



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF McLEAN COUNTY

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The Voter

Of McLean County

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Save the Date:

Hidden McLean County Tuesday, November 18, 7:00 p.m.

- Normal Public Library Community Room, 206 W. College Ave.
- Providers and clients from Marcfirst and Labyrinth provide insight about the developmentally disabled and previously incarcerated women. See page 3 for details.

Annual Wine Tasting Social & Fundraiser Tuesday, December 2, 5:00 p.m.

- McLean County Arts Center – 600 N. East St., Bloomington
- Email dd.willi@hotmail.com for reservations

Drinks & Dialogue: 2014 Election – A Look at Who Voted, Who Didn't and Why Wednesday, December 10, 5:30 p.m.

- A Renée Wine Café, 306 N. Center St., Bloomington
- Recommended reading and video on page 3

Government's Role in Economic Development Tuesday, January 27, 7:00 p.m.

- Normal Public Library Community Room, 206 W. College Ave.
- Speakers TBA

Drinks & Dialogue Wednesday, February 11, 5:30 p.m.

- A Renée Wine Café, 306 N. Center St., Bloomington
- Topic TBA

Californians Would Be Jealous: Water in McLean County Tuesday, February 24, 7:00 p.m.

- Normal Public Library Community Room, 206 W. College Ave.
- Report from Water Resources Study Committee

From the Desk of Our President

Election season has been a busy time for our League. In October we partnered with community groups to organize and coordinate a series of voter registration drives in high schools, colleges, and nursing homes across the county. We dedicated our October Drinks and Dialogue session to providing education on the referenda contained on the November ballot, with particular emphasis on Marcy's Law, while several League members, including a large segment of the Board, sent Letters to the Editor on the referenda. Julie Sullivan compiled and published a comprehensive Voter Guide, and Laurie Bergner worked with ISU to organize a candidate forum featuring 13th Congressional District candidates Rodney Davis and Ann Callis. And as always, our League was active in the precincts on November 4, thanks to our excellent poll-watching program led by JE Myers.

And so as the dust settles on Election Day 2014, we find there are now 100 female members of Congress, and although we're happy to see some incremental progress in this arena, we're still a long way from where we need to be. According to a must read *Politico* article on women in politics ("100 Women in Congress? So What"), **"the United States entered the 2014 election season with more than 95 nations surpassing us in the percentage of women serving in the national legislature,"** and this remained true after Tuesday. Another disappointing fact emerging from the 2014 midterms: nationally, voter turnout was terrible. Just how bad was it? Only 36.3% of eligible voters cast votes, the lowest rate of voter turnout in 72 years. Here in Illinois, we find ourselves in the middle of the pack of states, ranked 25 out of 50, with our voter turnout clocked at a miserly 39.5%.

So, what does that mean for us? It means our work continues! Among young voters (ages 18-29) turnout in 2014 was only 13%, which presents an opportunity for us. In assessing our voter registration efforts this fall, our Board decided it didn't make much sense for us to set up tables at high schools where too many students streamed right past us or tried to register, but didn't have the right documentation. Instead, we need to be more actively engaged in **educating young people about why voting is so important** to their futures. Our Board will be brainstorming ways to make Voter Services more vibrant and education-focused, **so if you'd like to join that effort, please let us know! We'd be happy to have you join a revitalized Voter Services Team!**

Sincerely,

Maureen O'Keefe

Referenda Report

There were five statewide referenda on the November 4 ballot. Two were amendments to the Illinois Constitution and three were advisory.

The Illinois League supported one of the two amendments. It prohibits any law that disproportionately affects the rights of eligible Illinois citizens to register to vote or cast a ballot based on the voter's race, color, ethnicity, status as a member of a language minority, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation or income. This amendment passed.

One of the advisory questions asked if the minimum wage for those over 18 should be raised to \$10. The Illinois League supported this question and it passed. Another advisory question, which the League also supported, asked if any health

insurance plan in Illinois that provides prescription drug coverage should be required to include prescription birth control as part of that coverage. This question passed as well. It will be interesting to watch what happens in the Illinois General Assembly to the latter two issues.

There was also a question on the McLean County ballot which asked if the elected Office of Auditor of McLean County should be eliminated and the functions of the office be performed by an officer appointed by the County Board. The League of Women Voters of McLean County has a long standing position that the Auditor should be an appointed office. Unfortunately, this proposal did not pass.

—Sally Rudolph, Action Chair

Participate in Programs

Hidden McLean County: Nov. 18th

Our November program will focus on the **Developmentally Disabled And Previously Incarcerated Women**. As always, service organizations as well as one of their clients will be featured.

This year, Mary Campbell, Co-President of Labyrinth Outreach Services to Women, will discuss the housing and programming offered to previously incarcerated women, along with caseworker Kristin Manzi. There will also be a client to discuss the experience of working to reenter our community after being released.

Linda Furlong, CEO of Marcfirst, will be joined by Mary Riddle, Marcfirst Senior Vice President of Programs, and client Martha Dickerson. Linda and Mary will discuss the programming that Marcfirst offers, while Martha will discuss the challenges of the developmentally disabled on a person level.

Join us at the Normal Public Library's Community Room this Tuesday, November 18 at 7:00 p.m. Hidden McLean County is free and open to the public.

Drinks & Dialogue: December 10

The 2014 election brought a wave of change. For our next Drinks and Dialogue we will take a look at **Who Voted, Who Didn't, and Why**. Join us as we discuss age, race, gender, and socioeconomic diversity, and the restrictions and challenges voters faced. We will also identify the "takeaways" from this year's election and think about what can be done to have a more fully engaged electorate in the future.

To help you prepare for our discussion, please see the PowerPoint and recorded webinar on 2014 Voter Turnout from the non-partisan organization, Nonprofit VOTE:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7j1d5c441-c&feature=youtu.be>. Laurie Bergner also discussed voting restrictions on WJBC's Forum (see p. 6). And, the following blog highlights some examples of challenges voters faced on Election Day 2014: <http://www.brennancenter.org/blog/media-wrap-how-voters-fared-new-restrictions>

Join the discussion and enjoy a glass of wine, December 10 at 5:30 pm at A. Renée.

– Becky Hines

Members Tour Detention Center & Jail

More than 15 League of Women Voter members had fascinating tours of the McLean County Juvenile Detention Center and the Jail on Saturday, November 1. For most of us, it was the first time we were in those facilities.

Superintendent Cathy Jo Walsh showed us the Juvenile Detention Center, with the common rooms and school room, discussing the food, exercise and school activities. Most of these juveniles are incarcerated there for not more than 2 weeks, some for much less.



Mike Emery, Jon Sandage, Jackie Mathias and Greg Allen (l-r) answer questions from the LWV McLean group

Our Jail tour included not only Sheriff Mike Emery and incoming Sheriff Jon Sandage, but Assessment Specialist for Inmates Jackie Mathias and Adult Facility specialist Greg Allen (as well as the new Public Defender, Carla Barnes) who all attended the lunch discussion at the conclusion of the tour.

The County Jail includes some older parts, three "pods" that have open space, and a small women's section. The mentally ill, as noted often in the media and our mental health study, are housed in the booking area, which is entirely inappropriate, with 24-hour lighting and noise from the booking area.

Sheriff Emery has made many impressive improvements in the Jail during his 8-year tenure as Sheriff. For example, with the food contract, food is not only better, but inmates cook and can earn certificates as chefs, enabling them to get jobs in this field when they are released. We also talked with Chris Cashian, who is contracted to provide counseling services.

Our post-tour discussion helped to encourage continued future relationships between the League and the staff of both institutions. We are grateful to Cathy Jo Waltz and to Sheriff Emery and the jail staff for taking so much time with us!

–Laurie Bergner

League Studies in Full Swing

Evaluating Water Resources

The Water Resources Committee is researching the current state of water quantity and water quality in McLean County and prospects for the future. In doing so, we have been conducting numerous interviews with local officials, including heads of the water department/water treatment plants in both Bloomington and Normal, the McLean Co. Health Department, the Bloomington-Normal Water Reclamation District, McLean Co. Farm Bureau, a geologist/hydrologist at ISU, and an engineer at the Farnsworth Group. We've also toured the Bloomington Water Treatment Plant at Lake Bloomington, the sewage treatment plant, and gotten a look at some engineered wetlands intended to improve the quality of water discharged from the latter. Several members attended a workshop sponsored by the Soil & Water Conservation District titled "Highlights of Mackinaw River Drinking Watersheds Project Partners". Needless, to say, we've been quite busy over the past two months!

At the moment our committee focus is exclusively on gathering information to present at the February 24th meeting of the general membership. Our members include Anne Nadakavukaren (Chair), Rebecca Anderson, Roger Elm, Gretchen Monti, Meredith Schroeer, and Juergen Schroeer.

I was asked by the League Board to chair this committee, and since the recommendation came from Carol Reitan, I felt I couldn't refuse! In past years I have chaired several other League committees studying such environmental issues as air quality and solid waste disposal, and taught in the Environmental Health Program at ISU for about 15 years, giving me a fair amount of experience with water-related issues.

--Anne Nadakavukaren

Affordable Housing is a Priority

In many community meetings and discussions I've attended, the topic of limited affordable, accessible housing continued to surface. I felt that without the basic need of housing being met, other services were difficult to be impactful. A comprehensive look at affordable housing became a priority. As I've learned more, housing has emerged as a long term community issue that seems overwhelming to address. It has been heartening to see our committee be passionate about getting to the root of the problem and bringing knowledge and enthusiasm to address housing and homelessness issues in our community.

The first three meetings of the Housing Study have been spent learning more about needs and opportunities – including the review of several community assessments along with having local experts talk with us about our current housing resources. We continue to feel that there is much to learn about the housing needs in our community. Our plan is to move forward with small work groups to address areas such as best practices in housing, resources available and specific community needs.

Many people from the area have come together to work on the study, including: Karen Major (Chairperson), Laura Furlong (Chairperson), Roxanne Huxford (Secretary), Nicole Aune, Rickielee Benecke, Beverly Byerly, Mary L. Caisley, Hannah Cohen, Melissa Dougherty-Ohara, Cynthia Edmonds-Cody, Angela Frazier, Jeremy Hayes, Lori Kimbrough, Gretchen Knapp, Kevin Mehalek, Maureen O'Keefe, Julie Prandi, Mary Ann Pullin, Vasudha Pinnamaraju, Julie Sullivan, Jennifer Toney, Kathy Tosh, Emily Vigneri, and Sharon Walker. As small groups are developed more members may be needed.

--Laura Furlong

The 4th Annual League of Women Voters of McLean County Wine Tasting & Social Fundraiser!

The party begins at 5:00 pm on Tuesday, December 2. Biaggi's Ristorante Italiano is catering this year with tasty hors d'oeuvres and some of their favorites from Heritage Wines for you and your friends to enjoy. We are holding the Fundraiser at The McLean County Arts Center once again, from 5:00 - 7:30 p.m. And remember — you'll have time to shop the Arts Center's Holiday Treasures.



Tickets are \$35.00 and available from any League Board member or online at dd.willi@hotmail.com. Don't miss out - make your reservation now! (Deadline for reservations is November 26, 2014.) *--Dianne Williamson*

Mental Health Study Continues Its Work

“Engagement Mode” best describes the work of the LWV Mental Health Study Committee. The 21-member committee has begun the discussion of 2015 goals and creation of a PowerPoint presentation designed to continue the conversation, raise awareness and educate our community.

The presentation will highlight the goals of the completed mental health study, what was learned in the process, the status of improvements to local mental health services and a review of future improvements. We anticipate scheduling presentations for service organizations and church groups.

We also anticipate providing public comment related to the proposed revisions for the mentally ill and women at the McLean County Detention Facility. The LWV joined the *Pantagraph* in hosting the October 14 premiere of their film, *Shortchanged: Unjailing The Mentally Ill*, to a standing room only audience at the Normal Theater. If you missed the showing or want to

see this powerful documentary again, it is available at www.pantagraph.com/shortchanged. The 60-minute film looks at the community’s efforts to reform and improve mental health care in McLean County.

In addition, several LWV members serve on the 3rd Advisory Group of the McLean County Board Executive Committee. This group is engaged in one or more writing groups with county board members to prepare a report and action plan for the McLean County Board Executive Committee and full Board. The topics include Crisis Care, Juvenile Services, Coordination and Collaboration, Supportive Housing and Funding and were drawn from a survey of all previous advisory group members and their reports.

The LWV has taken the lead in efforts to raise awareness and educate the larger community. We remain committed to joining in collaborative efforts going forward as we move the conversation on local mental health. Comments or questions? Contact Judy Buchanan at 309-838-0461 or judyblm1@gmail.com

–Judy Buchanan

Bloomington City Council: Observers Report, November 2014

Everything the Bloomington City Council does greatly affects all Bloomington residents. Everyone is encouraged to attend these meetings to become better educated about who is serving on the Council and how they vote to affect our lives.

The Bloomington City Council is comprised of nine aldermen and the Mayor. All are elected for four-year terms. The Council changes every two years (four or five aldermen are elected every two years) and occasionally when an alderman resigns before his/her term is finished. In those cases the Mayor appoints a person from the same ward to fill the unexpired term.

Mayor Tari Renner has changed the committee structure of the Council. Many of the standing committees have been eliminated and the entire council acts as a “committee of the whole.” This has led to fewer meetings for most of the councilmen. He has also forced strict enforcement of time limits for all speakers and presenters. Most people have been cooperative of this enforcement which has considerably shortened Council meetings. Pace of meetings is steady and the Mayor conducts the meeting’s agenda in a fair and crisp manner.

Usually 40-50 people attend Council meetings and speak often to the Council about various concerns. Meetings are always covered by the press and many city staff attend all Council meetings. Discussion usually moves along well; however, when council members call

for clarification or present their views on items, discussion gets bogged down and can be thwarted.

The consent agenda usually contains 15-20 items that are recommended for approval by the city manager. Aldermen may call for removing various items from the consent agenda for further review and discussion and often do so. (Examples may include awarding of contracts, voting on applications, voting on new ordinances, discussions on pertinent issues, approving water and sewer for new subdivisions, and money issues such as pension, taxation, budget cuts, and income sources.)

Some important issues facing the City Council soon:

1. Under-funded pensions for retired police and fire fighters. Of course, this will be a huge topic for the new budget year.
2. A new hotel and/or conference center for downtown Bloomington and the ongoing development and implementation of the Downtown Improvement Plan.
3. Ongoing street and sewer repairs.
4. The new budget which starts April 2015.

Regular Bloomington City Council meetings are held at 7:00 p.m. at City Hall on the second and fourth Mondays of each month. Agendas for each meeting and minutes of meetings are found on the city website (www.cityblm.org) under the “city hall” tab. There is also a link there to a live video stream of each meeting.

–Phylis VerSteegh

Voting Restrictions Grow in U.S.

"We make democracy way too hard in this country." So says Barbara Arnwine, head of a Lawyer's Committee for civil rights-led coalition of 150 groups that monitored a hotline for voting problems. No less than 18,000 pleas for help and reports of glitches came into the hotline during the election! Distressed voters, many of whom were navigating new, restrictive election laws, reported many glitches.

The Lawyer's Committee, which does this work for every election, said the volume of calls was unusually high. It's likely that this results from the Supreme Court's decision gutting the Voting Rights Act of 1965, relieving states with a history of discrimination from having to get approval from the Justice Department when they made changes in their voting laws. Immediately, new laws in 21 states made it harder to vote. And behold! Voters had more trouble voting at the polls.

Texas's photo ID requirement was one of the major sources of confusion and calls to the hotline. Other calls included registered voters' names "disappeared" from voting rolls; military IDs not being accepted at polling stations, although they are accepted as official ID for other things; officials asking for photo identification in states that did not require it to vote; and lack of interpreters for non-English speaking voters.

These new laws all affect African Americans, who tend to vote for Democrats, and they are all passed by Republican states. They demonstrate the little-known truth of our voting rights history: that it is a history of disenfranchisement, not increasing enfranchisement, as we tend to believe.

So how much of a difference did voter suppression laws make in this election?

North Carolina's new voting laws slashed several early voting days, eliminated same-day registration, and prohibited voting outside a voter's home precinct – all forms of voting that are especially used by African Americans. The Senate race there was decided by 48,000 votes. In 2012, 700,000 voted during those now defunct early voting days, and 100,000 used same-day registration, many of whom were African American, and voted Democrat.

This year, more than 24,000 Kansans tried to register, but their registrations were suspended because they failed to present the documentary proof of citizenship now required.

In Virginia, the senate race was won by just 12,000 votes; in Florida, by 1.2 percent, or 72,000 votes. And in Texas, more than 600,000 registered voters could not vote this year because they lack IDs the state will accept. The governor's race was decided by that same 600,000.

Despite the fact that supporters of stronger voter ID laws insist that they are needed to stop voter fraud, one constitutional law professor found that there have been a total of 31 instances, you heard me right, just 31 out of more than 1 billion votes cast, of voter fraud recorded since 2000! So for 31 instances, we have 18,000 issues with problems for voters. (I have included a link for this article:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2014/08/06/a-comprehensive-investigation-of-voter-impersonation-finds-31-credible-incidents-out-of-one-billion-ballots-cast/>)

Clearly, our elections' integrity is compromised by these restrictions, and this impacts citizens, many of whom were long-time voters, who were denied their basic right of citizenship, their ability to hold their politicians accountable, and their ability to have a say in what happens in their communities.

–Laurie Bergner on WJBC's Forum

Can Illinois Politics be Fixed?

LWV Observer Chair Glen Ludwig (and former Governor Jim Edgar!) recommends *Fixing Illinois: Politics and Policy in the Prairie State*, by James D. Nowlan and J. Thomas Johnson. James Nowlan served two terms in the Illinois House of Representatives and worked under three governors. He is coauthor of *Illinois Politics: A Citizens Guide*. J. Thomas Johnson was director of the Illinois Department of Revenue and is President Emeritus of the Taxpayers Federation of Illinois.



The book includes 98 suggestions and recommendations that should be explored to fix Illinois. Chapters include: Fixing Past Budget Sins; Upgrading Education; Improving Human Services and Health Care; Economic Development for Stability; Reengineering Our Government; and Corruption in Illinois: An Enduring Tradition. *Fixing Illinois: Politics and Policy in the Prairie State* is available from Amazon.com.

In Memory of Carol A. Reitan

Last Saturday arrived cold and blustery, serving up a dose of winter a little too early. Never-the-less, several of your fellow Leaguers gathered at Songbird Grove, now a part of the Children and Elders Forest, to dedicate a fledgling red oak in honor of one of the most memorable and influential members of our local League, the late Carol A. Reitan. While the wind howled outside, those of us huddled in the shelter at the M.J. Rhymer Family Nature Preserve joined an intergenerational contingent of community members in a moving ceremony honoring departed family members, co-workers, colleagues, and friends.

League members Alexis Kalish, Martha Everman, Susan Alford, Charlie Reynard (leader of the Carol Reitan team!), Maureen O'Keefe, Bob Grosse, Dianne Williamson, and Mary Lynn Edwards represented our League at the dedication ceremony orchestrated by Joe Grabill, Carol's long-time friend and founder of the Children and Elders Forest.



We asked Mary Campbell, Co-President of Labyrinth Outreach Services, who was also a close friend and colleague of Carol's, to share some of her memories with those assembled. Mary recounted the myriad ways Carol worked to make our community a better place to live, and in particular, how she inspired countless other women to become active participants and leaders in community-wide efforts.

As Mary noted, Carol was a woman ahead of her time, dedicated to making government work better for everyone. She served as the first and only female mayor in Normal and ran for public office as a congressional candidate. But she was also enormously influential in

improving mental health services in McLean County and she supported a wide array of environmental causes as well. We all remembered Carol being an early and enthusiastic owner of an electric car.

Dianne Williamson counted herself lucky to have worked closely with Carol last year on the League's study of mental health services in McLean County. Not surprisingly, Carol was an influential and active member of the study team. And in working on a sub-committee with Carol, Dianne noted, "I had the honor and privilege of learning from one of our best."

Yes, Carol was definitely a leader in our community, and I would also say she had the unique gift of recognizing the talents of others and connecting peoples' gifts with civic or community work that simply needed to be done. Mary recounted, "Two days before she died, I talked to Carol and the conversation started with, 'Mary, I have an idea...'"

Even though Carol was experiencing some significant health challenges last year, she didn't let them sideline her. In addition to working on the mental health study, Carol was also a member of the study team we convened last winter to investigate the referendum proposing a Modified Ward System in Bloomington. And right now, Anne Nadakavukaren is leading a new League study on water resources in McLean County, a study Carol had proposed we undertake.

The poet Mary Oliver poses this provocative question in *The Summer Day*:

**"Tell me, what is it you plan to do
with your one wild and precious life?"**

I think Carol Reitan had a very good answer.

Speaking on behalf of the McLean County League of Women Voters, I would say although we've lost one of our tribe's most revered elders, her legacy will live on through the contributions of those she inspired to action.

— Maureen O'Keefe



Editor's Note: The McLean County LWV Board of Directors approved the purchase of a tree in the Children and Elders Forest dedicated in memory of Carol A. Reitan on behalf of our entire membership. This spring, our League will host an additional dedication ceremony. Information about that event will be posted on our web site and in the Voter as soon as plans are finalized.

***Relax and unwind at a
Fun ~ Fundraiser***



**WINE
TASTING
& Social**

Tuesday, December 2nd ♦ 5:00-7:30 p.m.

McLean County Arts Center

601 N. East Street, Bloomington

*Sample fine wines and
Tasty hors d'oeuvres catered by*

BIAGGI'S

RISTORANTE ITALIANO

- ♦ Gift Basket Raffle ♦ Holiday Treasures Art Show
- ♦ Purchase Wine by the glass

Tickets - \$35

For reservations & information email dd.willi@hotmail.com

Deadline for reservations is November 26



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of McLEAN COUNTY**