



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF McLEAN COUNTY

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The Voter

Vol. 79 No. 57 of McLean County February 2013

LWV 2013 PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Released Prisoners: Citizens or Criminals?

Monday • January 28th • 7:00 pm

Normal Public Library • Community Room

Sponsor: Citizens for Justice Options, LWV Committee
Co-Sponsor: ISU Department of Criminal Justice Sciences

• More information on page 6 •

Hidden McLean County:

Veterans in our Community - Issues and Experiences

Tuesday • February 26th • 7:00 pm

Normal Public Library

League of Women Voters of McLean County Annual Dinner

Thursday • April 11th • 5:00 pm

Holiday Inn Hotel
3202 E. Empire • Bloomington

Speakers: **John Hanlon**, Legal Director
Dr. Gwen Jordan, Professor
Legal Studies Program at University of Illinois Springfield

• More information on page 3 •

League of Women Voters of McLean County Annual Meeting

Tuesday • May 21st • 7:00 pm

McLean County Government Center
Front & East Streets • Bloomington

From the desk of . . . Co-Presidents Phylis VerSteegh and Maureen O'Keefe

Thanks to everyone who helped make our December wine tasting fund raiser such a success.

You probably already know that the majority of your League dues support League of Women Voters U.S. and League of Women Voters Illinois endeavors. Locally our League financially supports itself through fund raising activities and contributions to the LWVIL Education Fund.

LWVIL Education Fund is a nonprofit corporation organized under its own by-laws and operated exclusively for educational purposes. LWVIL dollars are used to supplement and extend the citizen education aspects of League work. All Voter Services and any educational activities which do not promote or lobby for a League position qualify. Donations to LWVIL Education Fund are tax deductible.

Please consider a donation to this Fund. You can send it to our local treasurer, Linda Stockton, and write "McLean County" on the notation line which means those funds will be used locally. Thanks!

We are getting ready for 2013 local elections. A primary for two Bloomington Township offices will be February 26th, and both Bloomington and Normal will have elections on April 9th for mayor and city councils.

We will hold forums for the April election and are trying to get another one organized prior to the February election. Watch our website, your email, and future Voters for more information. Also, interviews with our legislators will start soon. Let me know if you are interested.

There are several very interesting programs planned in the next couple of months. More court observers will be trained again soon. Planning for the state convention which will be held here in June is well underway.

Yes, League of Women Voters of McLean County is BUSY.

I hope you will join in one of our activities and get the most from your League membership.

...Phylis

• • • PLEASE NOTE UPCOMING ELECTIONS • • •

Tuesday • February 26th

Primary election for Bloomington Township Supervisor, both Democrat and Republican, and for Republican Bloomington Township Assessor.

Tuesday • April 9th

General election for city offices in Bloomington and Normal.

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The League will be having forums prior to both elections -

Primary Forum

Thursday • February 14th • 7:00 pm

Mount Pisgah Church
801 W. Market St. • Bloomington

As details are finalized on the General Election forum, information will be available in next month's Voter, your email, and our website.

We will also be having voter registration drives to be sure all eligible citizens are able to vote in these important elections.

---OUR LEAGUE IN ACTION -----

Although we were sort of “on vacation” last month, League members have -

- Continued to contact state and federal legislators about issues that are important to League and which support League program positions;
- Held a fundraiser at the McLean County Art Center in Bloomington;
- Continued to observe courts many local boards and organizations.

LWV has something of interest for everyone; contact one of our officers if you need suggestions. And thanks again for your on-going League support.

Our website is www.lwvmclean.org. And “like” us on Facebook.

2012 League of Women Voters of McLean County Fundraiser

What a fun evening we had at this year’s League of Women Voters Fun-Fundraiser Wine Tasting at the McLean County Arts Center. While socializing and relaxing with old and new friends we shopped the ‘Holiday Treasures’ Art show and enjoyed A. Renee’s delicious wines and food.

Phyllis VerSteegh spoke about the League—highlighting this year’s accomplishments and providing information on upcoming programs.

A special thank you to my Fundraising committee members - Kathy Tosh, Mary Vogel, Martha Everman, Pam Lubeck, Linda Stockton and Maureen O’Keefe - who made it all come together.

And thanks to all of you who attended—you helped to make this another successful League event.

---Submitted by Dianne Williamson, LWV of McLean County Fundraising Chair

SAVE THE DATE...

You won’t want to miss the
McLean County League of Women Voters’ Annual Dinner

Thursday • April 11th • 5:00 pm

Holiday Inn and Suites Hotel
3202 E. Empire • Bloomington

Our speakers will be from the **Illinois Innocence Project** @ Illinois Springfield.

John Hanlon, Legal Director, and **Dr. Gwen Jordan**, Professor,
in the Legal Studies Program at University of Illinois Springfield
will talk about the mission and what they do to accomplish their goals.

League of Women Voters of Illinois 2013 STATE CONVENTION

Please make sure that June 7, 8, and 9, 2013, are on your calendars for the Illinois League of Women Voters state convention which will be held at the Carol Reitan Conference Center in Normal.

LWV McLean is the host League so we will need lots of volunteers for many different jobs. Most jobs will require a very short time commitment so please be ready to help us out when our local committee soon begins to call members. The convention promises to be fun and interesting.

Observer's Report:

Normal Human Relations Commission

Unit of Government Observed: Normal Human Relations Commission

Time and Place of Meeting: 5:15 pm, Normal City Hall

Official Members: Mandava Rao (present); William Brown (absent); Dalia Diaz (present); Sandra Harmon (present); Arlene Hosea (absent); Mitchell Larkins (absent).
Also present was Sally Heffernan, Assistant to the City Manager.

Manner Officials are Selected: The members of the commission are community volunteers that apply for membership and that are appointed by the City.

Is the official membership a cross-section of the community? Even though it is small, the commission has diversity of racial, economic, gender, and age. For example, Mitchell Larkins is the ISU Student Government Association representative to the board. There is less diversity of philosophical outlook as interest in the board's goals is probably self-selecting toward a certain demographic.

The general atmosphere was positive and teamwork-based. Not all ideas were immediately accepted and there was discussion of pros/cons of suggestions.

1. The pace of the meeting was adequate. It could have been shortened without reducing meaningful input or limiting time to make decisions.
2. The order and conduct of the business was clear, although it did deviate from the published agenda somewhat (although, all agenda topics were covered).
3. The commission did not have quorum due to the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday so the meeting was more of a discussion-based work session. The commission did not make any decisions.
4. No newspaper reporters were present.
5. There were no other non-commission members present at the meeting. The meeting was open to the public.
6. No significant policy decisions were made. The majority of the meeting was a discussion of the upcoming Martin Luther King, Jr. Award Luncheon and its planning progress. The commission is concerned that they are not getting enough nominations for the awards and would like to increase awareness of the award and its purpose.

The commission also discussed two discrimination complaints brought to the city. The first was a formal complaint that was dismissed by the City because it was not timely and exceeded the 180 day time period for filing. Ms. Heffernan expressed regret that the city could not pursue the complaint, which was based on ethnic/racial discrimination at a workplace, but noted that the filing deadline is based on state statute and the city has no discretion to waive the deadline or to give extensions. The second complaint was informal and was based on hiring discrimination of a woman with a felony record. Ms. Heffernan informed the commission that city and state attorneys had been contacted and they confirmed that there was no legal basis to pursue a claim because ex-felons are not a protected class. She again expressed regret that the city could not help the woman. However, she was able to put her in contact with individuals at the EEOC who are looking for test cases in the hopes of building a case for revision of current federal law so that protections can be put into place to protect ex-felons from discriminatory hiring practices.

7. Yes, the commission appears to carry out the function for which it was established. I was not clear on the interaction between the City officials and the Commission and how those roles are defined. For example, the two complaints received by the City were resolved without Commission involvement.

---Submitted by Amelia Buragas

Court Observer Program looking for more observers!

Our successful Court Observer program, which assesses the judges, has been on a temporary break, but will be restarting in February. We are opening the program to new observers.

This program, which was popular with the law and justice community as well as our own observers, involves a 6-hour a month commitment to observe judges.

Refresher training take place on February 19th, from 9:00 am - 3:00 pm, and will be provided by Malcolm Rich, Chicago Council of Lawyers.

If you would like to be a part of this fascinating program, you may contact:

Allison Slocum allison.slocum@gmail.com (available now)

Laurie Bergner drlaurieb1@frontier.com (available after February 1st)

...Of Potential Interest to Leaguers...

American Civil Liberties Union: Engage conference

In December, I attended the ACLU: Engage conference.

The League of Women Voters was an Allied organization for this conference which was billed as “an interactive conference on civil liberties and human rights.”

I found the event very informative and I wanted to share a few things that I learned. There were a number of panels and workshops. For those who are interested, you can still view the conference by going to <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/acluofil>.

The keynote speaker was Aasif Mandvi, a comedian who often appears on the Daily Show. It's worth it to visit the website just to watch his speech! I could probably go on for quite some time about this wonderful event, but here are three things that I took away from the event.

1. The way you present an argument can be as important as the argument itself. I attended the reproductive rights workshop and we learned about “turning down the heat” when talking about hot button topics. It's important to acknowledge a person's beliefs before presenting your own. Also, giving the story of an individual experience can be very powerful when talking to elected officials about an issue that you care about.
2. Want to talk directly to an elected official? Be proactive. I attended a workshop on working with elected officials where State Representative Kelly Cassidy gave us a few tips. A personal email is good, but a phone call is even better. And when leaving a message with the official's office, make sure to ask for a call back. She also gave us the secret to contacting members of the state Congress: use social media such as Twitter or Facebook. Emails are filtered through the district office, but many members do their social media themselves.

When contacting elected officials, remember, they work for you! So don't be intimidated!

3. No matter what issue you are passionate about, there are many like-minded people ready for you to join them to help make a difference! I met so many people of all ages at this conference who are motivated to take action. And there were so many topics that were discussed: racial justice, reproductive rights, voting rights, privacy laws, marriage equality and numerous others.

Even if you aren't a member of ACLU, there are plenty of other ways to get involved in the issues you care about. Everyone was excited about getting to work on making a difference!

---Submitted by Laura Zimmerman

Community Forum

RELEASED PRISONERS: CITIZENS OR CRIMINALS?

Sponsor: Citizens for Justice Options, a League of Women Voters Committee

Co-Sponsor: Illinois State University, Department of Criminal Justice Sciences

Monday, January 28th, 7:00 p.m.

Normal Public Library Community Room

206 West College Avenue, Normal

The public is invited; admission and parking free

Forum guests should use the Parking Deck east of the library

Forum Speakers

MALCOLM YOUNG. Nationally renowned expert on prison populations; former head of Illinois' John Howard Association (prison watchdog group); current planner for Illinois prison release practices

CRAIG FINDLEY. Former member, Illinois House of Representatives; member, Illinois Prison Review Board

JIM TUSEK. Lawyer, McLean County Public Defender's office; Board member, Joy Care—assistance for prisoners returning to McLean County

BENNY LEE. Ex-offender/former gang leader/former drug addict, now a prominent speaker and expert on this culture; Community Liaison for the Illinois prisons through TASC (Treatment Alternative for a Safer Community)