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The **VOTER** is published 10 times per year. Items for the March issue are due Friday, February 8.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

More to learn, more to discuss...

With the League of Women Voters of Buffalo/Niagara-Citizen Action program last September, we expanded our knowledge about the seriously dysfunctional system of financing elections. We invite you to continue the conversation with us.

**Harlem Road Community Center
Room 2**

**Thursday, February 14, 2013
4:30 - 6:30 p.m.**

Come and learn more:

- ✓ How does money rule elections?
- ✓ What problems does current campaign financing cause?
- ✓ How can we work to achieve meaningful campaign finance reform?

Refreshments will be served.

League of Women Voters Mission:

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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President's Message

The calendar indicates another new beginning for us all. After a delightful and tasty Holiday Potluck, many League members spent time wrapping gifts at Eastern Hills Mall through December 24. The first few weeks were very slow, with much time to chat as folks passed our gift-wrap station, often without any packages in their arms. However, the last week was very busy! We certainly appreciate all the help from League members, friends and a pair of fantastic teens, but special thanks go to the champion gift wrappers of 2012: Eugene Abrahamson, Judy Huber, Sally Metzger and Mary Ann Turkla. Our profit this year will exceed \$3100. It's always good to connect with each other and to talk with the nice people who choose to support a local charitable organization instead of wrapping their own gifts.

If you looked carefully at page one of this VOTER, you saw a familiar name missing. Our fine office manager, Eugene Abrahamson, was offered a full time job in late November. We are fortunate to have had Eugene's unique abilities with fund development and volunteers. His contacts in the not for profit community have been important. Eugene's last official day was December 31, but he will continue to be an active League member. He will train Mary Ann Turkla who volunteered to become office manager. After her interview with the Transition Team, Ramona Gallagher, Lyle Toohey, Lynne Vallone and me, she was unanimously recommended for the position. Lori Robinson agreed to become League treasurer. She too is a most talented and able choice. Her day job is accountant for the Buffalo History Museum.

Office hours will be 9:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m., Monday – Friday. Of course, it's imperative to call the office before trekking there as Mary Ann may be out running League errands. Vanessa will continue at the office for a few weeks, but she will be leaving for a new job out of state. Flora and Jamie plan to volunteer on Tuesdays and Thursdays. As we transition to a new office team, it's important not to wait until the last minute to get materials from the office. Please help us make this change positive.

Lenore Banks, Outstanding League Leader

The local and state Leagues lost a most respected and revered leader of more than thirty years when Lenore Banks died on October 17, 2012. Lenore served for sixteen years as the Judicial Director on the state board and continued as an Off-Board Specialist for Judicial Issues until her death. She represented LWVNY on the boards of The Committee for Modern Courts, Campaign for an Independent Public Defense, The New York State Defenders Association (NYSDA), and was on the NYSDA Client Advisory Board. She was a member of the Blue Ribbon Commission established by chief judge, Judith Kaye in 2003 that called for an Independent Public Defense Commission. In 1988, LWVNY published Lenore's 131-page book, *The Judicial Maze: The Court System in New York State*. As always, Lenore was meticulous in her writing and rewrote the book at least eight times before it met her high standards. Lenore provided local leadership in the Amherst League prior to the 1995 merger, with the studies examining the Erie County jails and as Issues and State Government Chair of the board. She represented the League as a board member of Action for Mental Health. Joan Photiadis commented, "The quality of Lenore's contributions to the League is extraordinary." Therese Warden said, "I always consulted with Lenore on all matters related to the League."

Terri Parks

Great Decisions

As I write on 12/23/12, the 2013 Great Decisions books have not arrived, but as our first meeting is not until Thursday, March 7, I don't think this will be a problem. I received the results of the balloting for 2012 topics so please bring your 2012 books in March. Once people have volunteered as facilitators and purchased their 2013 books, we can see how our opinions compared with the other Great Books groups. I hope to see you all in March.

Bernice Baeumler

LWVBN News and Notes

LEAGUE HISTORY: VOTING

With another election behind us, the voter turnout is once again a topic of conversation and study. Unfortunately low voter turnout is not a new problem. It has been a concern of the League of Women Voters at least since 1926. In 1926, the Erie County League, assigning itself the task of getting out the “laggard” vote, worked in cooperation with churches as well as patriotic, civic, and educational organizations. This was an effort to “stay the voting slump which has been in progress for thirty years.” In 1929, the County League organized all the League districts in an effort to get out the vote. In 1931, it began a campaign to have a permanent voter registration in New York State. Sixteen states had already established permanent registration.

At all levels of the League, there was a belief that every eligible voter should be encouraged to vote. The League did however, back the English Literacy Test established in 1921 because it felt that basic English literacy was necessary for voters to understand the issues and vote intelligently. At the state level, the League worked with the New York Board of Regents to develop its exam. Through the years, the League has worked at living up to the “Voter” in its name by encouraging and educating voters on the issues and on the process of voting itself.

Marie Hanrahan, League Historian

VOLUNTEER NEWS

League members will attend monthly citizenship ceremonies at the federal courthouse to give voter registration forms to each new citizen this winter. If you are interested in participating, please let me know. Later in the year, the League will be asked to provide moderators and time keepers for the many school board elections taking place in our region. The League will schedule a short moderator training if there are interested members who would like to learn more.

The League contracts with the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority to oversee tenant elections. This League fund raiser is chaired by Alan Dozoretz. Al attends every election event and is familiar with all aspects of the process. He needs volunteers to accompany him to the election sites—he generously provides transportation! Please contact Al if you would like to find out about this opportunity.

Thanks for your consideration. Please call Mike Egan if you need more information.

Mike Egan, Volunteer Coordinator

IN REMEMBRANCE

Chet Dann, husband of long-time League member Delight Dann, died on November 7, 2012. We remember Chet for his enthusiastic participation in our 2010 tour of the Inner Harbor to examine possible locations for the proposed Buffalo Harbor Bridge. He was a great guy.

Gladys Gifford

LUNCH AND ISSUES

Dr. Debra Street, from the University at Buffalo’s Department of Sociology, will speak about the Canadian health care system at *Lunch and Issues* on Friday, January 18 at the Scotch and Sirloin Restaurant, 3999 Maple Rd. Amherst. Lunch begins at 11:30 a.m. The cost is \$16.00, all inclusive. Please bring a check payable to LWVBN. We will be collecting items for Haven House, a shelter for victims of domestic violence. Socks, personal items and checks will be gratefully accepted. The luncheon and program are open to the public. For reservations, contact Sally Metzger or Judy Metzger.

Judy Metzger, Sally Metzger and Arlene Miles, Amherst Unit Co-coordinators

Voter Services

Voters' Guide

On November 13, Eugene Abrahamson, Kristin Allen, Judy Clarke, Ann Marie Malachowski and Terri Parks attended the Voters' Guide wrap-up meeting. The following recommendations were made to the Board: 1) Continue to use Vote 411; 2) Continue to publish the paper guide; 3) Look for additional funding; and 4) Find a new editor and coordinator.

Students Inside Albany

Thirteen schools in Erie County were sent information about the *Students Inside Albany* program to be held April 14 - 17, 2013. Applications are due January 15. Theresa Pope and Joyce Bol will select one of the students by February 1 and send him/her a package of materials which has to be completed and submitted to Albany by February 15.

Joyce H. Bol, Voter Services Chair

Local Government Committee

The Local Government Committee reviewed the Erie County budget process at our December meeting. After an interview and discussion with Tim Callan, deputy budget director for Erie County, we attended many committee and legislative meetings making it a good learning experience on the budget process. Individually we voiced our opinion on the budget to the legislators with calls and e-mails.

We discussed a study of the county budget so that we can speak and take action on budget issues. We can speak within current positions on inequities between city and suburbs, roads, bridges, delinquent tax payments, high sales tax, distribution of sales tax, and New York State mandates that devour budgets. We need to stress fiscal accountability and transparency. Although budgets can scare people away, committee member Dot Brown reminded us that budgets are simply "programs in numbers."

We discussed a recent presentation County Executive Poloncarz gave at the downtown library after passage of the county budget. He recommended putting continuous pressure on legislators throughout the year to maintain a dialogue on community demands. It is clear that county funding for non-mandated services such as arts and cultural may have to be reduced as budget items that were reduced come due. Claims in the Law Department, fringe benefits and overtime must be paid even though they were cut by the legislature. The four year plan approved by the control board is a problem because of an unbalanced budget. The County Executive also spoke about how Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs) poach businesses and the need for the State Senate to support the IDA reform legislation introduced in the State Assembly by Sean Ryan. The League has a position on IDAs so we can work to gain Senate support for Sean Ryan's proposal.

We began planning our May program. The subject for a distinguished panel is the interface of government and the private sector in economic development. If this subject interests you, join us for the planning. Our next meeting is February 13 at 1:15 p.m. at the League office. Call committee chair Marian Deutschman for further information.

Marian Deutschman, Local Government Committee Chair

Social Economic Justice Education Committee

The committee continues to review background material related to LWVUS positions on federal fiscal policies. We expanded reviews to include United States social programs such as Social Security and Medicare. These programs are valued by the League and articulated in long established positions posted on the national League website.

On December 19, 2012, we were pleased to have former Congressman John LaFalce as a guest speaker. He presented an overview of happenings inside the Washington DC beltway, offering personal insights regarding use of power, the fiscal cliff, Congressional gridlock, banking regulations and causes of the recent Great Recession. His comment on the latter was that Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan promoted a laissez faire approach that saw little enforcement of regulations and rules that might have prevented the Wall Street meltdown and the mortgage crisis. Few stood up against the lack of effective oversight, even though existing regulations might have at least softened the crisis.

The committee proposed a letter to the editor on reform of federal fiscal policies to make them more equitable. The letter was published December 16, 2012 in the Buffalo News. A similar letter was sent to Senators Schumer and Gillibrand, and Representatives Slaughter, Higgins and Hochul. If you missed the Buffalo News letter, read it on the League website (<http://www.lwvbn.org/currentissues/LetterBufNews-inequality-11-6-12.pdf>).

Lynda Stephens, Social Economic Justice Education Committee Chair

Natural Resources Committee

Happy New Year! We feel 2013 is the Year of Climate Smart Communities (CSC). With Evans, Brant, Amherst and the Village of East Aurora already working on this issue, we feel we will be successful! Our CSC chair, Sandy Chelnov, set up a webinar with the statewide CSC program director early in January.

East Aurora's active CSC committee began a greenhouse gas inventory under the supervision of Laurie Kutina, a resident of the town of Aurora with professional experience doing these inventories in her position with Ecology and Environment. Dr. Brenda Young and a student intern from Daemen College, plus Village employee will assist with the inventory. With a baseline inventory completed, the Village will be able to set an emission reduction target and track the reduction going forward, serving as a role model to its citizens and other municipalities. The new village fire hall is being designed to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. To meet these standards, a certified arborist is determining how to save as many trees as possible and architects are looking for ways to recycle runoff water. Book clubs and schools are being encouraged to reduce their carbon footprints and compete for a prize. Participants will examine their personal carbon footprints with the "Low Carbon Diet," a fun way Leaguers used to assess their own energy use a few years ago.

CSC is a multifaceted approach to improving our environment. We encourage all Leaguers to get involved in their own communities. To get started, give us a call.

Ellen Neumaier, Natural Resources Committee Chair

Education Committee

VISITS TO TWO UNIQUE BUFFALO SCHOOLS

It was like seeing a UNICEF card come to life. “How many of you came to live here to be safe?” Almost every hand in the first grade group flew up. We saw big, dark eyes, varied hairstyles, some covered heads, and ethnic diversity beyond our experience. Most of the 900 students at Buffalo District School #45, known as the International School, are refugees. Thirty to forty different languages are spoken in the school. Many students suffered trauma and shock while living in refugee camps. Ms. Amy Chavez, school counselor for the last two and a half years, told us of two siblings who were sharing one set of gloves that cold morning. She has a closet of donated clothing to give students who need it. The International School is one of Buffalo’s schools which “Needs Improvement.”

Mastery on the New York State exam is expected although fluency in the English language takes years to develop, and living in an entirely different culture is a daunting challenge. Almost all students in the four Pre-K classes are starting to learn the English language. Reading and math coaches work alongside teachers. Buffalo State College partners with the school on a College Bound program that starts with first graders. This special school invites families to parent events with translators, and provides a newsletter. We observed a genuine cooperative atmosphere throughout the school.

The pressure in high stakes testing is devastating for teachers at the International School. Although they see significant growth in student learning, it does not show in the way performance is calculated. As a group, ESL (English as a Second Language) students have persistently low achievement because students are moved out of the group when they improve and new refugees move into it. In addition, ESL students come from very different educational backgrounds which can have a significant impact on how well they do in school. A child from Puerto Rico is very different from a child who lived in a refugee camp and may or may not have ever gone to school.

Despite the challenges, the hallway walls of the International School were covered with photos and self-descriptions celebrating student diversity. There is a need for volunteers to help even for an hour or two once a week. This would enrich the volunteers!

Lafayette High School, about a block away from the International School, has a dynamic new principal, Ms. Naomi Cerre. She has made tremendous improvements in this school. Ms. Cerre looks forward to having Johns Hopkins University as an educational partner. If the grant she applied for materializes, it will fund specialized staff and materials for the school’s 854 students speaking 42 different languages. On our walk through, we observed enthusiasm, optimism, as well as serious concentration. These teenage students have survived many tragedies and traumas, but they work hard in school.

Although fluency in English takes 7-10 years, these students are expected to pass Regents Exams. In 2006 this school had 29% ESL students; now they have 70%. Linking families to social services through the school is critical to student success. Families are involved with the International Institute and Journey’s End and their translators. Why do these refugees come to Buffalo? The economy is different from New York City enabling them to survive better here. However, New York City has a larger pool of support.

Getting families to come into the school requires a change in perception. For example, one parent said that school is like a temple. In another instance, it was learned that Latino girls may do well in school, but most do not attend college. Parents were invited to hear a speaker from “Say Yes to Education” with a translator. In spite of local publicity, these parents had not heard about the program. We realized that to reach these parents, the district must make multilingual announcements and

forms available so that parents can read and understand them. This is one example of a way the district could prioritize its assistance more equitably.

Like the entire United States, the face of Lafayette High School is changing. Internal systems that recognize significantly changed student needs are a must. Last year 220 seventh and eighth graders were added to this school. As many as 98% of the students in Lafayette High School are on free or reduced lunch programs. Teachers carry multiple responsibilities.

Nationally, English language learners are the fastest-growing group of students. Meanwhile, educators are putting the new Common Core State Standards into classroom practice. They need supports to bridge the gap between learning the new language and mastering content. The League of Women Voters believes that the federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide an equitable, quality public education for all children pre-K through grade 12. A quality public education is essential for a strong, viable, and sustainable democratic society and is a civil right.

NEXT COMMITTEE MEETING

The Education committee will meet on January 17, 1:30 p.m. at the League.

Lee Tetkowski, Education Committee Chair

Transportation/Waterfront

Bulldozer at work on the Inner Harbor, September 15, 2012. Join the League for a tour of the whole waterfront in the spring to see progress happening!



The League of Women Voters:

***Where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement.
Work with the LWV to help shape the issues that keep our community fair,
vibrant and strong.***



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Winter 2013

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
January 13	14	15	16 Transportation/ Waterfront 10:00 a.m.	17 Education Committee 1:30 p.m.	18 Lunch and Issues 11:30 a.m.	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31	February 1	2
3	4	5 Issues Committee 4.30 p.m.	6	7	8	9
10	11 Board Meeting 4:00 p.m.	12	13 Local Government 1:15 p.m.	14 Nat. Rsrcs 9:00 a.m. Campaign Finance Reform 4:30 p.m.	15	16
17	18	19	20 Transportation/ Waterfront 10:00 a.m.	21 Education Committee 1:30 p.m.	22	23