

Co-Presidents' Report

The annual meeting program theme this year is *The Power of Citizen Activism*. It is especially appropriate in a year that has seen a tremendous increase in activities such as the Women's March, the March for Science and the People's Climate March in Washington and around the world which highlighted the issues that increasingly concern women and men. Many League members participated locally and in D.C. The marches highlight the issues, but it will be in the continuing work of the League and other organizations that the issues will be addressed in meaningful ways.

Earning the right to vote in New York State on November 6, 1917, and the passage of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 extending it across the nation, marked only brief stopping points in the long march to guarantee that all citizens are able to exercise that right.

At our holiday party in December 2016, we recognized 95 people who volunteered at least once for the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara in 2016. A few of those people are not League members and many people volunteered for several efforts or several times for the same effort. It's interesting that no one had even considered that we have so many active League people! Hmmm, it's interesting that 95 volunteers participated in the League's 96th year.

The League has many concerns about government actions that attack voters' rights, health care, and other key issues that the League has fought long and hard for. We must increase our efforts and work more to collaborate with other organizations and engage with our community in meaningful ways. This needs all of us working together.

This past year we published ten issues of the LWVBN *Voter* with the able assistance of Barb Jezioro, layout editor, Nora Mikes, copy editor, and Nancy DeTine, proofreader. Mailing of the *Voter* was completed with the able assistance of Sally Metzger.

Kathie Macaluso, board events chair, arranged for the venues and speakers for the two board events, the holiday party and annual meeting. We

also began an informal *Fourth Thursday Happy Hour* at Providence Social this spring thanks to the efforts of Nora Mikes, Lori Robinson and Nancy DeTine. This is a social event that gives an opportunity for League members and friends to discuss issues of the day. The first few have been enjoyable.

The members of the Great Decisions discussion group have begun to cull through League files in preparation for the upcoming centennial celebrations of women's suffrage and the state and national League's founding as well as submitting our records for archives. We're certain that there will be interesting and valuable items to display as these milestones are reached.

The reports that follow show much depth of involvement and commitment to League principles. We offer our appreciation and gratitude to everyone who works on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara.

Judy Metzger and Terri Parks

Board members: *Judith Clarke, Marian Deutschman, Mary Herbst, Lori Robinson, Margaret Brunson, Pat Costanzo, Shirley Joy, Joan LoCurto (on leave), Kathleen Macaluso, Nora Mikes, Dorothy Tao, Nancy DeTine, Sue Stievater*

Governance

The Governance Committee was activated to give our bylaws a needed update. Changes include:

In Article III: Membership we made two revisions, changing "citizens" to "persons," and starting eligibility at age 16, conforming to the national League as required.

Article IV: Officers was changed to provide a defined procedure to operate the League if no one steps up to be president or co-president.

In Article VI: Committees minor changes were made to the Budget Committee and Nominating Committee regarding size and membership.

Under Article VIII: Financial Administration, we changed when members are dropped from the roll

to January 31, which is current practice and the date when we report membership to the state and national Leagues. A section titled Contracts was added to state that the board must approve all contracts and only the president or treasurer may sign a contract. (This includes agreements to rent space for program events.)

Section 3 in Article IX: Program was renamed Adoption of Local Program as a clarification.

Shirley Joy, Chair

Committee: *Marian Deutschman, Kathleen McCarthy, Terri Parks, Lori Robinson*

Volunteer Coordinator

The volunteer coordinator recruited members to represent the LWVBN at naturalization ceremonies at various sites in Buffalo and Hamburg. Sixty-nine volunteers represented the League at 34 different ceremonies.

After a long hiatus the coordinator was able to reestablish a relationship with the Board of Elections, which has committed to attending all the ceremonies to assist our volunteers and collect the registration forms. The BOE continues to monitor the number of stamped LWVBN registration forms turned in. We had almost twice as many as last year.

Moderators and timekeepers were recruited to assist at seven candidate forums and BMHA elections as well as assist the Election Services chair in organizing and carrying out some of the responsibilities related to running BMHA elections.

Additional volunteers were recruited to monitor charter school lotteries. Two speakers represented the League this year resulting in honorariums.

The volunteer coordinator also served as a member of the Finance Committee.

Judith Clarke, Volunteer Coordinator

Waterfront Committee

In 2016-2017, the Waterfront Committee met six times beginning in August at the Central Library cafe area in downtown Buffalo. We met on: August 31, October 12, November 30, January 11, February 22 and May 22. Meetings took place from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m. Our group included representatives from the 21st Century Park on the Outer Harbor.

We continued to review the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) activities concerning the Outer Harbor, and JoAnn Mecca continued to attend the ECHDC board meetings. The agenda of each ECHDC meeting is now available for the public to review. We began meeting with our state legislators to urge that they take an active interest in the proceedings at the Outer Harbor, since the ECHDC is a subsidiary of New York's Empire State Development.

Future meetings will be scheduled in concert with a coalition of civic groups, in support of a resolution before the Buffalo Common Council that includes the League.

We attended hearings concerning Buffalo's Unified Development Code (aka the Green Code) in November in support of our previous comments urging that the City of Buffalo designate the Outer Harbor lands as reserved for public use and not private development. The changes that we supported were incorporated into the final document.

We continued to monitor 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 state environmental laws and by City of Buffalo zoning codes. The building on the property has been demolished. We are monitoring the lawsuit by several individuals (including Lynda Stephens), which insists that proper procedures were not followed by the city to allow this project to go forward.

We planned the March 23 program for the LWVBN Lunch & Issues. Speakers Margaret Wooster and Nicole Matteson presented the latest developments about the Outer Harbor to an audience of more than 50 attendees. Gladys Gifford was emcee and Dorothy Tao managed the video equipment. We maintain an email contact list of 43 people.

Gladys Gifford, Chair

Committee: Joyce Bol, James Carr (21st Century Park), Judy Clarke, Alan Dozoretz, Nancy DeTine, Ellen Gibson, Janet Goodsell, Joanne Kahn (21st Century Park), Beth Kauffman, Nicole Matteson, Janet Massaro, JoAnn Mecca, Nora Mikes, Lynda Stephens, Joyce Zobel

Election Services Committee

The Election Services Committee has two functions: we conduct nominations and elections at various sites managed by the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority and, every two years, we conduct the city-wide BMHA tenant commissioner elections. The site elections are mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Each site can have its own Resident Council, which can work for the betterment of its residents. HUD also mandates that the residents who live in BMHA facilities elect two of the seven BMHA commissioners. Our responsibility is to be the neutral third party that ensures that all of these elections are conducted in a fair and timely manner.

From May 2016 through May 2017, this committee conducted elections at these sites: Marine Drive [twice], Holling Homes, Schwab, Frederick Douglas, A.D. Price, Kenfield-Langfield, Msgr. Geary, Stuyvesant, Sedita, Jasper Parrish, Villa Carolina, and Lower West Side Homes.

Last spring, the committee conducted Meet the Candidates events, worked with the Erie County Board of Elections, counted the ballots, and conducted a requested vote recount to ensure the tenant commissioner election was correctly completed.

Currently, our contract with BMHA has expired. While we are continuing our mission at the

request of BMHA, we feel it is very important to settle a new contract with BMHA.

This committee is functioning only because of the dedication, caring, and willingness of the group to work together to accomplish our mission.

Alan Dozoretz, Chair

Committee: Nora Mikes, Judy Capodicasa, Mike Egan, Ramona Gallagher, Scott Gehl, Janet Massaro, JoAnn Mecca, Judy Metzger, Sally Metzger, Terri Parks, Lee Tetkowsky, Kathleen Macaluso, Marlene Katzel, Kathleen McCarthy, Janet Goodsell, Marianne Poprosky. Additional thanks go to moderators Judy Weidemann and Marian Deutschman.

Communications

During 2016-17, the communications function continued to review and edit League materials to standardize style and align with the updated LWVBN brand. New magnetic name badges have been produced for distribution at the annual meeting; going forward, badges for new members will be ordered once a year. In cooperation with the president, we updated and secured board approval for the League's communications policy.

Beginning in 2017-18, the public relations function will be combined with communications. We will also develop a new design for the Voter.

Nancy DeTine, Chair

Public Relations

To publicize activities, promote the League's image, and increase visibility of League services and projects, I have submitted press releases for all LWVBN meetings and presentations. I've also posted these events on the LWVBN Facebook page. This year, because of personal time constraints, I regrettably reduced the number of press releases I submitted, limiting them mainly to the *Buffalo News*, *Artvoice*, and the *Gusto* and *Artvoice* calendars. I have also sent entries to *The Public*. These publications regularly included articles in their publications, whereas most others, such as *Business First* and the Bee Group publications, did not.

We publicized all monthly programs and luncheons that are detailed in the Issues and Action Committee report as well as two candidates meetings: October 26 in Hamburg, and October 28, 2016, in Amherst. We also publicized the annual holiday party, annual meeting in June, and the July picnic.

My other projects have included passing an Excel copy of our press list and press release template to AAUW, our partner organization, so they could establish their own PR committee. In addition to PR duties, I have also pitched in with Barb Jezioro to set up and manage setting up the projector for League PowerPoint presentations.

As I step down from the committee this year after six years, I feel grateful to have had the opportunity to learn the PR ropes and have been honored to help spread the League's messages. Going forward, I hope someone will step forward who is skilled in using new information technologies, currently Facebook, and who can manipulate and insert suitable images and manage our Facebook page expertly. Facebook is a highly useful tool that the League could use to significant advantage as we go forward. Although I took beginner courses at the public library and often referred to *Facebook for Dummies*, my lack of expertise was very frustrating and insufficient to spread the messages I intended. But thanks so much for the opportunity -- I'll miss it.

Dorothy Tao, Chair

Local Government Committee

During the past year we made a concerted effort to review online materials on the Erie County Charter Revision Commission with a special interest in the redistricting proposal, ethics reform, diversity in the employee pool and budget revisions. We met with Diana Cihak who was a commission member. She described the highly partisan three-month process. She also provided valuable insights on the legislators' workload and the minimal amount of power they have. A statement was developed and then delivered by a committee member at one of the hearings. NOTE: Our interest in ethics reform was addressed in a May program arranged by Lynda Stephens and her committee.

We coordinated the successful program on September 16 at the 20th Century Club with two co-sponsors, the Women's Bar Association and the National Association of Women Business Owners. The meeting had fine evaluations on the location, the food, the speaker, retired justice Rose Sconiers, and the audience involvement.

We continued to monitor the activities of the Erie County Citizens' Budget Review Commission. We note that no final report for 2016 and no agendas or minutes of meetings have been posted online. The commission lacks diversity and representation from women. We communicated with the new director of the Erie County Commission on the Status of Women to address these issues. We encouraged women to apply with an announcement at our well-attended September meeting, and will continue to track this issue.

We continue to examine and attend hearings on the Erie County budget and budget process to educate ourselves, our members, and the general public with the ultimate goal of taking action when appropriate.

After substantial discussion and investigation of a new focus for the committee, we decided to address gentrification leading us to questions about developers, public investment in displacement, and the pros and cons of gentrification. We are searching for models of success leading to a League program, rather than a study, to include a keynote speaker and a panel of experts representing some of the major local players.

Marian Deutschman, Chair

Committee: Dot Brown, Lynne Vallone, Lynda Stephens, Arlene Miles, Nancy DeTine, Kathleen McCarthy, Nora Mikes

Issues and Action Committee

Representatives from the program committees form the Issues and Action Committee. Committee chairs distribute summaries of their committee meetings to Issues Committee members and 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 LWVNYS, for LWVUS and for convention.

In its role as a clearinghouse for programs, this committee was involved in the League hosting or co-sponsoring a wide array of meetings. The September 16 lunch kickoff program at the 20th Century Club included two co-sponsors, the Women's Bar Association and the National Association of Women Business Owners, and featured retired justice Rose Sconiers and a turnout of 70. Kathie Macaluso was appointed board events chair and joined our committee. Ann Lazore, who now represents the League on the West Valley Citizen Task Force, is expected to keep us apprised of their activities. We prepared questions for the *Voters Guide* for candidates for Congress, New York State Senate and Assembly and the district attorney. We co-sponsored a September 20 meeting at Canisius College on *Dual Constitutionalism in America*. With the Women's Bar Association, Erie County Bar Association and UB Law School, we co-sponsored the October 6 meeting at the United Way titled *Effects of Big Money and Big Media on Political Campaigns*. Lee Coppola moderated the panel which included Jim Heaney of *Investigative Post*, James Gardner of the UB Law School, and Carole McNall of St. Bonaventure School of Journalism. At the November 17 meeting at the Harlem Road Community Center, speaker Bob McCarthy from *The Buffalo News* provided his *Reflections on Politics 2016*. The December holiday party featured Mary Travers Murphy from the Family Justice Center speaking on domestic violence. Members made generous contributions to her organization. Peter Galie spoke on the pros and cons of the constitutional convention, the 2017 ballot issue, at a lunch meeting at the Scotch 'n Sirloin Restaurant on January 13.

The Issues and Action Committee recommended that the board approve joining the coalition of community groups for the *Our Outer Harbor Campaign* as long as the mission remains the same and we have members working actively with

the coalition. We want to be sure that development is vetted through a transparent and public process. Our recommended legislative priorities — *1-Campaign Finance, 2-Ethics, 3-Renewable Energy Plans* — were sent to LWVNYS.

The February lunch meeting featured Larry Brooks speaking about his book, *Buffalo Niagara: Diagnosis & Prescription for Change*. The March lunch meeting addressed Outer Harbor issues with Margaret Wooster and Nicole Matteson. The April meeting, *Survivors of Torture*, collaborated with Jewish Family Services with a focus on trauma experienced by refugees. *Ethics in Government* was the subject of the May 17 meeting with retired justice Penny Wolfgang and Kevin Connor, co-founder and director of the Public Accountability Initiative.

Plans for the remaining months of 2017 include the July picnic, co-sponsorship of a presentation on open government by Robert Freeman in September, and celebrating the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage in New York State at a gala luncheon at the 20th Century Club on November 6. There are a number of topics being considered for October and November. The holiday party will be in December.

Marian Deutschman, Chair

Committee: Gladys Gifford, Janet Massaro, Lynda Stephens, JoAnn Mecca, Judy Metzger, Terri Parks, Kathie Macaluso,

Education Committee

In October 2016 the Education Committee was tasked by an off board adviser of the LWVNYS to explore Buffalo's Academy of Science Charter School for any indication the school was a "Gulen" school, possibly associated with the Gulen movement, a religious and social movement led by Turkish preacher Fethullah Gülen. The committee visited the school. The principal, Joseph Polat, met with us, recounted the history and goals of the school and gave us a thorough and informative tour of the school, which serves grades 5-12 and focuses on science and technology. Committee members were generally very impressed with the Academy of Science

Charter and its principal. Based on our tour and talk with the principal, we did not think they were influenced by Gulen or Turkey. After our visit we were asked to provide a speaker to their student leadership group about the League; Marian Deutschman covered this.

Following the November election and the appointment of Betsy DeVos, we wrote postcards as individuals to Senators Schumer and Gillibrand saying we opposed DeVos, whom we deem inexperienced and uninformed about education issues, especially concerning public schools.

Returning to our focus on improving the Buffalo Schools, as explored at the April 2016 general meeting, we invited Barbara Nevergold, president of the Buffalo Board of Education, to speak to us on April 27, 2017. Nevergold reported that instead of the one community school, there are now five such schools, with smaller classes, increased outreach to new mothers and other parents in the communities, increased teacher skill and cultural training, plus counseling and medical assistance provided through facilities in the schools. She reported the School Board is impressed with what Superintendent Kriner Cash has been able to accomplish, including finally negotiating a teachers contract. Nevergold urged advocating for increased funding to support the Buffalo Bargain program, which will be threatened by President Trump's budget cuts. She opposes the voucher program and charter expansion.

As a result of Nevergold's positive report, the committee is planning a spring visit to one of the five community schools in preparation for a general meeting in fall 2017 to inform LWVBN and the public about the progress of the Buffalo Bargain. We will present a panel discussion tentatively including a principal, a teacher and a parent.

The committee has reviewed the unfinished settlement of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity and continues to monitor compliance of the New York Charter Schools Act, taking action when necessary. On a national level we keep informed of progress in Congress of the status of the threatened Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA).

Lee Tetkowski and Dorothy Tao

Committee: *Marian Deutschman, JoAnn Mecca, Marlene Katzel, Maxine Insera, Joan Photiadis, Nora Mikes*

LWVBN Web Page

The total number of visits to the LWVBN website, **lwvbn.org**, from May 2016 through April 2017 was 19,612, 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 here.

Visits During Year from May through Following April

	Total Visits	Non-Election Months Average prior to Sep	Election Months Average (Sep,Oct,Nov)
May 12 - Apr 13	10855	701	1515
May 13 - Apr 14	10939	794	1265
May 14 - Apr 15	12206	827	1586
May 15 - Apr 16	12265	871	1207
May 16 - Apr 17	19612	903	2175

Kristin Allen, Webmaster

Money In Politics Committee (MIP)

The MIP Committee began the new League year buoyed with the knowledge that we had an updated national position on campaign finance reform, guidelines on the Article V United States Constitutional Amendment process, and had reached concurrence on a redistricting position. We welcomed new members to the committee in late summer and responded to priorities identified by LWVUS by submitting an article to *The Buffalo News* urging reform of the Federal Election Commission. In January we invited LWVBN members to participate in an MIP Book Club by reading and discussing Jane Mayer's remarkable investigative reporting of the Koch Brothers and other prominent figures from the radical right in her book *Dark Money*. We reviewed money in politics from the state League perspective. In May 2017 we agreed to incorporate redistricting into our activities, realizing that the 2020 census will soon again be front and center in political debates. Reforming campaign finances is the MIP

Committee's primary concern, but it cannot be separated from such issues as redistricting or election reform, ethics, or corruption in government.

Janet Massaro, Chair

Committee: *Barbara Brooks, Janet Goodsell, Shirley Joy, Elizabeth Kauffman, Laura McDade, JoAnn Mecca, Christine Reichmuth, Alberta Roman, Liz Zausmer*

Finance Committee

Current: On May 11, 2017, the market value of the LWVBN investments was reported as \$100,954.57. This growth has provided 2016-2017 dividends of:

- \$ 215.94 Bond Fund
- \$ 1,091.30 Growth and Income Fund
- \$ 1,304.31 Mid-Cap Value Fund
- \$ 1,924.21 Social Choice Fund

LWVBN had a total dividend income of \$4,535.76 for the year.

Background: LWVBN's \$40,000 investment in TIAA funds, started in September 2013, grew to \$46,986.48 by July 30, 2014, at which time Lori Robinson, treasurer, 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 \$74,364.44.

Pat Costanzo, Chair

Committee: *Judith Clarke, Shirley Joy, Terri Parks, Lori Robinson*

Voter Service

The League members who worked at the League voter registration events last summer and early fall reported an increase in traffic. There was an increase in new registrants plus many questions from people passing by.

Voter registration events were held at the following locations since last year's annual meeting: Buffalo Historical Society Food Truck Rodeos (June, July and August), Elmwood Art Festival, Miss Buffalo Cruise - WNY Muslims Outing, Burchfield Nature Preserve in West Seneca, New Era Field (a health fair, not a football game), Empower Yourself Barbecue in Martin Luther King Jr. Park, Response to Love Center (near the Broadway Market) Health Fair, Niagara County Community College and a few more neighborhood festivals. A few members took voter registration forms to their churches to make them available to church members who might need to register or update their status.

The West Seneca Friends of the Library group requested a short program about the coming election including some questions on the pros and cons of the 2017 ballot proposition about the New York State constitutional convention. The presentation was well received and at the end of the program two of the attendees registered to vote. I did a trial run of the program for my women's club; they also had many questions and we had a great discussion.

We participated in Vote411 online last fall and the *Voters Guide* was compiled from responses and distributed in October. *They Represent You* was distributed in early March.

Candidate forums were held in Hamburg and Amherst in October. East Aurora had a candidates night for the village election in March.

School board candidates nights were held in the Williamsville, Amherst, Hamburg, East Aurora, and Lockport school districts in May 2017.

We are currently scheduling summer voter registration events and presentations for summer and fall. Suggestions for new locations and events are welcome; please send email to margbrunson@yahoo.com.

Thank you to all those who volunteered at these Voter Service programs and events!

Margaret Brunson, Chair

Students Inside Albany

Students Inside Albany (SIA) is the New York State League's three-day opportunity for 60 high school students from across the state to spend time in Albany, learning about state government. This year, LWVBN has provided the opportunity for two students from Western New York to travel to attend SIA May 21-24.

While in Albany, they learn about New York State government and the process by which citizens can participate. In addition to shadowing their elected representatives and attending legislative sessions, they enjoy social activities including pizza parties and a cruise on the Hudson River.

The challenge of finding appropriate students to attend SIA is not that there is a shortage of bright, motivated, and informed young people in local high schools. The difficult job is to choose among so many applications from motivated potential leaders who may take up the reins of government someday.

The year, LWVBN was proud to be represented by two students: Genavieve Koyn of Grand Island High School, who is on her way to Cornell in the fall to study industrial relations, and Madeline Gee of Buffalo City Honors, who anticipates a career in law and social justice. We hope that what Gena and Madeline learned during their adventure to Albany will inspire them to be informed citizens and successful professionals.

Janet Goodsell, Chair

Membership

As of May 16, 2017, we have 211 members; 22 new members since July 2016, with an upsurge in early November 2016.

I do not have a committee as such but there are several people who have been helpful with the membership/hospitality before League events. Especially noteworthy are Sally Metzger and Marion Fay who faithfully register guests at the League luncheons at the Scotch 'n Siroin. I also appreciate the help of Janet Massaro, Lois Uhteg, Judy Metzger and JoAnn Mecca; at various times they called members who did not

renew, and contacted new members to see if they have been able to attend any functions since they joined the League. We have received very positive response to those inquiries. I also appreciate that Janet Massaro has conducted orientation sessions for many of our new members this year.

I am very happy to turn the chair over to Janet Massaro who will do a wonderful job as she is very enthusiastic, outgoing and knowledgeable.

Sue Stievater, Chair

Special Volunteer Opportunities

- A. **LWVBN Webmaster:** Kris Allen has decided it's time to retire.
- B. **Facebook Manager:** We would like to have a more prominent presence on Facebook.
- C. **League Photographer (s)**
- D. **Sort and Organize the League's History:** This project has been begun by the Great Decisions Discussion Group and will involve selecting records that need to be archived.
- E. **Celebration Committees:**
 - 1. November 2017 Centennial for Women's Suffrage in New York State
 - 2. 2019 Centennial for the League of Women Voters of New York State
 - 3. 2020 Centennial for the League of Women Voters of the United States
 - 4. 2020 Centennial for the Nineteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution that granted Women in the United States the right to vote.

Please let us know if you're interested in learning more about any of these opportunities by calling the League at 986-4898 or sending an email to lwvbn@lwvbn.org.