

Presidents' Report

We celebrate this past year at the Annual Meeting with a most appropriate title: Civil Discourse in a Presidential Election Year. We are certain that the discourse among our members and guests will be more than civil. It will be warm, cordial and reflect the informed and enlightened views of the fine people in attendance.

This is a challenging time to be involved in elections. Laws designed to limit participation in the election process for many people are challenging voters across the county. The effect of the Citizens United Supreme Court decision is devastating to the conduct of fair elections. The League and its steady voice is as vital now as it was when it was founded almost 100 years ago.

The reports that follow give a good indication of the efforts of our local League this past year. We are proud of the work of each of the committees and the fine and thoughtful contributions of those involved.

The Amherst Unit has merged seamlessly into the League has a whole. The Lunch & Issues events are being held as part of our overall program and the summer picnic continues as the League Pot Luck Picnic at noon on July 19, 2016 in the Chelsea Club House on Downing Lane at Canterbury Woods.

On March 12, we conducted a Citizen Lobbying Workshop organized by our Advocacy Chair, Joan LoCurto and Judy Metzger. Thirty-five attendees learned and shared valuable insights to use as citizens advocate with their elected officials. Many League members who attended have been lobbying our state legislators for the priority items set by the state League for this year. Joan was pleased that the workshop became a conversation among attendees, both those with lobbying experience and those new to the process. Important questions were addressed in a positive and helpful manner.

We published ten copies of the Voter with the able assistance of Graphic Editor, Barb Jezioro and Copy Editor, Sandra Chelnov. Nancy DeTine provided her eagle eye to do the final copy edits for each Voter.

Board Members: Judith Clarke, Marian Deutschman, Mary Herbst, Lori Robinson, Joan LoCurto, Nancy DeTine, Dorothy Tao, Theresa Pope, Wynnie Fisher, Pat Costanzo, Sue Stievater, Margaret Brunson and **Judy Metzger and Terri Parks, Co-Presidents**

Money in Politics

2015-2016 was an exciting and rewarding year for our Money in Politics (MIP) Committee. It was the second year of the National Money In Politics study, culminating with consensus meetings in January and the announcement of a new national MIP position in April. Throughout the year our committee worked diligently to inform ourselves and the public of the challenges to campaign finance reform in light of the United States Supreme Court Citizens United 2010 decision. We read voraciously. We distilled a different aspect of money in politics from the national study material in each issue of the Voter.

The highlight of our year was the super successful Constitution Day event held at the WNED Studios, featuring Zephyr Teachout as speaker. An enthusiastic audience greeted Ms. Teachout and she responded with spirited accounts of the country's constant struggle to keep money from corrupting politics and convincing us that yes, we can reform how we finance political campaigns. We previewed Zephyr's visit at our summer picnic with one of Lawrence Lessig's popular money in politics talks on video. (The Lessig and Teachout books were included on the national League reading list.)

Looking forward, action will take center stage. We are reminded that challenges to reform remain, but opportunities for reform, based on our expanded new MIP position, will arise on the national, state and local levels. Our MIP Committee members plan to participate.

Committee: Pat Costanzo, Janet Goodsell, Shirley Joy, Beth Kaufman, Joni LoCurto, Laura McDade, JoAnn Mecca, Joan Photiadis and **Janet Massaro, Chair**

LWVBN Web Page Report

The total number of visits to the LWVBN web site, **lwvbn.org**, from May 2015 through April 2016 was 12,206, an increase from the previous four years. The peak months for visits were September, October, and November, reflecting interest in election information available during these months. Web traffic statistics for the past five years are given below.

Visits During Year from May through Following April

	Total Visits	Non-Election Months Av.	Election Months Av. (Sep, Oct, Nov)
5/11-4/12	9710	693	1158
5/12-4/13	10855	701	1515
5/13-4/14	10939	794	1265
5/14-4/15	12206	827	1586
5/15-4/16	12265	871	1207

Kristin Allen, LWVBN Webmaster

Education Committee: Report

The highlight of Education Committee efforts this year was the presentation of a forum titled *New Education Bargain with Students and Parents* at Buffalo History Museum, Tuesday April 5, 2016. The program was the result of our decision that rather than focusing on the many festering negative issues in education, we would focus on early childhood education and the positive and creative efforts we had observed in area schools to improve reading and basic skills. The keynote speaker, Anne Botticelli, Chief Academic Officer, Buffalo Public Schools (BPS), described the BPS push to insure Buffalo students will read well by the time they leave third grade to prepare them to read content required from fourth grade on, echoing the introductory statement of Marian Deutschman that statistics show that children who lack reading skills by the end of third grade do not graduate from high school. The key elements of this program, according to Botticelli, are smaller classes, coaching both students and teachers, and wrap-around services, so children and families in these neighborhoods can navigate the system and get an education. Similarly, panel member Yvonne Minor-Ragan, recently retired

president of *Buffalo Promise Neighborhood* which pioneered a similar program, talked about methods for teachers to encourage parents and teachers to get involved in reading efforts and the successful results of those efforts on testing; Anne S. Ryan, Executive Director, *Read to Succeed*, described how *Read to Succeed* goes into early childhood centers and homes with reading materials and books to encourage the introduction of reading skills; and Miguel Medina, Principal, School 33 - Bilingual Center, described the *Reggio Emilia* approach that uses a child's interests as a source from which to develop reading, vocabulary and writing skills in the early grades. We were most pleased that audio and video spots of the forum had been recorded by Mike Desmond of WBFO and were broadcast on WBFO radio the next day and on the WBFO Blog! The Committee continues to keep informed of progress in Congress toward reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and to monitor compliance of New York Charter Schools Act and take action when necessary.

Committee: Marian Deutschman, Maxine Insera, Marlene Katzel, Joan Photiadis, and **Dorothy Tao & Lee Tetkowski, Co-Chairs**

Membership

In the fall of 2015, more than 40 members who had not renewed their membership were contacted by phone by Lois Uhteg, JoAnne Mecca and myself. More than half appreciated the reminder. The others were unable to renew their memberships for various reasons, mostly health or because they longer live in this area. It was decided that a lapsed member who renews should be noted.

Exceptional programs such as the opening one in September brought new members to the League. Our Lunch & Issues meetings are popular with about 30-40 including guests in attendance at each one. We appreciate that Sally Metzger and Marion Fay continue to manage the reservations with their welcoming faces at the Scotch 'n Sirloin.

We instituted use of nametags this spring for League events, which I feel are very important, to make it easier to help members know each other better.

We have registered at least 12 new members since June of 2015. Nearly 10% of our membership is men. Current members who knew them or were willing to welcome them contacted most new members. Short bios of the new members have begun to be posted in the Voter.

On January 31, 2016, we reported a total of 190 members. On May 31, 2016, our membership total was

Sue Stievater, Membership chair

Communications

The communications function was rejuvenated during 2015-16. Our goal has been to update and professionalize the LWVBN brand — a more contemporary image will increase our organization's stature and appeal to a wider audience of prospective members. Working with Krysta Doerfler, a professional graphic designer who has generously volunteered her services, we introduced a new color letterhead design, as well as an attractive and consistent new format for event flyers and programs. These reflect Krysta's design for our Voters Guides.

Our most significant achievement this year was the creation of a new membership brochure, printed in full color and incorporating a tear-off application.

All new LWVBN materials highlight the theme used by the national League — MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK. The updating efforts will continue in 2016-17, when we plan to work on the Voter and website. We will also update our Communications Policies to reflect current practice.

Nancy DeTine, Chair

Finance/Investment

Background: LWVBN's \$40,000 investment in TIAA funds, started in September 2013 and grew to \$46,986.48 by July 30, 2014 at which time Treasurer Lori Robinson deposited \$16,364.44 from the Nancy E. Ryther bequest into the account bringing the balance of the account to

\$63,350.92. In September 2014, noting that New York State law mandates non-profit fiscal responsibility, the Finance Committee prudently invested \$20,000 of the nearly \$32,000 LWVBN liquid assets leaving approximately three months of working cash on hand. Thus \$10,000 was invested into each of (1) the Growth and Income Fund and (2) the Mid-Cap Value Fund bringing the total LWVBN monies invested to date to \$74,364.44.

Current: On May 20, 2016, the market value of the LWVBN investments was reported as \$85,597.90.

This growth has provided 2015 - 2016 dividends of

\$ 164.68 Bond Fund,
\$ 1,721.51 Growth and Income Fund,
\$ 2,725.56 Mid-Cap Value Fund, and
\$ 1,380.37 Social Choice Fund

The LWVBN total dividend income for the year is \$5,992.12 despite the market value decrease from last May's \$88,992.01.38.

Committee Members: Judith Clarke, Shirley Joy, Terri Parks, Lori Robinson, and **Pat Costanzo, Chair**

Local Government Committee

During the past year we continued to examine the Erie County budget and budget process to educate ourselves, our members, and the general public with the ultimate goal of taking action. Following the May 2015 PowerPoint program we presented at the Harlem Road Community Center entitled *Pies & Pie Charts/Brunch & Budget*, we attended mid-year and November budget hearings. We developed a set of recommendations to improve the budget process.

We continued our interviews with county officials. After interviewing the County Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Forestry, we decided to schedule a meeting to highlight all the new collaborative initiatives and partnerships of the county that we learned were taking place, especially those related to LWV positions. At a November 20 lunch meeting at Scotch & Sirloin we arranged to have Tom Dearing, Commissioner of Environment & Planning, reflect on his 35+

years of experience in county government under the title “*Good things happen when government works – what did and didn’t work and what we learned.*” He also provided this committee with an update on the June 2013 document “*Economic Initiatives for a Smart Economy*” so that we could see the progress on the county executive’s initiatives. We were asked to provide support for the updated Erie County Parks Master Plan. However, that has been delayed with the departure of the Commissioner. Our letter to the editor in support of the county executive’s pay equity requirement for the ECIDA was published in the Buffalo News. After significant and persistent effort, an *Another Voice* article on sales tax distribution was finally published.

We explored a definition of good government and concluded that it should be accountable, responsive and responsible. To make democracy work we need educated informed voters who exercise their right to vote. We suggested a LWVBN focus on voter turnout given the dismal statistics from last November.

Our focus turned to the Erie County Citizens’ Budget Review Commission (ECCBRC) that has had difficulty scheduling meetings and assembling a quorum. We prepared a set of questions for interviews with the members of the ECCBRC in an attempt to find ways to improve its effectiveness. We tried to interview all the members of the 2015 commission but were only successful in getting information from four of the 12 members. *Another Voice* was published to highlight the positive actions occurring in county government and the need for changes in ECCBRC. One of the proposals of the Charter Revision Commission was the creation of an Erie County Planning Board. We testified at their public hearing in support of the concept with additional recommendations to strengthen the board. We observed the last minute poorly conceived package of charter revisions; many of them were defeated before the May 15 deadline for completion of the work of the commission. We will continue to monitor the revisions as they proceed through the legislature, to the county executive, and to the ballot in November.

Committee members: Dot Brown, Lynne Vallone, Lynda Stephens, Arlene Miles, Nancy DeTine, Kathleen McCarthy, **and Marian Deutschman, Chair**

Issues and Action

Representatives from the program committees form the Issues and Action Committee. Committee chairs distribute summaries of their committee meetings to Issues Committee members and to the board. Our role is to discuss and recommend approval of program events and actions proposed by those committees and other League members. Based on our recommendations, the board decides whether to grant approval or denial. Most actions are in the form of letters to media or elected officials and must conform to League positions. The president keeps us informed of program items for LWVNY, LWVUS and for convention.

In its role as a clearinghouse for programs this committee was involved in the League hosting or co-sponsoring the following programs: On September 17, Zephyr Teachout spoke to an audience of over 150. City Court Judge Susan Eagan was the speaker at our October 16 lunch & Issues program on the “Raise the Age” juvenile justice concurrence issue. Tom Dearing, commissioner of the Erie County Dept. of Environment & Planning, was the November 20 .The holiday party at Rizotto Ristorante featured speakers from Vive and Jericho Road. Attendees brought gifts that were distributed to refugees. We recommended that we continue this successful combination of speaker and giving gifts to a worthy group at future holiday events. Money in Politics meetings were held in January to reach consensus for the LWVUS update. A panel of nurses spoke on *Why Safe Staffing Matters* on February 18 with a focus on passage of state legislation to address inadequate staffing of hospital nurses. We co-sponsored International Women’s Day with AAUW at UB Center for Tomorrow on March 8. The March 12 Citizen/lobbyist training workshop was very successful with a good turnout, fine networking and new memberships. The April 5 meeting on *Buffalo Public Schools’ New Education Bargain with Students and Parents* took place at the History Museum. An informative meeting on April

27 included Fred Floss and Sam Magavern at the Scotch & Sirloin on the subject of the minimum wage. Plans for the kickoff on September 16 include speaker Rose Sconiers, retired Appellate Court Justice for a luncheon the 20th Century Club.

This committee is a filter for recommending action and priorities for advocacy/lobbying. We developed questions for the 2015 Voters Guide. We initiated discussion and production of an expanded version of *They Represent You*. We recommended signing on to a petition to the NFTA from Citizens for Regional Transit urging WNY legislators to become co-sponsors of the Transit/Transportation Investment bill. We recommended three legislative priorities for LWVNY: 1 – Campaign Finance, 2 – Natural Resources, and 3 – Healthcare. We recommended that LWVBN should not tackle the Constitutional Amendment issue. We recommended updating of the list of Allied organizations. Letters to Buffalo News editor on Pay Equity and IDA were approved and published. Our recommendations for LWVUS Program Planning included: 1 - Protection & Expansion of Voting Rights, 2 - Money in Politics based on completed review and update of our position, and 3 - Redistricting Reform. A letter was sent to Darius Pridgen on extension of the Green Code comment period and we recommended adding it to public comments on the Green Code. The Buffalo News published *Another Voice* in May with a focus on the Erie County Citizens Budget Review Commission.

Committee members: Gladys Gifford, Joan LoCurto, Janet Massaro, Lynda Stephens, JoAnn Mecca, Judy Metzger, Terri Parks, **Marian Deutschman Chair**
Voter Service

The League Members who worked at the LWV Voter Registration Events last summer and early fall reported disappointing results. Things are looking up this year. There is a lot more interest in the 2016 Presidential Election and this seems to be bringing out potential voters for candidates in all levels of government including the presidential primary.

Ten Voter Registration Events were held since last year's annual meeting. A total of twenty-six

completed voter registration forms were forwarded to the Board of Elections. We signed up twelve organ donors and distributed eighty-five voter registration forms. We talked to many, many voters – answering questions and distributing absentee voter applications.

April 28, 2016 at Maryvale High School: Mr. Murphy's Senior Government Classes. four LWVBN Volunteers did a presentation to 120 students on the privilege and importance of voting followed by a voter registration event. We collected 94 completed voter registration forms and delivered them to the Board of Elections. A few students completed the Organ Donation Form also. We welcome contact suggestions for repeating this program in the fall.

Candidate Forums were held in Evans, Amherst, East Aurora and Hamburg in October 2015. We also provided timekeepers for the televised County Executive Debate on Channel 17 and Channel 2. School Board Candidates' Nights were held in Williamsville and Ken-Ton School Districts in May 2016.

We are currently scheduling summer voter registration events and presentations for summer and fall with the able assistance of Kate Wagner.

The Voters Guide Committee has updated its action plan for 2016. The steering committee working thus far includes Barbara Jezioro, Terri Parks, Krysta Doerfler, Mary Ann Turkla, Dorothy Tao, Margaret Brunson and Laura McDade.
Margaret Brunson, Chair

Volunteer Coordinator

Fifty-six volunteers were recruited to represent the LWVBN at Naturalization Ceremonies held at the US Courthouse, the US Little Rock, the Theodore Roosevelt Inaugural site, The Buffalo History Museum and Hamburg Middle School.

Moderators and timekeepers were recruited for four Candidates' Forums and three speakers for two community organizations. Volunteers were also requested to monitor charter school lotteries and four of our volunteers participated in a high school registration drive.

The Volunteer Coordinator also assisted the Election Services Chair in organizing and carrying out some of the responsibilities related to running BMHA elections. This included recruiting nine volunteers for BMHA Candidates' Forums for this year's Resident Commissioner election.

Changes were made last year to monitor the number of registration forms that were completed. We had about a 16% return. Adjustments have been made to increase that rate and the Board of Elections has agreed to continue monitoring the returns.

The Volunteer Coordinator served on the Nominations Committee and the Finance Committee as well.

Judith Clarke, Volunteer Coordinator

Election Services

The Election Services Committee has been involved at numerous Buffalo Municipal Housing sites where we conduct nominations and elections for Resident Councils. Our League is the neutral third party that is required by the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to conduct such democratic processes.

In addition, this year, we are conducting the city wide Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority's Tenant Commissioners' Election. This is another process whereby the residents who are served by the housing authority are able to vote for two of their own as tenant representatives. Our League obtains remuneration through a contract with the Housing Authority.

All of these activities require many skilled volunteers to make these actions successful. I surely appreciate all of the dedication, time, and efforts of all of the volunteers.

Alan Dozoretz, Chair

Public Relations

In most helpful collaboration with Communications Chair, Nancy DeTine, Theresa Pope and I continue to publicize activities, promote the League's image, and increase visibility of League

services and projects, by submitting press releases for all LWVBN program meetings to editors and calendars of the *Buffalo News* and *Artvoice*, as well as to editors of *Business First*, *The Public*, *the Niagara Gazette*, *the Challenger*, *Criterion*, *Panorama Hispano*, *Karibu* and others, and additionally to web publications such as *Buffalo Rising*. We also distribute via Mary Ann Turkla all releases and flyers to the League's list of Allied Organizations. In addition, notifications are sent to radio stations, such as WBFO and WGRZ. Finally, all events are posted with images on the League's Facebook page, which we regularly maintain and update.

Dorothy Tao, Chair

Waterfront

In 2015-2016, the Waterfront Committee met six times beginning in September at selected locations. We met on: September 23 January 4, April 11 and May 4 at the Central Library; March 14 at Sail Buffalo and June 1 at the Theodore Roosevelt Historical Site. Meetings are held from 3:00-4:00 pm. Our group includes representatives from the 21st Century Park on the Outer Harbor.

We reviewed the Erie County Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) activities concerning the Outer Harbor, noting that their "Blueprint" was announced 9-16-15 without significant public input. The ECHDC and the Niagara Frontier Transit Authority have agreed on the transfer of Terminals A & B to the ECHDC. JoAnn Mecca continued to attend the ECHDC Board meetings; however, we noted that these meetings are subject to change without adequate public notice.

We learned that the proposed Green Code has features that may allow development on the Outer Harbor. Therefore we composed comments that were approved by the LWVBN Board and submitted by the April 22 deadline. We sought a change in the zoning designation for the Outer Harbor that would prohibit such development. Several of us attended and testified at a public hearing on the Green Code, held April 2nd at the Buffalo School for Performing Arts.

Our efforts are now turned to the proposed 23-story tower project by Gerry Buchheit of Orchard Park to be built on the site of the former Freezer

Queen building located on the Lake Erie waterfront immediately south of the Outer Harbor boundary. Called “Queen City Landing,” this is private property, but governed by NYS environmental laws and by City of Buffalo zoning codes. We attended a City Council meeting on May 17, and offered detailed and passionate comments requesting that the City delay approval of this project as presently offered. The Planning Board of the City was considering the project at its May 31 meeting.

We plan to offer leadership for bike/ped outings to the Outer Harbor during the summer months. Look to the Voter and the LWVBN website for details!

We maintain an email contact list of 43 people.

Committee members: Joyce Bol, James Carr (21st Century Park), Nancy DeTine, Ellen Gibson, Janet Goodsell, Joanne Kahn (21st Century Park), Beth Kaufman, Nicole Matteson, Janet Massaro, Joann Mecca, Lynda Stephens, Joyce Zobel and **Gladys Gifford, Chair**

Social Economic Justice

The committee met in July, September, October, December, January, February, and March. We decided to contact Erie County elected officials to inform them about the League’s Living Wage position and learn whether any Erie County employees earn less than a living wage; approximately \$15/hour. We will urge them to require for-profit businesses which contract with Erie County to pay all their employees at least a living wage. If any County employees earn less than living wage, we will recommend the County make efforts to work with county unions to improve wage levels. We expect to pursue these activities later in 2016, after budget deliberations for 2017 begin.

On April 27, we presented a Lunch & Issues program at the Scotch ‘n Sirloin Restaurant. The program, “Increasing the Minimum Wage Is Good Economics”, featured Buffalo State College Department of Economics Chair Dr. Fred Floss, Jr. and Partnership for the Public Good Co-Director Sam Magavern. Our speakers provided technical economic and social justice reasons why

increasing the minimum wage benefits the local, state, and even national economy.

The United States has a “consumer economy” – people buying goods and services generate wealth and income. Lower income people tend to spend all of the money they earn to sustain themselves and their families. Stores and service providers benefit from increased sales. Low wage workers become less reliant on social welfare programs, such as food stamps, thereby reducing government spending. Government revenues increase when wages go up with more income taxes generated and higher contributions to Social Security and Medicare. Sales tax revenues increase as people buy more, adding to state and county coffers. Increasing the minimum wage will not solve the wealth and income inequality problem, but it’s a small step in that direction.

A challenge the committee is experiencing right now is that members have many commitments, some involving other League work. We have been less active in recent months. We hope to increase activity as Erie County begins 2017 budget deliberations.

Committee members: Marian Deutschman, Judy Frank, Ramona Gallagher, Judy Huber, Suzanne Kelly, Judy Metzger, Joan Photiadis, Sue Stievater, Dorothy Tao, Lynne Vallone and **Lynda Stephens, Chair**