

League of Women Voters of Albany County Bulletin Nov/Dec 2011

Democracy is NOT a Spectator Sport

Speedy Recovery!

Mary Berry, LWV Albany County President, is recovering from surgery and Margaret Sawyer, LWV Albany County Treasurer, is recovering from a serious illness. We wish them both a quick and complete recovery!

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December Luncheon

Holidaying with a Heart

Is it possible to indulge and still feel good?

Ah, yes, Virginia, indeed it is!!!

Plan on attending this year's LWV Holiday Luncheon which will not only feature a gourmet buffet at the Century House, but which will also offer a "hearty" bonus. In the spirit of community awareness, The Century House has been working with the Regional Food Bank to provide meals to those in need. And so, for every entrée they serve, a meal is provided to someone in need through their "Enjoy One, Share One" program. Over 225,000 meals have been served to date, and more will be offered through our participation this year.

The fun "holidaying" will take place on **Wednesday, December 14** starting at noon. This will be a buffet with a variety of choices for sampling which include:

Chef's Soup du Jour

Fresh Spinach Salad with Horseradish Buttermilk Dressing

Balsamic Marinated Fresh Vegetables

Seafood Newburg-Shrimp, Scallops, and Crabmeat Served in a Sherried Cream Sauce w/ Bowtie Pasta

Sliced Roasted Loin of Pork Served over Sundried Cranberry Stuffing w/ a Sundried Cranberry Demi-Glace

Tortellini Maribou-Spinach Tortellini w/ Roasted Red Peppers,

Artichoke Hearts, and Black Olives in a Pesto Cream Sauce

New York Style Cheesecake w/ Fruit Purees (to be served by waitstaff)

Rolls, coffee, and tea at each table.

(Note: Cocktails and other beverages will be available at the cash bar in the main restaurant.)

The guest speaker for the afternoon with more than just a little to say will be retiring Albany County Executive Mike Breslin. In light of his many years of service at the helm of county government, Mike Breslin has a wealth of past experiences to share, and can also explore what he foresees as major issues for the future. This should be a most informative and enlightening program.

And, finally, something optional to consider for this day's event. Although basic necessities are the norm for donations for those in need, sometimes you need a little sparkle in your life. This year we will have a small "luxury item" donation basket. These donations will become "frivolous gifts" for women at the Interfaith Partnership Shelter and their auxiliary program the "Drop-in Center" both located in the Arbor Hill neighborhood. (The day program serves individuals and families who have homes but are in need of food, clothing, secure mailboxes, and job counseling.) Although the basics are critical, sometimes a little sparkle can provide an emotional uplift.

Recommended donations should be \$10 or under and may include some of the following: a fragrant hand lotion, a moisturizing lipstick or pretty nail polish, a dressy scarf, a small picture frame, a scented candle, etc.

The cost for the luncheon is \$30 and reservations are requested **by Friday, December 9**. Payment will be accepted at the door, but please know that if you have not cancelled your reservation by Monday morning, December 12, you will be responsible for the amount due. Please e-mail Margaret Danes at mdanes@nycap.rr.com or call her in the evening at 438-7218. Members are welcome to invite guests to attend as well. And, if you are in need of a ride or can offer a ride, please let Margaret know as well.

Everyone is invited to come and join in the festive holiday spirits as we look forward to good wishes and, even better, to good deeds for the coming year.



How did County Executive Breslin get his job? Or How did Albany County get a charter form of government?

Ann Brandon

Albany County has had only three county executives in the life of our charter. Our first executive in 1975 was Jim Coyne. He was followed by Michael Hoblock, and then Michael Breslin won the position in 1995. County Executive Breslin has said many times that he wouldn't have his job if it weren't for the League of Women Voters. He is remembering the 1970's when the League spearheaded a drive to get a county charter with an elected executive form of government.

For those of you who haven't been around that long, it was an exciting time for the League. Our big issue in 1970 was to get a nonpartisan elected school board for the city of Albany. We got enough signatures for a referendum which won by a 2-to-1 margin. It was challenged by the Mayor, and ended up going to the state Court of Appeals where the League prevailed.

Our next challenge was getting a county charter for Albany. At the time we were governed by the 39 member Legislature and non-elected county attorney. After study and consensus of county government, we began our campaign with an all-day seminar on county government at SUNYA. That sparked an interest in a coalition of organizations where we ended up collecting 16,000 signatures to urge the County Legislature to appoint a charter commission. After many ups and downs, a charter was put on the ballot in 1973, and passed by the voters. One compromise was that the Legislature would retain the right to appoint department heads. That provision was changed in the '90's to give the Executive appointment powers.

So I guess Mike Breslin is right that he wouldn't have his job without the League. Now, after 16 years of a job well done, he is taking a well-deserved rest. Mr. Breslin has been a friend of the League during his tenure and we wish him the best in his next endeavors.

Reinvigorating Our Observer Corps - Come Join Us!

The Observer Corps is underway. League members are observing at various board meetings and providing reports to the League. What a great way to observe your government in action and participate in the League.

A meeting was held in October to introduce League members to the process of the Observer Corps and to recruit more observers. Click [here](#) to view the power point presentation from that meeting. Also, contact [Jan Messina](#) if you would like to volunteer for the Observer Corps.

Here are two reports from Paula Philo's observations at the Bethlehem Town Board Meetings:

I attended the Bethlehem Town Board meeting on Wednesday, November 9, 2011, as a member of the LWVAC Observer Corp. One topic was discussed that would be of interest to the League in relation to our consolidation study. The Town of Bethlehem has already consolidated their vehicles into one Fleet Management department. They are already seeing a savings because of this. It is now time to formalize the new Fleet Management policies and put them in writing. To begin this process, there was a request from the Supervisor and the Fleet Manager to adopt a Vehicle Procurement and Maintenance Policy for the Town of Bethlehem. This policy was approved.

I also attended the November 22, 2011 Town of Bethlehem Town Board Meeting.

At the meeting there was a presentation by the 20/20 Implementation Advisory Committee of the Final Report on Opportunities to Strengthen Town Financial Management. The Bethlehem 20/20 Advisory Committee was made up of a group of Town residents interested in developing a better understanding of the issues, opportunities and challenges that the Town of Bethlehem is facing. The 20/20 Committee was appointed in January 2008. The Committee's mission was to "involve key stakeholders in a community-wide conversation about the long-term strategic direction of the Town (as an institution) and to provide broad-based guidance and direction to the Town Board as it faces the many challenges and difficult decisions ahead."

As part of the presentation, the Committee mentioned that the Town of Bethlehem uses one financial system, which covers all offices. They feel that this consolidated system works well for the town.

It was also mentioned that town departments share workers at peak seasons to meet a heavier workload and to save money.

Long Term Care Study Group

The LWVAC completed its six month study of Long Term Care in Albany County just in time to testify at the public hearing at the Albany County legislature which was held on Tuesday, Nov. 29. There were two items on the Legislature's agenda: Proposed additions or deletions to the 2012 Tentative Annual Budget and Hearing on Local Law no. L for 2011, overriding the tax levy limit for the 2012 budget.

Several league members attended and Arleen Stein testified, giving a summary of our recommendations. Unfortunately, due to the holiday and the recent scheduling of the hearing, we were unable to get this out sooner. For your convenience here are the proposed recommendations:

The County should:

- Continue its commitment to programs that serve the frail elderly who do not have Medicaid.
- Delay plans to build a new facility. We believe that alternatives have not been adequately explored.
- Arrange for a public-private task force to explore the full range of options publically within six months. The Task force should explore alternatives to negate the need for a County owned and administered nursing home.
- Explore incentives needed to encourage private sector nursing homes to accept Medicaid and other patients currently accepted only by the County nursing home.
- Investigate the impact and opportunities of New York State Medicaid Reform activities including managed long term plans, home and community based waiver consolidation and nursing home rate revisions.
- Study the size and scope of the problem concerning "hard to place" patients, and the best solutions to assuring patients access to appropriate services.
- Maintain the health and safety of the current residents of Albany County Nursing Home.
- Develop a local long term care measurement tool that will enable public officials and residents to speak a common language and understand how well Albany County is meeting its residents' need for long term care.



To view the full report, click [here](#). Co-Chairs for this study are Arleen Stein, Barbara Frankel and Julie Elson.

Voter Services Update - A Busy Fall Season

Mary Ann Lettau

The trees are almost bare. Leaves are piling up. Night comes early. No more sleeveless tops! This means: the end of election season is here.

Since our last communication, the Housing Authority project is complete. Thanks to Carol Webster, Shirley Anderson, Marggie Skinner and Tina Raggio who assisted in our meetings with tenants and candidates on 9/27 and 9/28. Mary Berry, Carol Webster and I have met to do our report. We'll submit it to the Authority in a future meeting. Thanks to these volunteers who helped with the count: Shirley Anderson, Lois Griffin, Tina Raggio, Martha and Dave Kissinger, Annette Argyros, Mary Berry, and Aimee Allaud. The incumbents won. The final numbers are impressive:

- total votes counted: 703;
- ballots that came in too late: 64;
- total number of participants: 67, not counting the ballots that were incorrectly marked;
- total number of ballots 2 years ago with the ballot box system: 276.

For our first effort with this new process---we learned more about what NOT to do next time!! We are pleased with this increase in democratic participation:491 votes - more than 2 1/2 times from 2 years ago. If we do this again, the tenants will start getting used to voting by mail!

We were asked to conduct a candidate forum by the Albany City-Wide PTA. There was a turnout of about 60 citizens at Albany High School. Thanks to Marggie Skinner, for her lively moderating; also, thanks to Lois Griffin, Julie Elson and Janet Reilly who helped with timing.

The Bethlehem Extravaganza took place on October 24: twelve candidates in 4 races in a three-hour program. Our able volunteers included: Nell Stokes-Holmes, Esther Karp, Lois Griffin (right-hand woman!), Monica and Bill Sharp, Tina Raggio, Loretta Simon, Mary Berry, Marilyn Katenbaum, Paula Reed, and Maggie Moehringer. About 125 voters attended. Charles Wiff of the Spotlight took over Bill Devoe's moderating responsibilities. Tina and Loretta tried their hands at timing (not a pun!); we use a stop-watch.

Albany County Vote 411 has made its debut! Supervisor and Town Council races in Bethlehem and Colonie were featured. In addition, an overrun of 400 of the printed version by our cosponsors, the Spotlight, was distributed in those towns by the League. This is an exciting development. The voting public is hungry for information on the candidates, presented in a fair way. The proof: the Albany County League's 411 site got 574 hits!!! This is the 3rd highest in the state, after New York City and Rochester. Individuals spent over 4 minutes on the site. This is success, for our first effort--shout -out to Chris Alexander in Saratoga, the 411 guru. The software is fabulous and next year we aim to be bigger and better, now that I've had some experience with the program. The printed Voters' Guides from the state League were also distributed to libraries and other community sites.

The last event of the year had the largest attendance. The highly-competitive race for Colonie Town Supervisor was featured on 11/2, at the Holiday Inn on Wolf Rd. Our cosponsors were the Colonie Chamber of Commerce, Capital Area Council of Churches and Spotlight Newspapers. Special thanks to Joanne Esposito who stood in as the moderator at the last minute with great aplomb. About 350 voters attended; it was a focused, respectful crowd. Thanks to our volunteers for the evening: Ruth Dinowitz, Suzanne Perry and Anita Behn.

A final word of thanks for all the Leaguers who stepped up this election season. They were a great combination of "tried-and-true" veterans and some new faces. Special recognition to Lois Griffin, for her flexibility and energy and good sense! And Julie Elson who fixed our cloth banner in time for hanging at the Colonie event.

State League News

Electronic Voters Guide: Vote 411

In addition to the usual candidate forms and printed voter guides, leagues across the state have taken a new path this year to engaging voters by creating online voter guides through the League's Vote 411 website. Participating leagues include Albany County, Broome/Tioga Counties, Buffalo/Niagara, the Hamptons, Huntington, New York City, Rensselaer County, Rochester Metro Area, Saratoga County, Schenectady County, Wayne County, and the Westchester County ILO.

These leagues took advantage of the voter guide system of www.VOTE411.org to post information about the candidates running for office and ballot issues. The www.Vote411.org website covered 535 races in New York State and 1032 candidates. New York voters represented 27% of the nationwide visitors to the Vote 411 website. There were over 12,000 New York visitors to the Vote 411 site in the past year, and they came from 488 cities around the state.

Kudos and thanks to Chris Alexander and Francine Rodger, both of the Saratoga County League, who spearheaded the committee that made this possible.

Redistricting

Local leagues have continued to give testimony at LATFOR hearings around the state, and participated in other forums on redistricting issues. We are the only group that has had a presence throughout the state. The Governor has pledged to veto any district lines drawn by LATFOR but expectations are dwindling for a major structural change from LATFOR to an independent commission for 2012. The League remains committed to a long-term constitutional solution.

Hydrofracking

Several public meetings are being held around the state by the Department of Environmental Conservation on the High-Volume Hydraulic Fracturing draft SGEIS. The state league plans to submit written comments. For a full list of the hearings scheduled, click [here](#).

2012 Legislative Agenda

Based on the responses we had from local leagues with suggestions for the 2012 legislative agenda, and consideration of both resources and legislative opportunities for the next year, the Board adopted the following as the League's 2012 Legislative Agenda.

Steps To A Better New York **# Election Reform**

Improve election processes to extend, encourage and protect voting, including paperless and Election Day registration, better ballot design, improved polling place management/ poll worker training, and measures to ensure the integrity of all ballots

Campaign Finance Reform

Support lower contribution limits, increased disclosure and public financing. Support stronger and effective campaign finance enforcement with increased civil and criminal penalties for violations.

Other Government Positions

Support structural reform to legislative redistricting; support effective ethics enforcement and open and transparent government processes; monitor impact of the property tax cap on localities and schools.

Health Care

Support affordable and effective health care for all New Yorkers.

Natural Resources

Support protection and management of New York's natural resources in the public interest.

Other League Positions

The League also has positions on the Judiciary, State Finances, and Social Policy under which we can and do take action .

Tax Caps and Circuit Breakers

LWVNYS President Betsey Swan recently presented *Tax Caps in New York State: Meaningful Relief or Snare and Delusion?* at a conference. The conference was organized to discuss strategies for the 2012 legislative session on property tax relief and reform. Click [here](#) to view the power point presentation and click [here](#) to view the media coverage.

Lobby Day

We will be organizing a Lobby Day in Albany in late January, similar to the one we held in February last year. All League members interested in our advocacy work, here in Albany or locally, are invited to attend. We will discuss what our positions are, how we derive those positions, and what action we are taking on those positions. We will also provide a tour of the Capitol and arrange for meetings with state legislators if people are interested. So, watch for more information and a date for 2012 Lobby Day. Email the state League office if you'd like to receive the info and attend.

Advocacy Issues

Click [here](#) or go to the state League website (www.lwvny.org) for important updates from our Issue Specialists in Elections, Transportation and Court Restructuring in the November State Voter (scroll to bottom of homepage for link to State Voter).

Voter Participation Project

How can our voter registration process and voting methods be improved to increase voter participation? What are other states doing? How does early voting or vote by mail work? Can the design of the ballot and poll worker training be improved to simplify voting and encourage more to vote? These and other questions are answered in the Increasing Voter Participation program that the State League is finalizing this month. Ask your League if it is organizing a community forum with the materials provided - or offer to help organize a forum. Education of our members and the public will be important for our advocacy efforts for reform on these issues.

1919 Society

Don't forget to include the state League in your will - and join the 1919 Society. If you already have included the League in your will, just let us know and we'll add you to the members of the Society. As a member, their names will be engraved on a plaque in the state League office, listed in the State Voter, and on the website.

State Voter

The State Voter, the state League's newsletter is published electronically every other month. It is emailed to all members for whom the state League has email addresses. Anyone may subscribe for \$12 a year to a paper copy of the State Voter; just call (518-465-4162) or [email](#) the state office.

Membership 2011-2012 - Join & Make a Difference

Name: _____ Telephone: _____

Address, City, Zip: _____

Email: _____

- Individual Membership \$50/year
- Household Membership \$75/year
- Student Membership \$15/year
- Contribution in support of my local League

Please send me more information

For financial aid information, contact Monica Sharp, 475-9736
Mail to: League of Women Voters of Albany County PO Box 611,
Slingerlands, NY 12159