acquired and all that she has learned through her involvement in the League.



Julia Weiser

My Life Before LWV

Julia was born and raised in Janesville. Her parents and extended family had a substantial role in shaping her interest in local government and civic activities. Julia's father was an attorney and also served as a member of the Janesville City Council. As a child, Julia recalls watching her mother stapling League *Bulletins* for the League of Women Voters of Janesville. She also recalls that her mother circulated a petition to remove Senator Joseph McCarthy from office. Julia's aunt served as president of LWV Janesville. Julia also believes that attending a boarding school in Arizona as a youth provided her with a unique education. Every year the students would travel by bus to Mexico and to nearby Native American reservations. Through these experiences, she gained a wider view of the world. Finally, Julia recalls that her grandmother was a big influence in her childhood. Perhaps because of her close

relationship and strong connection to her grandmother, Julia has always recognized the wisdom of the veteran members of the League and has been drawn to learning from them.

After graduating from Vassar College, Julia went to graduate school at the University of Wisconsin. She met her husband in the Rathskeller. They married and moved to Champaign, Ill., where he was a professor of economics and she taught high school social studies. After a few years, they moved to Stevens Point, where they raised their three children and she taught piano to children ages five and up. It was there that Julia joined the League of Women Voters of Stevens Point.

My Life with the League

Julia dove into activities with LWV Stevens Point. She served as the co-chair of the land use committee. She also was active in helping with issues briefings. Assuming the responsibilities of treasurer, Julia served on the Board of Directors and, with a friend, managed the fundraising drive for a few years. Julia very much enjoyed meeting different people and working on different issues during her time in Stevens Point. One challenging task was working to create questions for *Candidates' Answers* and making sure that the questions were nonpartisan.

Julia believes that the League of Women Voters excels in the area of voter registration and voter services. Providing information about candidates and educating and informing the public about issues is a real strength of the League. She pointed out that the League of Women Voters in Stevens Point worked hard on educating members about school funding issues, which are quite complex. A lot of time is involved in this process.

The League of Women Voters helped Julia because she felt supported by others, especially those connected with the UW–Stevens Point campus. Her childhood provided a rich foundation and the League allowed her to capitalize on those strengths. If someone were interested in joining the League of Women Voters, Julia would encourage them to jump right in! Look to veteran members for assistance, but don't be afraid about an initial lack of knowledge. She appreciates that the League is nonpartisan and that it is not involved in only one issue. Finally, Julia expressed that the dynamic of the League is truly a "bottom-up" and not "top-down" organization. Members drive the League!