President’s Report

This has been an unusual year in all our lives. As we recognize 100 years of women’s suffrage in the United States and the League of Women Voters, the need for the League’s work is as great as it has ever been. Voter suppression and unfounded reports of voter fraud are only two of the issues that threaten the national election in 2020. With the current uncertainty about the safety of going to the polls in November and efforts to deny absentee voting, we have crucial challenges to our democracy.

We can expect to conduct more business by videoconference this coming year. We hope that we will be able to host program events and voter turnout activities live, but are planning to do many things by mail and electronically.

The past three months have been difficult. Programs we planned were cancelled due to the coronavirus and we have been practicing social distancing and keeping close to home. The office has been closed, but we have continued to serve League members remotely with the able assistance of Mary Ann Turkla and Barbara Gunderson, two outstanding office managers.

In 2019, we had 128 people, mostly League members, who volunteered their time and talents to carry out the work of this League. Many of them volunteered for several different projects. We recognize volunteers in the Voter and know that the work described in these reports could not be accomplished without them.

During this year, we had several resignations from the League board for a variety of reasons. Margaret Brunson, Pat Costanzo, Joan Simmons and Tina Prygon left the board. When Barbara Gunderson was hired as office manager, she needed to continue her Voter Service chair duties as an off-board specialist.

Please contact the committee chair if you have any questions about a committee’s report.

Board: Marian Deutschman, Nancy DeTine, Susan Dombrowski, Ramona Gallagher, Shirley Joy, Nora Mikes, Lori Robinson, Liz Zausmer, and Terri Parks, president

Money In Politics (MIP)

On October 29, 2019, the MIP Committee testified before the New York State Campaign Finance Commission to urge their support for strong campaign finance reforms, including a small donor matching system for New York State. Ours was the last of four hearings in the state and was held at the Burchfield Penney Art Center in Buffalo. A summary of our statement was printed in the December 2019 Voter and the full statement is available on the LWVBN website.

On March 9, 2020, the MIP Committee conducted the National League’s proposed Concurrence on Electoral Systems reform. The concurrence meeting was held at the League office prior to the board meeting. LWVBN members agreed to support the concurrence and the results were sent to LWVUS. The final decision will be determined at the National Convention in June.

Unfortunately, the committee has been unable to meet in person after the Covid-19 pandemic closed most offices in March. We continue to keep ourselves informed of happenings on both state and national levels and look forward to a quick return to regular activities. I thank the MIP Committee and all League members for their steadfast commitment to achieving the reforms in campaign finance, redistricting and election law we have long sought.

Committee: Margie Boyce, Liz Clark, Janet Goodsell, Jennifer Hoffman, Shirley Joy, Beth Kauffman, Janet Lenichek, Helen Mayo, Laura McDade, JoAnn Mecca, Margaret Meyer, Christine Reichmuth, Alberta Roman, and Janet Massaro, Chair

Naturalization Ceremonies

Many thanks go to Patricia Wille who chaired the Naturalization Committee so effectively. I assumed this role in January, grateful for her guidance and support. In the 40 weeks from June to early March our dedicated volunteers were called on to cover 30 naturalization ceremonies at various sites. We welcomed 1451 new citizens and registered 1416 new voters. All ceremonies
scheduled after March 5 were cancelled due to Covid-19.

Our continuing partnership with the Erie County Board of Elections has proved very effective in registering new citizens. We especially appreciate the assistance of Robert Hellwitz of the Board of Elections, who has been instrumental in helping to achieve 98% return of new citizen voter registration forms.

Deborah Shiffner, Volunteer Coordinator for Naturalization Ceremonies

Bylaws Review

The report of the Nominating Committee in the spring of 2019 advised that a succession plan for the office of president was needed. At its October 2019 meeting the LWVBN board charged the Bylaws Committee with:

- Developing at least two possible plans for presidential succession;
- Changing the Nominating Committee from seven (7) members to five (5) members, Article VI Committees, Sec 4;
-Renaming the Issues and Action Committee the Program, Issues and Events Committee, Article VI Committees, Sec 5;
- Deleting Article VII Units in its entirety.

Lyle Toohey, committee chair, thoroughly researched presidential succession plans for not-for-profit organizations and submitted numerous options to the board for comment.

The Bylaws Committee reviewed the bylaws as amended in June 2019 by using comments from the current board, research on presidential succession by Lyle Toohey and written comments from Larry Brooks. The changes put forth are based on assessment of current LWVBN structure and resources and a commitment to bring the bylaws into conformity with those of other not-for-profits. In addition, the bylaws required extensive edits for clarification and consistency.

Committee: Larry Brooks, Susan Dombrowski, Ramona Gallagher, Terri Parks, and Lyle Toohey, Chair

Western New York Women's Suffrage Centennial Celebration

The Centennial Celebration Committee was formed in 2017 to celebrate the centennial of women’s suffrage in New York State (1917) with an event in November 2017 at the Twentieth Century Club. It continued to plan a celebration for the centennial of the LWV New York State (1919) in May 2019 at the Garret Club. The focus of the committee this year is to celebrate the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1920) in which women gained the vote.

The Western New York Women’s Suffrage Centennial Celebration Committee (WNYWSCCC) was formed at the invitation of the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara to join in partnership to celebrate the centennial of the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The committee has met monthly since September 2019 and has since divided into several subcommittees to facilitate planning “Embracing the Past/Empowering the Future.”

The 11 partners include organizations dedicated to education, religious tolerance, good government and human rights. They are:

- AAUW, Buffalo Branch
- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority
- Daemen College
- Erie County Commission on the Status of Women
- League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara
- NYS Women, Inc., Buffalo/Niagara Chapter
- UB Gender Institute
- Women’s Auxiliary of Ahmadiyya Muslim Community
- Women’s Bar Association of the State of New York, WNY Chapter
- WNY Women’s Foundation
- Zonta Club of Buffalo

“Embracing the Past/Empowering the Future” is a celebration of women’s rights, past and present. This half-day event will embrace the past by honoring the battles fought and obstacles overcome by the determination and perseverance
of the suffragists and the men who supported them. It will also empower the future through a series of workshops to illuminate the challenges and inequalities that exist for women today, that will provide opportunity for future discussion and networking. The committee secured the location, set the time and date, developed a program with speakers, topics and facilitators for workshops and was planning publicity and seeking funding.

Then in March the Covid-19 pandemic interrupted our planning and caused the committee to postpone the celebration from August 2020 to October 2, 2021, at Wick Center, Daemen College. As I write this, the committee is continuing to plan the event and will hold virtual meetings until such time as it is safe to meet face to face.

Lyle Toohey, Chair, WNYWSCCC

Election Services

The Election Services Committee attempted to conduct numerous elections at Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority (BMHA) sites during 2019 and 2020. The vast majority of these elections were completed successfully. In a few cases, when the League members arrived at the site, there were too few residents present to conduct an election. In these situations, we contacted the BMHA housing aide to make her aware of what had occurred and to offer any assistance so that an election can proceed.

These were the sites that your Election Services Committee members visited in 2019: Stuyvesant, Msgr. Geary, Sedita, Perry, Schaffer Village, Holling Homes, Jasper Parrish, LaSalle Homes, Kelly Gardens, Kenfield-Langfield, A.D. Price, and Lakeview.

The biannual BMHA Resident Commissioner Election has been postponed to September 8 and will take place primarily by mail-in ballot. Nora Mikes chairs that effort with the able assistance of Mary Ann Turkla.

The library table downstairs would be piled high with notices, mailing labels, envelopes, and stamps. Yet each piece of mail was placed in the correct envelope with the correct mailing label and sent to the correct address. All I had to do was provide coffee and treats.

My thanks to the 20 dedicated League members who participated in mailings and elections. I am very thankful to all of those who helped this committee perform its duties and assist our League at the same time.

I want to give a special shout out to Janet Goodsell for running her first nominations meeting. Although having trepidations before the meeting, Janet performed admirably with a fine debut. Nice going, Janet.

During my family emergency, Nora Mikes took leadership of the committee and through her competence, organization, and caring, this committee flourished. THANK YOU, NORA!

Alan Dozoretz, Chair

Waterfront

In 2019-2020, the Waterfront Committee met only two times. Regular monthly meetings were not possible since circumstances intervened in the fall and then the coronavirus arose in the spring. We met at the Central Library café area in downtown Buffalo on October 16 and January 15.

Despite few in-person meetings, the committee participated in actions concerning the Outer Harbor. We attended the press conference at the Bell Slip of the Outer Harbor in September to support the release of Buffalo’s Outer Harbor: The Right Place for a World-Class Park, by Sam Magavern of the Partnership for the Public Good. A letter to the editor by Gladys Gifford in support of this proposal was published December 15.

LWVBN is an active member of the Our Outer Harbor Coalition.

Together with other representatives of Our Outer Harbor we voiced opposition to the Queen City Landing project at the City Council hearing on January 14: Lynda Stephens and Gladys Gifford
testified. JoAnn Mecca continued to monitor the board meetings of the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC).

Winter storms did severe damage to parts of the Outer Harbor, forcing Times Beach to close to the public.

We were pleased by the March decision by the developer to cancel the Queen City Landing (QCL) project. The city was able to resist his demands for financial help, and we applaud their solidarity in support of the public. Gladys Gifford reported in May that the QCL sign on the property has been removed.

At our January meeting we learned about the Skyway removal proposal offered by the NYSDOT. We recognized that the rationale for the project promoted access to the Outer Harbor, so we attended a scoping meeting January 28, and submitted official League comments to the NYSDOT, as did our partners in the Our Outer Harbor Coalition. We stated that public access to the Outer Harbor should include a strong investment in public transportation, with or without the Skyway.

We maintain an email contact list of 36 people.

Committee: James Carr, Nancy DeTine, Ellen Gibson, Joanne Kahn, Beth Kauffman, Janet Massaro, JoAnn Mecca, Lynda Stephens, Joyce Zobel, and Gladys Gifford, Chair.

Local Government

Given the changes in election law in New York State in 2019, the Local Government Committee explored having a keynote speaker on voting rights from the Brennan Center via Skype. However, we found that we had an expert on voting law right here at the University at Buffalo. James Gardner, ranked as one of the 10 most cited faculty specialists in election law, was our keynote speaker on September 26 at an evening meeting at the Theodore Roosevelt site. The program was titled “Countdown to the Election: What you need to know before you vote.” Panel members addressed recent and future election reforms. The panel included Assemblyman Sean Ryan, Board of Elections Commissioner Jeremy Zellner, and Barbara Gunderson, LWVBN Voter Service Chair.

Committee members handled the details for the evening resulting in an impressive turnout and Q&A, and excellent evaluations.

Our interest then shifted to the U.S. Census 2020 since failure to comply affects New York State’s standing in Washington and determines how millions of dollars will be spent. We needed to know what responsible groups were doing to assure a fair and comprehensive census. We learned of the Complete Count Committee in Erie County, attended their meeting at the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo and met Amy Brombos, Supervisory Partnership Specialist with the U.S. Census Bureau. She agreed to be our speaker at our March 12 lunch program at the Twentiety Century Club. The program title was “Census 2020: High Stakes for our State and Region.” We learned how trusted voices like ours can help dispel misinformation about this vitally important issue. She was an excellent speaker, well-prepared to answer all our questions. This was our last public meeting and committee meeting just before the pandemic lockdown.

Committee: Dot Brown, Nancy DeTine, Kathleen McCarthy, Nora Mikes, Lynda Stephens, Lisa Parshall, Lynne Vallone and Marian Deutschman, Chair.

Program, Issues and Events

Representatives from the program committees form the Program, Issues and Events Committee (formerly the Issues and Action Committee). We welcome other members to help us plan programs. Committee chairs distribute summaries of their committee meetings to this committee 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 or Executive Committee 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, LWVUS and conventions. In its role as a
clearinghouse for programs, this committee was involved in the League hosting or co-sponsoring a wide array of meetings.

Some members asked to have our summer picnic in July at Canterbury Woods be primarily a social event. Our program in July 2019 featured representatives of the Lancaster Opera House for entertainment and appreciation of the wide selection of theater productions in our area.

Our September kickoff featured a local government program on voting rights (see Local Government Annual Report). We worked on finalizing questions, submitted by committees, for local candidates for the November 2019 election.

Our October 18 lunch meeting at Chef’s Restaurant featured Jerry Zremski, Buffalo News Washington Bureau Chief, who spoke on “The Inside Scoop on Covering Washington.”

Our November 16 evening celebration of the centennial of the League of Women Voters of New York State at the Buffalo History Museum, a collaboration with LWVNYS, had a fine turnout and an array of speakers including Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul and her husband, former U.S. Attorney William Hochul. Other community leaders were Dr. Katherine Conway-Turner, President of SUNY Buffalo State, Alice Jacobs, representing the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, and Ariel Palitz, of Nightlife for New York City.

Our holiday lunch party took place at My Tomato Pie and featured speakers from the charitable organization Stitch Buffalo. Its focus is on building business and language skills for refugee women.

The January 30 lunch event at Chef’s Restaurant on the state budget was coordinated by Lynda Stephens. It featured Dr. Fred Floss, Ron Deutsch, and E.J. McMahon addressing “New York State’s Whopping $6.1 Billion Budget Deficit.”

The Education Committee coordinated a tour of the Northland Workforce Training Center on February 13 that included key speakers who provided background on the formation and rehab of the facility. The March meeting on the U.S. Census is described in the Local Government report. The committee has had conference call meetings since the pandemic lockdown and has had to cancel and reschedule all other meetings for the spring.

**Committee:** Gladys Gifford, Janet Massaro, JoAnn Mecca, Nora Mikes, Terri Parks, Lynda Stephens and Marian Deutschman, Chair

**Education**

Our focus on ways to improve basic skills of Buffalo city students and to reduce absenteeism led to our learning about mentoring programs and the Northland Workforce Training Center.

In November we planned a committee visit to the Northland facility. This is part of Governor Cuomo’s Buffalo Billion investment. We met with the Director of Outreach and Recruitment Services, and were impressed with the presentation and tour of the facilities.

Northland prepares students for careers in advanced manufacturing and energy. When needed it helps applicants improve their basic high school skills. Northland has partners at Alfred State College and SUNY Erie. It will fill the need for properly trained folks to fill current available jobs in the Buffalo area.

This experience led to an all-member tour there in February which was well attended. We saw many work stations in use, and had an impromptu short talk with a current satisfied student. Much has been added since our first visit. This was followed by supper at their newly opened facilities.

Our plan before the pandemic was to revisit the local charter school situation. Our members have been sent some background information. A review of grants to New York State through the U.S. Department of Education’s Charter Schools Program is needed.

**Committee:** Marian Deutschman, Maxine Insera, Marlene Katzel, JoAnn Mecca, and Nora Mikes, Dorothy Tao and Lee Tetkowski, Co-Chairs
Students Inside Albany

When disappointment is inflicted on young people, the sadness affects their families, friends, and teachers as well. Those of us who arrange for them to attend Students Inside Albany (SIA) share disappointment at the cancellation of this year’s exciting learning experience.

All of the outstanding students who applied for our League’s two representatives were clearly motivated and successful members of their communities and schools. We considered them all to be finalists for this year and have enrolled them as student members of LWVBN. The difficult recommendation was made by the LWVBN committee and approved by the board. They selected Colin O’Neill and Sierra Luke for their interest in government and demonstrated achievements. They were both thrilled with this recognition, and accepted the disappointment at the cancellation of the SIA conference with grace and understanding beyond their years.

Colin, of Lake Shore Senior High School, had submitted an essay detailing school and community involvement that demonstrates multiple interests and a desire to improve society. He has held many leadership positions in his school and community. In the fall, he will attend Canisius College to work toward becoming an environmental attorney.

Sierra, who has been on the High Honor Roll for four years, is a senior at Lockport High School. She plans to pursue an MBA and to run an African culture-based business. She has an interest in government and legislation as it can bring about change in the prison system. She has also held several leadership positions in her school.

Both young people were among the most impressive ever selected by the LWVBN to go to Albany.

We share the disappointment and regret as expressed by Laura Bierman and the others at the state League who were looking forward to entertaining and instructing our state’s outstanding young people.

Committee: Ramona Gallagher, Barbara Gunderson, Terri Parks and Janet Goodsell, Chair

2019 Voters Guide

The Voters Guide Steering Committee coordinated production and distribution of the Voters Guide from the responses to Vote411.org. The board directed that we include the Buffalo and Niagara Falls City Council Districts in the 2019 Voters Guide. The final product was 16 pages long and included only one question for each office. We delivered about 20,000 Voters Guides to over 350 locations in Erie and Niagara Counties along with the Early Voting brochures created by the League of Women Voters of New York State. Through the arduous efforts by Barbara Gunderson to obtain email addresses, there was a much higher response from candidates. At its wrap-up meeting, the steering committee recommended that the printed Voters Guide effort be ended and we focus our efforts on the online Voters Guide, Vote411.org, which provides voters with more information about each candidate. At its March 2020 meeting, the board made the difficult decision to cease production of the printed Voters Guide.

Committee: Nancy DeTine, Krysta Doerfler, Barbara Gunderson, Barbara Jezioro, Shirley Joy, Laura McDade, Nora Mikes, Tina Prygon, Lori Robinson, Joan Simmons, Mary Ann Turkla, and Terri Parks, Coordinator

Communications & Public Relations

It is with much gratitude that I acknowledge the achievements of this committee in 2020. Thanks to our extremely talented volunteer designer, Krysta Doerfler, we updated and printed a new membership brochure, and produced professionally designed flyers and programs for all League events. Krysta also designed our 2019 Voters Guide. Thanks to our new layout editor, Kathleen McCormick, every edition of the Voter has been executed beautifully, and thanks to Sally Metzger, printed copies are sent by mail. Thanks to webmaster Nora Mikes, our website not only is completely current, it also provides the convenience of online payments for membership dues, events and donations.
Thanks to Michelle Perkins, our Facebook page regularly provides interesting, timely and relevant posts that continue to attract new followers, comments and “likes.” We also use posts to encourage member and non-member participation in action items initiated by the state and national Leagues. Before the pandemic forced us to postpone or cancel events, we had been posting them with links to our website and purchasing Facebook ads to promote them to a broader audience. Finally, our continually updated media list now comprises more than 60 contacts, allowing press releases about League events to be distributed throughout the community.

Nancy DeTine, Chair

Voter Services & Get Out the Vote

One of our most, if not the most, important rights is the right to vote. To that end, we have been working to stimulate voter interest, educate voters, register voters, and collaborate with other organizations to encourage people to exercise this precious right during elections. In addition to the 1,416 voters registered at naturalization ceremonies, 447 new voters were registered/pre-registered at four high schools, nine local colleges, and eight community festivals. We registered voters who live in 63 different zip codes.

Youth Projects

October 2019

- Letters were sent to 90 high schools offering voter education.
- Barbara Gunderson, Susan Dombrowski, and Muna Munassar (ACCESS WNY) gave voter issues presentations, Vote411.org information and voter registration at government classes at Maryvale High School, St. Mary’s School for the Deaf, and Lake Shore High School.

February & March 2020

- Barbara Gunderson, Susan Dombrowski and David Boyd (Buffalo NAACP) gave two presentations to Olmsted High School government classes to include issues-based voting and Vote411.org.
- Letter were sent to staff at local colleges requesting that they send a GOTV letter with links to Vote411.org and the Boare of Elections to get voting information.

December 2019

- Barbara Gunderson served as a judge/advisor at Generation Citizen Civics Day in Manhattan.
- Barbara Gunderson, Susan Dombrowski and Liz Zausmer provided voter education workshops at the Buffalo Psychiatric Center.

January 2020

- A meeting of community service organization leaders was held at the League office regarding possibilities for coordination and cooperation between the groups. The organizations represented were NAACP, PUSH Buffalo, Open Buffalo, Access Buffalo, Hispanics Unidos, Hearts and Hands, and Voice Buffalo.
- Barbara Gunderson and Liz Zausmer attended the two-day Voice Buffalo “Boot Camp” and networked with several organizations regarding GOTV ideas and opportunities to work together. We also recruited a new League member.

Candidate Forums/Community Outreach

September-November 2019

- A candidate forum for the Niagara Common Council candidates was moderated by Ramona Gallagher.
- A candidate forum in North Tonawanda was organized by Bj Vandewater.
- PUSH Buffalo provided Vote411.org cards for their street team to distribute as they canvassed Fillmore and Niagara District neighborhoods.
- Liz Zausmer, Tina Prygon and Barbara Gunderson met at Access Buffalo with Muna Munassar and Talib Abdullah to devise ways we could work together on voter education, registration and GOTV.
- Liz Zausmer attended a workshop and voter registration on Jefferson Avenue with Open Buffalo.
- Liz Zausmer registered voters with Muna Munassar in Lackawanna.

March 2020

- Ramona Gallagher presented GOTV strategies and distributed registration packets at a Hispanic Women’s League board meeting.
- Barbara Gunderson attended an AMVETS event with panel discussion of her “game” regarding voting and black women in in America and provided registration kits.
- Patti Meyer-Lee and Barbara Gunderson spoke about GOTV and handed out registration kits to
the St. Joseph University Parish Social Justice Committee.

- Liz Zausmer distributed voter registration materials to VITA sites.

April & May 2020

- Barbara Gunderson participated in a virtual meeting with NOAH regarding GOTV.
- PUSH Buffalo is distributing information regarding Vote411.org.
- We moderated the Williamsville School Board candidate forum conducted via ZOOM on May 28.

Scheduled/Postponed Events

- Voter education event with the Amadiyyah Muslim Women’s Organization
- Work to Win multi-organizational GOTV event
- Voter Education with GED students at Urban League
- We have received a $600 grant from the League of Women Voters of New York State to send postcards to 3,000 low propensity voters in work in the Lovejoy District to GOTV. We will also work with their community organizations to encourage increased voting in the district.

Committee: Mike Egan, Ramona Gallagher, Janet Goodsell, Linda Koenigsberg, Liz McGough, Patti Meyer-Lee, Terri Parks, Bj Vandewater, Tina Prygon, Elisabeth Zausmer, and Barbara Gunderson, Voter Services Chair

GOTV Steering Committee: Susan Dombrowski, Linda Koenigsberg, Terri Parks, Tina Prygon, Barbara Gunderson, and Elisabeth Zausmer, Chair

LWVBN Web Page

The total number of visits to the LWVBN web site, lwvbn.org, from May 2019 through April 2020 was 25,583, a decrease from 2019. Peak months for visits are usually September, October, and November, reflecting interest in election information – but being an odd year, the 2019 election cycle did not provide a "peak." Visits for all of the months were pretty steady, averaging about 2,100 per month and ranging from a low of 1,572 (August 2019) to a high of 2,791 (March 2020). Web traffic statistics for the past five years are given here.

Finance/Investment

This League began investing in TIAA with $40,000 in 2013. An additional $16,364 was invested in July 2014, and $20,000 in September 2014. In August 2019, we reinvested the $9,000 capital gains and dividend distributions we received in December 2018. In May 2020 we sold the Mid-Cap Value Fund and made our portfolio more conservative by putting $7,000 in the Green Bond Fund, $6,043.49 in a Money Market Fund, and transferring $7,000 to our checking account to pay outstanding liabilities. Our investments total $96,998.79 as of May 29,2020.

Committee: Pat Costanzo, Terri Parks, Lori Robinson, Deborah Shiffner, and Shirley Joy, Chair

Nora Mikes, Webmaster

We welcome new participants in all of the efforts of the League at any time. Contact the committee chair and you will be warmly received.