



## Defender of Democracy 2023

*The Defender of Democracy Award recognizes outstanding service as a champion of the League's mission of empowering voters and defending democracy.*

### Aileen Nettleton

Aileen Nettleton grew up in northeast Ohio and central Washington state. Though she lived in small communities, her parents regularly discussed world and international affairs at home. In high school, Aileen further expanded her worldview as an exchange student in Sweden.

Aileen attended Central Washington State College and was involved in the civil rights movement. For a time she lived in Boston, also doing civil rights work. There, she met and married Al Nettleton. After some detours to Washington and California for graduate school, Al and Aileen moved to Madison in 1969.

Aileen worked as a reading specialist for the Madison Metropolitan School District, focusing on staff development projects. During the last 20 years of her career, she worked in schools with many low-income students and families.

Along the way, the couple had two children, Anna and Greg, who in turn brought Al and Aileen the joy of four grandchildren. The Nettletons were active in the Dudgeon Monroe Neighborhood Association and Aileen served as the newsletter editor. They also served in various board and committee positions of the Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society. Aileen continues to be active on its Caring Committee, which provides personal assistance to members of the congregation.

Aileen retired from her job and joined the League of Women Voters of Dane County in 2007. Her volunteer time with the League was initially limited to short-term voter registration projects as she took on grandchild-care responsibilities. As her grandchildren needed less of her time, she was asked to serve as the LWV Dane County President in 2018 for a two-year term. Some initiatives during her tenure included:



- Adoption of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion policy and the addition of a DEI Director on the Board
- Increase in membership from 250 to 500, a response to voters facing increasing restrictions
- Expansion of opportunities for member involvement
- Creation of two new Unit Discussion groups at UW-Madison and Prairie Ridge/Oakwood
- Development of the Observer Corps, which evolved into the Advocacy Corps
- Initiation of a study for the Executive Director position

As we all know, the world changed in March 2020. The highly anticipated Centennial Celebration had to be canceled. Not all was lost, however; LWVDC mailed the Centennial booklet, which had already been printed to members and welcomed Speaker Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins, former president of LWVUS and author of the "The Untold Story of Women of Color in the League of Women Voters," addressed members virtually in 2021.

Since her term as President ended, Aileen has continued to be active in the League. She served as the Chair of the Social and Racial Equity Subcommittee of the Program and Advocacy Committee and chair of the member survey work groups, and co-leads the Capitol Lakes Discussion Unit. She continues to register voters at Capitol Lakes and serves as a poll worker.

Aileen has appreciated her work with the League, stating, "It's been an education in so many different ways: learning how the League works in a nonpartisan way and how we can have an impact through voter registration and education, even in very difficult times. I have found working with the League to be tremendously challenging and rewarding."