

THE VOTER

May 2016

Celebrating our New League Year!

President's Letter

Happy New League Year,

Well, we turned another chapter in this, our 79th local League year, with our traditional annual April business meeting and luncheon. As you all know, May marks the start of the League business year and, like spring, new beginnings. It's time to welcome new officers and directors to our board, begin work on potential new program projects, and advance toward new phases of existing projects.



Julie Kessel
President, 2016-2017

All this renewal is the byproduct of months of member outreach, committee input, and board coordination culminating in the LWVSPA's Annual Business Meeting held last month at which members elected new officers and directors, approved the budget, voted on targeted bylaw changes, and agreed to adopt the board-recommended program for 2016-2017. We had a robust and highly engaged member turnout at the meeting, which took place at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club, directly followed by our Making Democracy Work awards luncheon honoring Deirdre Macnab, immediate past president of the League of Women Voters Florida and present chair of the Environment Committee. Deirdre was an electrifying speaker; we made a little money with our auction, drawing and new swag, and had a lot of fun. What a fantastic way to begin the year!

The year-end transition provided an opportunity for board members, Wendy Grassi (two years) and Jane Harper (two years), to pass their respective batons and move on. Jane will now lead our Sustainability Working Group, and Wendy will remain an active League member.

In addition, I was elected to my third term as president, Raechel to her third term as first vice president and our treasurer, Caroline Bloodworth, was elected to another two-year term. Jim Jackson moved from his second year as general board member to second vice president. Secretary Iris Yetter, as well as directors Kathy Mousing and Kay Lahdenpera, are continuing in the second year of their two-year terms. Information Manager Susan Mayer will transition to the role of Voter Editor and Event Communications Manager, and Colleen Abel joins our team to support our office processes and membership database management. Marty Shapiro joined our board in a two-year elected position.

Highly accomplished in their fields of expertise, these individuals collectively bring to the board a wealth of knowledge and experience ranging from high-level organizational management (profit and non-profit), healthcare administration, legal expertise, financial management, university education, and youth and social services. On behalf of our newly elected team, it's an honor to welcome our new board members. We look forward to serving with them!

This year, our membership is on fire. Our members identified ten areas of interest, each with assigned leadership. The general membership approved our 2016-2017

Program, consisting of four committees, five working groups, and one working group in evolution. These include:

COMMITTEES: Committees meet regularly to influence public policy through education and/or advocacy, require resources, \$\$, and substantial commitment.

Closing the Gap in Health Care, led by Julie Kessel: educate people about the issues of uninsured in Florida, focus to collect personal stories about the burden of gaps in care, prepare for action

Immigration, led by Karen Coale and Kay Lahdenpera: focus to surveil legislation, craft messaging, prepare for action to squash punitive bills.

Advocacy, led by Marty Shapiro: focus to create positive relationships with legislators, understand their interests and focus, advocate for the issues of importance to the League.

Voter Service, led by Raechel Garafalo: focus to educate voters through conduct of candidate forums, educational seminars on voting and the constitutional review commission, registering voters, and publishing our online voter guide.

WORKING GROUPS: Working groups meet regularly to monitor events, collect information, engage in discussion, promote events and awareness, and consider actions for a future program.

Recycling in St. Pete, led by Karen Coale and Kathy Mossing: focus on metrics, expansion.

Gun Safety, led by Tina Spangler: focus on surveilling legislation as it arises, educating the public on gun safety, and preparing to squash bad bills in the next session.

International Relations, led by Judy McSwine of the North Pinellas League: focus on meetings.

Sustainability, led by Jane Harper: focus on development, likely to align to State focus on establishing solar coops in St. Pete to bring down pricing, pushing for cost friendly legislation, and working with local municipalities to support solar.

Education, led by Jim Jackson: focus on the five challenged schools in South St. Pete, understanding the issues and actions being taken.

Social Justice, led by Julie Kessel: focus on films and panels to promote discussion around topics including money in politics, the impact of the ban on abortion and defunding planned parenthood on access to health care, poverty, and the death penalty.

We are also enhancing our member services. We have added a monthly cocktails and conversation, a quarterly hot topics, and enhanced website resources. Visit the [website home page](#) to keep up with all that we are doing.

Please contact us if you are interested in participating in any of these projects so we can get you hooked up with the project leads.

Thank you so much for helping to kick this year off to a terrific start! I look forward to a wonderful year together, to hearing from you about your interests, and to seeing you at one of our next events.

In League,
Julie

Woo Hoo! It's Time for Cocktails and Conversation Again: Wednesday, May 18th



Charlie Frago
Tampa Bay Times Writer

Good drinks, good food, and good company. Don't miss this opportunity to meet our special guest, [Charlie Frago](#), who covers the St. Pete beat for the **Tampa Bay Times**. From local state legislative candidates and issues to city politics and policy, if it affects St. Pete, Charlie probably has reported or will report on it, and he'll be on hand to share his insights

When: Wednesday, May 18th, 6 - 8 PM

Where: The Tap Room at the historic Hollander Hotel
[421 4th Street North](#), St. Petersburg

Parking: on street, in the Hollander Hotel parking lot (west of the building), or at the [dentist's office](#) across the street on 4th Avenue.

Cash/debit/credit card for food and drinks. Camaraderie courtesy of the League.

Here's the [Tap Room menu](#) in case you want snacks or plan to stay for dinner.

Please [email Raechel](#) if you are planning on attending. Your RSVP is appreciated so we can gauge space needed, but it's not required; just stop by and join the crowd!

Closing the Healthcare Gap Training Saturday, June 18th

Learn How to Share the Message About Healthcare Expansion

Here's your chance to refine your message about the importance of Closing the Healthcare Gap in Florida.

The League is sponsoring a healthcare advocacy, communication, and messaging training on June 18th in downtown St. Pete. The training will be led by Darden Rice, longtime activist and organizer, media expert, and sitting City Council Vice-Chair.



Darden Rice, St. Pete
City Council Vice-Chair

The purpose of the training is to help people to be more comfortable in their messaging, communicating, and speaking skills in order to drive people to action. The training is open to Closing the Gap in Healthcare Committee members, as well as those League members who distribute or collect Closing the Gap material during other events, such as Voter Registration.

Space is limited. Please RSVP to jbkessel@verizon.net or office@lwvspa.org. About 30 minutes of (easy) pre-work will be required.

League News

League Expands its Advocacy Role for Closing the Gap in Healthcare



by Julie Kessel, Tampa Bay Area Regional Lead for LWVF Healthcare Expansion Advocacy

The mission for the Closing the Healthcare Gap Program in 2016 is to educate, motivate, and activate people directly impacted by the Florida Healthcare Gap. The Gap is created due to Florida's decision NOT to expand Medicaid and take \$\$ already paid by Florida taxpayers and earmarked by the federal government for this sole purpose.

Closing the Gap activities are intended to give Florida citizens the tools they need to ask important questions of legislators, make an informed vote in the 2016 primaries and general elections, and to cultivate the land for advocacy later, perhaps in 2017, when newly elected legislators go back into session.

The LWVF's position is that all citizens should have quality, affordable healthcare. It has educated and advocated on this topic for nearly four years now. A few years ago, LWVF joined with **CHAIN**--a group whose exclusive purpose is to expand healthcare coverage--and received funds for the project through CHAIN. CHAIN and LWVF set shared goals.

This 2016 calendar year, the LWVF divided the state into three regions, each with a regional lead, recognizing it was too big for just one leader (formerly Dena Leavengood of Hillsborough). Each interested League can receive funds if they agree to certain deliverables in the grant period. A single grant is offered to each League for \$1000 (Tier 1), \$500 (Tier 2), or up to \$150 for small expenses. Choosing not to ask for a grant does NOT preclude any league from participating, and we encourage each League to work on the topic in any way they choose. Any activity that falls into our shared goals category may be used for our collective region deliverables.

The LWVSPA has already applied for, and received \$600 of its \$1000 grant. We are working on the development of a comprehensive program through the end of the year for our local area and the region. We will partner with the North Pinellas League to focus on Pinellas. Stay posted!

Voter Education and Registration Efforts Ramping Up for Election Season

by Raechel Garafalo, LWVSPA Voter Service Chair

In preparation for the August 30th primary election, the Leagues of Women Voters of the St. Petersburg Area and North Pinellas County are working to produce the League's 2016 **Pinellas County Voter Guide** (the Guide). The target for publication of the Guide is the first week of August to coordinate with the distribution of Vote by Mail ballots.

The Guide will be totally web based (no downloading PDF's), optimized for viewing on mobile devices, and will cover all contested federal, state, county and special fire district races. The LWVF will also be publishing a paper voter guide as in years past, that will cover US Congressional races, Florida Senate races, and the ballot amendments. This paper guide will be available for distribution in advance of the general election in November.

This year, as a result of the redrawn, renumbered Florida Senate districts, many voters' precincts and polling places will change. So, **be on the lookout for new Voter Registration cards**. The League recommends that you confirm your voting status and update your signature as well as party affiliation before the August 1st Registration deadline.

There are several nonpartisan races in the August 30th election. However, if you want to vote in the partisan races on the ballot, and are currently registered as an NPA (no party affiliation), you will need to choose a party with which to affiliate (Republican or Democrat) and update your registration. [Click here](#) to check your status and update your registration.

On the subject of voter registration, our League is participating in a coordinated state effort called Project R.O.A.R. (Reach Out And Register) for which we're planning a series of spring/summer voter registration activities. The goal of ROAR is to register, engage, and educate as many new voters as possible, especially in underserved communities and groups. We're looking to plug into community events or organizational activities where we can make a difference.

Conducting a successful voter registration drive takes the work of a dedicated team of volunteers. Please [contact me](#) if you're able to facilitate our participation in an event/activity or to learn about some of the other opportunities to get involved.

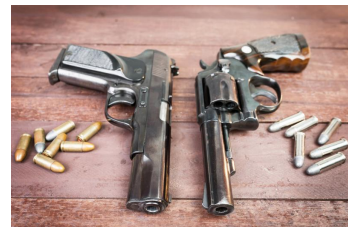
On a final note: I was one of six members of our local League to attend LWVF's biennial Council of Leaders conference, What a Difference a Map Makes, in Orlando last week. At the end of Plenary Session II (part of a packed two-day agenda of workshops, caucuses, speaker sessions, and celebratory dinners), I put forth a Direction to the Board. I proposed that LWVF draft and send a letter to county supervisors of elections (SOEs) requesting that they send a signature update card in the mail to recurrent vote by mail voters who have not renewed their signatures in the last three years and that this become a regular practice. Some county SOE's, like in Miami-Dade, already do this. I happily received notice this week that **the state board has agreed to my proposal**. If the practice of prompting signature updates is adopted statewide, we may see a decrease in challenged and invalidated ballots. Because, EVERY VOTE COUNTS!

Click the image to go to our online Voter Guide.

We're Riled Up About Gun Safety

by Tina Spangler, Lead for the Gun Safety Working Group

The gun safety group continues its monthly meetings and ongoing surveillance of any new gun news in and around our state. Wrap up from last year includes the **League's successful efforts in defeating three proposed gun bills: Campus Carry, Open Carry, and the expansion of the Stand Your Ground law.**



These bills are very likely to resurface and we are preparing our strategy now. One component of that is ongoing education. We have an updated slide presentation

available for groups that request education and action opportunities from the League. **Please let us know if groups that you know want to learn more about gun safety.**

The group discussed the fact that gun ownership overall is going down, primarily because sport hunting has been in decline. The NRA has responded by creating a series of ads focused on fear of attack. Their target: younger people, college students, those they could also press into service to support their Campus Carry bill when it likely re-emerges in the future.

This year, the League will explore pushing forward or sponsoring a bill that requires safety training requirements for those who own a handgun. Florida Agriculture Commissioner Adam Putnam asserts that current classes are not meant to be actual "safety" classes but rather minimum competency requirements for handgun owners as a prerequisite to obtaining a permit to carry a concealed weapon. However, the present requirements to obtain a permit for concealed weapons vary widely and, ironically, have the NRA as an approved provider. Hmmmmm, anyone smell a conflict?

Good news, though. The League is kicking off several showings of ***Making a Killing, Guns, Greed and the NRA***, a documentary by Brave New Films. It will show in Orlando, Palm Beach, and St. Pete. **The St. Pete show is on June 7th at the Freefall Theater, and will be introduced by Councilwoman Lisa Wheeler Brown. Mark your calendar and come join us. [Click here](#) for an event flyer.**

The work of the League is tireless. If all of this gun talk gets you riled up, if you like to present information to others, if you know groups who are interested in a focused educational presentation on this topic, **please contact me at office@lwvspa.org, and put "Gun Safety" in the subject line.** I'll plug you in to our group and you can be a part of the gun safety solution in Florida.

Focus on "Failure Factories"

by Jim Jackson, Education Working Group Lead

The newly formed Education Working Group continues to expand our member base and to build a timeline for our activities in the next year. We had several long time chapter members join after the Annual Meeting, and we are always looking for more help.

Our early efforts for our working group are to examine and monitor supplemental programs in the five schools on the Southside of St. Pete and featured in the ***Tampa Bay Times "Failure Factories"*** series. Pinellas Schools will continue to measure test schools as their outcome of progress in the schools. The working group hopes to look at all of the programs conducted by the District as well as outside groups that impact the home and learning climate of a student.

Even though all of the five schools remain near the bottom in metrics of test scores, they differ in terms of resources. We hope to follow the money. We also will monitor the litigation by **[COQEBS](#)** (Concerned Organization for Quality Education for Black Students, Inc.) and now the U.S. Department of Education brought against the District. **We welcome volunteers.** Contact Jim Jackson at **jjackso1@aol.com**.

Failing Schools in South St. Pete: It Takes a Community

by Dr. Judy Hall, LWVSPA Rep to the SCCC

The South County Community Council (SCCC)

is a citizen/organization Advisory Board of South Pinellas County to the Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County.

The Council has focused on parental engagement in our schools for the past five years. Currently it has "adopted" Melrose Elementary School, providing mentoring and organizing parents to become more engaged with their children's education.



Melrose Elementary

During the past school year, the SCCC, partnering with Parent Engagement, participated in a day where dads came to school with their children. This was another step toward a goal of 100% improvement in parental engagement at the school. SCCC is partnering with other organizations concerned about the failing schools in south Pinellas County.

The League's Education Group is also concerned about these schools and a natural partner. As the League's SCCC representative, I will facilitate bringing together these partners, along with other target groups, to develop positive strategies for improving the educational experience of the children in our failing schools. This will represent a League effort to see that all children in our community have equal and fair access and support for quality education.

Please [email our office](#) with "Failing Schools" in the subject line for more information or to get involved.



Recycling: Expanding to Apartment Complexes and Condos--But Not Yet

by Karen Coale, LWVSPA Recycling Co-Chair & People's Trash Coalition Chair

On March 31st, the St Petersburg Sanitation Department provided City Council with an update on the first phase of residential recycling in St Petersburg. Take a look at the current scorecard

posted on the LWVSPA website for the details: <https://www.lwvspa.org/st-pete-releases-recycling-scorecard/>

At the same meeting, Neighborhood Affairs Director Mike Dove reported on the research that was conducted to expand recycling service to apartment complexes and condos, and the development of a pilot program to begin that rollout. However, due to the significant drop in the price of oil and thus the value of oil-based products such as plastic, the City's recycle processor, Progressive, is not able to take on significant additional materials at this time. It is an economic issue triggered by both the plummeting price of oil and the troubled economies of India and China, who are the primary buyers of recycled materials. Bottom line: There is a plan to expand recycling in St. Pete when prices go back up, and they will.

After receiving the disappointing news, Council Members discussed other ways to take care of the environment, like looking at city contracts and stopping the purchase of styrofoam and plastic products, pushing for reuse of materials, etc. For a summary of the meeting read the following **Tampa Bay Times** article: saintpetersburgtimes.fl.newsmemory.com/publink.php?shareid=2d816f108

Meanwhile, please fill your blue bins with uncontaminated recyclable aluminum, cardboard, paper, and plastics. Encourage your neighbors to do so as well. If you have any questions, please contact me at recycling@lwvspa.org.

Working to Counter Misinformation About Immigration

by Karen Coale, LWVSPA Immigration Co-Chair &
LWVF Immigration Co-Chair

Immigration remains an issue in the presidential race, but unfortunately is accompanied by considerable misinformation and scary rhetoric.

Building on our discussion at the Annual Program Planning Meeting, your Immigration Committee is developing an educational communications plan to counter these myths with researched facts, e.g., the actual cost of deporting 11 million undocumented immigrants in two years: \$300 Billion.



We have a framework for organizing the facts that we want to cover in simple understandable bites. Social media is a natural vehicle for sharing these facts. The committee is pleased that immigration is one the LWVSPA priorities agreed to at our recent Annual Meeting, which is critical as we prepare for the 2017 Florida Legislative session.

In the 2016 session, seven immigrant impacting bills were introduced, six of which were punitive. Fortunately, the punitive bills were blocked by Judiciary Committee Chair, Sen. Diaz de la Portilla. However, with the continued anti-immigrant rhetoric emanating from some presidential candidates, we expect a spillover into the state legislature again this year.

Having immigration as a priority positions us to advocate heavily against them. Our committee meets monthly on the fourth Monday. Join us and stay current on this complex issue. For more information email me at immigration@lwwspa.org.



Upcoming Events Quick Reference Guide

[Visit our website](#) for more information about upcoming events. We update this information about League and community events on a regular basis, so check it out frequently.

| When | What | Where |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Wed. 5/18, 6-8 PM | Cocktails & Conversation | Hollander Hotel Tap Room 421 4th Ave. N, St. Pete |
| Sat. 5/21, 10 AM-2 PM | Mental Health Awareness Day | Enoch Davis Recreation Center |
| Tue. 5/24, 7-8:30 PM | Membership Meeting: Recap of State Council & Program Updates | The Beacon 470 3rd St. S, St. Pete |
| Thu. 6/2, 5:30-6:30 PM | Closing the Healthcare Gap Conference Call | Email the office for call in information. |
| Tue. 6/7, 6-8:30 PM | Making a Killing: Guns, Greed, and the NRA Florida Premier Film Showing | Freefall Theater 6099 Central Ave. St. Pete |

Important Dates in the 2016 Election Cycle

- 8/1 5 PM--Registration Deadline for Primary Election
- 8/2--Deadline to Mail Ballots to Domestic Voters for Primary Election
- 8/20--Early Voting for Aug. 30 Primary Election
- 8/24 5PM--Deadline for Voter to Request a Mail Ballot to be Mailed
- 8/29 5 PM--Last Day to Pick Up Mail Ballot in SOE Office

8/30--PRIMARY ELECTION
10/11--Registration Deadline for General Election
10/24--Early Voting for Nov. 8 General Election
11/2 5 PM--Deadline for Voter to Request a Mail Ballot to be Mailed
11/7 5 PM--Last Day to Pick Up Mail Ballot in SOE Office
11/7 5 PM--Deadline to Cure Unsigned Mail Ballot Envelope
11/8--GENERAL ELECTION



We are very pleased to welcome these new members to the LWVSPA:

Jack Donovan, St. Petersburg
Jacob Ross, St. Petersburg
Becky Wilson, St. Petersburg
Sharon Winters, St. Petersburg

Sincere thanks to these special donor level members:

Linda Lerner, **Susan B. Anthony** membership renewal
Aleta B. Fisher, **Carrie Chapman Catt** member transfer from LWVNPC



Caught on Camera...
at our Annual Meeting and Luncheon

It's easy to join or renew. [Pay online using PayPal](#), or if you prefer, mail a check payable to LWVSPA to **POB 11775, St. Petersburg, FL 33733-11775**.

A large percentage of what you pay for an individual membership goes to support our state and national Leagues. By selecting the new Gold or Silver membership level, most of your dues will help support the work of our local League.

League of Women Voters of the St. Petersburg Area | office@lwwspa.org |
727.896.5197 | www.lwwspa.org

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.

LWVSPA, P.O. Box 11775, St. Petersburg, FL 33733

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