



# Suffolk County Voter

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Wednesday December 14 LWVSC Board Meeting, SCCC, Riverhead, 10:00am - 12:00noon

December 2011

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## Restorative Practices

Since the early 1990's, Leagues throughout New York State have studied criminal justice issues, opposing the death penalty and recognizing the need for a range of punishments less restrictive than incarceration. The League supports the use of Alternatives to Incarceration for nonviolent offenders and more effective intervention and, if applicable, treatment. We have been encouraged by the creation of specialized courts in Suffolk County – for the mentally ill, for the drug addicted, and for those harmed by domestic violence – which seek to help the offenders get treatment through the court system.

The Restorative Justice movement, now nationwide, makes it possible to bring together offenders and victims so that those who have caused harm can acknowledge the impact of what they have done and have an opportunity to be re-integrated in the community. The Center for Restorative Practices, directed by Smithtown LWV member Carol McNally, offers training to schools, businesses, families and the community to develop methods of peaceable intervention to resolve conflicts.

*Nancy Marr, LWV Brookhaven*

## Integrating Restorative Practices Into Our Justice System

On November 18<sup>th</sup>, I attended an all day Symposium, "Integrating Restorative Practices into our Justice System" which was presented by the Center for Restorative Practices, Inc. and held at Touro Law Center in Central Islip. I, like other New York attorneys who attended, earned 5 hours of our required Continuing Education credit for the day.

Restorative Practices is also frequently referred to today as Restorative Justice. The term is meant to suggest both a new and a very old understanding of the concept of Justice. Native American tribes and other cultures worldwide have long practiced community centered techniques to achieve justice and healing after a crime, injury or other damage has occurred.

For many centuries some Asian, Western European and American cultures have focused on the notion of blame and punishment when considering how to treat the aftermath of crime or injury. Someone—or society—was damaged; someone must pay, usually by suffering in some way, thus prison. Police departments, Courts, Judges, Juries, have been organized to mete out this "justice". Our Courts and systems of justice have been organized with a notion of fairness. We have rules to protect the rights of the accused. Often the victims feel ignored. They have been damaged, but the Courts are—in their minds—obsessed with protecting the accused. They feel no one is hearing their pain, what the real consequences are to them. Least of all, victims feel, the perpetrator does not understand the extent of the damage or the depth of their pain. Only in recent years has it become customary to allow victims a chance to voice all this at the sentencing phase of a trial.

Most people, I think, would agree on a goal of lowering the amount of crime as well as the amount of taxpayer funds required to maintain an ever growing prison population.

How can we accomplish this? Most crime is committed by the younger segment of our population. Often substance abuse, sometimes mental illness, is involved in some way. There seems to be no thought about the rights and feelings of others, consequences of the crime, or even of the perpetrator's own future. In many communities all over the United States, including here in Suffolk County, techniques are being tried, systems being put in place, to address these issues. Usually they are used in cases involving lower level crimes,

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*Judie Gorenstein, LWVSC Voter Service Chair, reports on the 2011 issues and developments in voter service to LWVSC Post Election Breakfast attendees.. See more on next page.*



**League of Women Voters of Suffolk County  
2011 Post Election Breakfast**



**Sunday November 13, 2011 Bellport Country Club**

*(right) Judie Gorenstein, President, LWV Huntington, presents the LWVSC Voter Service Award to Barbara Magaliff and Eileen Coblens, in recognition of their efforts in organizing, coordinating, and reporting on the Voter Registration efforts at the Naturalization ceremonies held for new citizens at the Alphonse D'Amato Federal Courthouse in Central Islip.*



*(right) Mary McLaughlin and JoAnn Alario Paulsen presented an overview of local Huntington races and results.*



*(right) Rick Brand, political columnist for Newsday, shares insights, perspectives, and the politics and personalities behind the 2011 elections in Suffolk County with the PEB attendees in Bellport.*



*(left) Anne Marshall, LWV of the Hamptons presents the LWVSC Voter Service Award To Julia Kayser.*

**Integrating Restorative Practices Into Our Justice System** *continued*

although here in Suffolk County sometimes felonies are included. Often group talking or communication circles are organized where both victim and perpetrator come with their families, friends, support and learn from each other to better understand what happened and why. All can express their feelings and know they have been heard. This technique can be used with good effect to address problems in schools, related to damage to property, violence between students, cheating. This usually calms all involved, sets up a system whereby the perpetrator understands the gravity of their deed and has a way to atone for it and regain self respect and the respect of others. The end result can be a young life transformed and future crime deterred, avoided.

In the Suffolk County Court system, cases involving substance abuse or mental illness are considered appropriate for diversion. He or she must plead guilty and agree to an arrangement based on treatment. The jail sentence for his crime is not carried out if he completes a rigorous program of Court-supervised treatment over a period of a year. This has turned around, even saved, many lives, as well as tax dollars, which would have been spent on incarceration. It definitely seems to be the win/win solution we all look for today.

In schools, students who participate in a program of restorative practice are able to return to be part of the student body instead of being excluded, as they are if they are suspended or punished by school administrators.

*Sondra Irvine, LWV Smithtown*