

# League of Women Voters Bloomington - Monroe County

League Letter – May 2017

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## Calendar

- May 4** Gerrymandering: The Movie, Monroe County Public Library Room 1B, 7:00 PM  
(co-sponsored with Reverse Citizens United and Democracy for Monroe County)
- May 7** Annual meeting, 1:30-3:30 PM, Monroe County Public Library Room 1B-1C  
(Note that this is a Sunday afternoon.)
- May 8** Board meeting, 7:00 PM, Bell Trace Community Room

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## Mission Statement

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 advocacy and education.

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER – Kate Cruikshank



I'm writing while at the LWVIN convention, which is a wonderful experience that I recommend to all of you for future years. The opportunity to meet other local League members and discuss our work and common problems and to learn from what others are doing is invaluable, and being among so many committed women and their male colleagues is inspiring.

Outgoing co-presidents Erin Kelley and Lisa Plencner have developed a momentum in the LWVIN toward greater collective action throughout the state that incoming co-presidents Patsy Hoyer and Oscar Anderson clearly intend to carry on, exploring ways to bring local Leagues together, perhaps through regional meetings to share ideas and learn from each other. Developing partnerships to increase our effectiveness in fostering greater civic engagement is clearly a priority, as is coordination with the many other activist groups that have emerged over the last few months.

Although these are unsettling times, they are also exciting ones as more people seek out ways to become more knowledgeable about how government at all levels is supposed to work and how to effect change. This makes it an exciting time for the League as well, as it is clear that the knowledge and practices that are its hallmarks are precisely what is needed. I look forward to our annual meeting, where we can continue to define and plan our local engagement in the project of making democracy work.

--- Kate

## League Updates

### LWVIN CONVENTION

The LWVIN convention took place in South Bend April 29-30. Major items of business were approval of the conversion of the LWVIN to a single 501(c)(3) entity and approval of a program focused on “Making Democracy Work” through working for redistricting reform, protection of voting rights, voter and civic education, and good government. Patsy Hoyer of the Greater Lafayette League and Oscar Anderson of the Montgomery County League will be the new co-presidents. They are seeking more ways to support and build networks among local Leagues, many of whom are experiencing sharp increases in membership, and will also be spearheading plans for the centennial celebration of the League. Guest speakers for the first day were Prof. Elizabeth Bennion of IU South Bend speaking on the development of the Civic Leadership Academy in conjunction with the St. Joseph County Public Library, and state house district representative Ryan Dvorak providing a review of the legislative session just ended. Dr. Darryl Heller, professor of history at IUSB and director for Student and Community Engagement at the Civil Rights Heritage Center was featured speaker on the second day. Nineteen of Indiana's 21 local Leagues were represented at the convention, with 62 voting delegates in attendance. Kathy Loser and Kate Cruikshank presented one of three mini-sessions on Making Democracy Work in Your Community, sharing our first steps toward developing greater support for civic education.

## Reports on Program

### 2017-2018 PROGRAM RECOMMENDATION

The March 1 and April 8 member meetings generated a recommended program for 2017-2018 that includes redistricting reform, voting rights and voter protection, voter information, civic education, and good government. The details for each of these categories are in the materials sent to you in preparation for the annual meeting, when we will begin our planning of specific activities in each of these areas. So plan to attend, and bring your ideas and energy!

### REDISTRICTING REFORM: A GERRYMANDER MEANDER?

Although the redistricting reform legislation died in committee, citizen workshops are still being sponsored by Common Cause, and events being planned around the state. When Julia Vaughn of Common Cause spoke to Democracy for Monroe County in March, she mentioned the idea of a “gerrymander meander” that had been developed along a particularly peculiar boundary in Maryland, an idea that our LWVBMC task force members have been exploring. George Hegeman has become our map guru, examining in detail, for example, the intersections of Indiana house districts 60, 61, and 62 in the southeast corner of Bloomington. Democracy for Monroe County is interested in cosponsoring such an event, and a couple of high school age activists have volunteered to help, so we now need imaginative ideas for making this into a publicity event that is fun and still makes the point about the importance of fair representation. The tentative date is July 17, the birthday of Elbridge Gerry, the perpetrator of the original gerrymandered district in 1812 as governor of Massachusetts (and a year later vice president to President James Madison).

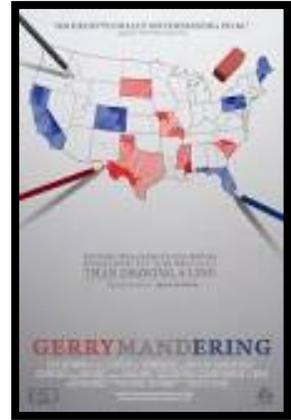
### CIVIC EDUCATION: CONSTITUTION 101



Planning is underway with the Monroe County Public Library in our joint sponsorship of the Constitution 101 course to be offered on consecutive Thursdays October 5 through November 9 by national *We the People* director Robert Leming. The course will be held in MCPL room 1B, with registration limited to 36. Registration will open September 1 through the MCPL.

## GERRYMANDERING: THE MOVIE

If you haven't yet seen *Gerrymandering: The Movie*, you have a chance on May 4 at 7:00 PM in Room 1B of the Monroe County Public Library. It's an extremely entertaining presentation of how gerrymandering is done, what the effects are, and why it is so important to put a stop to it. The movie is a great show, and it helps us build the arguments for redistricting reform, so we can persuade others to become involved in pressuring our legislators going into the 2018 session.



## Advocacy and Activism

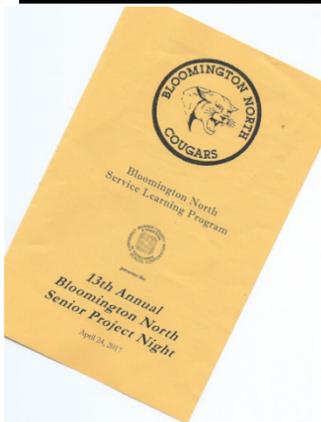
### CIVIC EDUCATION

En route to the LWVIN convention in South Bend, on April 28 Kate Cruikshank, Albrecht Holschuh, and Kathy Loser met with Collin Gruver, Director of Civic Education with the Indiana Bar Foundation, to talk about how the League both locally and statewide might support expanded civic education in the schools. The Indiana Bar Foundation sponsors the *We the People* program, which has been implemented in 87 schools in Indiana, some of which send teams to a national competition. Support for teachers is offered each summer through a tuition-free workshop on the IU campus focused on the *We the People* curriculum. This year's workshop takes place July 9-13.

League members from around the state have been involved in the *We the People* program as judges in local competitions. Collin indicated a strong interest in involving more League members and developing a more extensive partnership with the LWVIN. In a conversation at the LWVIN convention, incoming co-president Oscar Anderson indicated strong interest in building such a partnership.

The Indiana Bar Foundation has in the past also sponsored *Project Citizen* both in the schools and as a program for adults that looks at how the private sphere, civil society, and government intersect and explores in a hands-on way how we as individuals can affect public policy. After federal funding was cut in 2011 to the Center for Civic Education, which is the source of both *We the People* and *Project Citizen*, the latter program was dropped, but Collin was able to give us some of the leftover materials from that program, which could be the springboard to developing civic education around local government addressing local issues. Our emerging task force on civic education is going to have a lot to work with. If you are interested in working with that group, please contact Kathy Loser ([keloser@me.com](mailto:keloser@me.com)).

## BHSN SERVICE LEARNING PROGRAM – Doris Wittenburg



For the third year in a row, I have had the privilege of being a volunteer community panelist at the 13<sup>th</sup> annual Bloomington North Senior Project Night. I was first asked to participate while I was your League president and have continued to participate as a representative of the League.

Throughout the school year, students in the Bloomington North Service Learning Program complete non-paid internships in fields of their interest or serve as cadet teachers in our local schools if they have an interest in pursuing a career in education. During their second semester, the students write a four- to six-page research paper on a topic relating to their site and

work on a project while at that site, create a product related to their site, or teach a series of lessons in the classroom where they are cadet teaching.

Senior Project Night started during the 2004-2005 school year with the idea of showcasing the skills these students acquired, while also involving the Bloomington community in the learning process. Over one hundred Bloomington community members (from all different types of businesses and non-profit organizations) volunteer their time to be guest panelists at Bloomington North on this evening to read the student papers and hear their presentations. Typically there are five or six panelists and four BHSN seniors assigned to each room. The juniors in the program act as room facilitators. The panelists start out the evening reading the papers of the four students they will later hear make 10-15 minute presentations. The panelists ask questions about the students' papers, their presentations, and their service learning experiences.

The four students with whom I was involved and their topics were quite varied:

- Mass Spectrometry: “The Science of Blowing Molecules Up”
- A look into the job of a Physical Therapist
- Cadet Teaching Experience: Technology in the Classroom
- Let’s Buy a House

Their papers were well thought out and well written, and their presentations were quite sophisticated and enlightening.

This was a unique opportunity to participate in the educational process of a MCCSC school program. It was very interesting to read and hear of the varied projects in which the students participated. If you or someone you know would like to participate next year in this activity, you can contact: Brian Muehlhaus, Bloomington North Service Learning Program/Senior Project – Director, 812-330-7724 x 50204 or [bmuehlha@mccsc.edu](mailto:bmuehlha@mccsc.edu).

## Reports on Voter Service

### FINAL LEGISLATIVE UPDATE ON APRIL 8

Our final legislative update had good attendance from legislators, with Matt Pierce and Mark Stoops being joined by Bob Heaton, Peggy Mayfield, and Jeff Ellington. Unfortunately, Jeff Ellington, arriving late, took the opportunity to distribute a Republican promotional handout to the audience before we were aware of what he was doing. The board resolved to make clear to legislators in our invitations for next year's legislative updates that we are inviting them as legislators representing all of us, not as members of a political party and to ask them to respect the nonpartisan nature of the updates.

### VOTER REGISTRATION - A NEW CHALLENGE?

The purging of the voter rolls announced this month by the Secretary of State means that there will potentially be a number of people who have been registered but now are not because of having not voted in the 2014, 2015, or 2016 elections. The purge of 480,000 voter names is about ten percent of Indiana's total registered voters for the 2016 election, many of whom could be college and university students. While the clean-up was long overdue, and the Secretary of State sent out multiple postcards to verify residence and registration status, there could be any number of people who think they are registered but no longer are but won't realize that until they go to vote. Ann Heath suggested we might consider a bumper sticker and other publicity material that says, "***ARE YOU SURE THAT YOU ARE REGISTERED TO VOTE***"



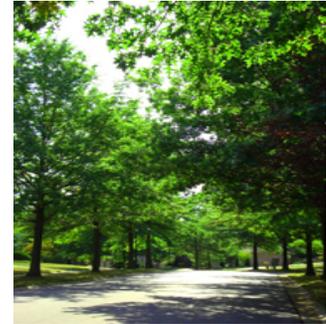
### LEAGUE PRESENCE AT THE COUNTY FAIR?

New member Vicki Polansky has been looking into the possibility of the LWVBMC having a booth at the Monroe County Fair. The board agreed we could consider funding, but we'll need planners and volunteers to staff it from 4:00 PM through 8:00 PM each day July 27-August 5. Board member Doris Wittenburg said that at one time the LWVBMC had a fairly elaborately constructed booth at the fair. If anyone has that display stashed in their garage or has pictures of it, and/or if you'd like to be part of the planning--we promise you won't have to wear suffragette costumes--please let Vicki know at: [vwilliam@indiana.edu](mailto:vwilliam@indiana.edu).

## Observer's Report

### WHO OWNS THAT TREE? – George Hegeman, Bloomington Tree Commission

Our part of Indiana is a great place to grow trees. The city of Bloomington has been honored by the Arbor Day Foundation as the first “Tree City” and, because of the high quality of our urban forest, has been so honored each year since 1984.



The City Department of Parks and Recreation cares for and “owns” the many trees in our parks and the more than 12,000 trees in the tree plots or “tree lawns” at the edges of City streets and between the streets and sidewalks. But like the sidewalks, which are City property, the adjacent property owner owes a duty of care for the tree plots and the trees growing there. Sidewalks must be cleared of snow or ice and maintained for the common good. Similarly, tree plots must be mowed or otherwise cared for, and the trees growing in them need care too. Home or property owners whose yards are adjacent to City trees have the duty to trim them to provide 15 feet of clearance over streets and 8 feet over sidewalks. In addition, dead and dangerous branches and growth obstructing street traffic sight lines or traffic control signs and signals must be removed. As a homeowner, you have the right to select and plant appropriate trees in the tree lawn. It is your responsibility to feed water and prune them when young. The City, for its part, is responsible for the removal and replanting of trees that die of disease or are damaged by storms. It is also responsible for making sure that street trees do not become a common nuisance.

A property or homeowner can remove up to 30% of a street tree’s canopy and branches up to 3 inches in diameter without permission. But because major work could be hazardous to the tree’s health, more extensive work requires that the property or homeowner apply to Parks and Recreation for a Tree Work Permit. The permit is free, is less than one page in length, and must be submitted for approval seven days before the proposed work is to begin.

All these tree and landscape-related rules as well as many helpful facts and references are to be found on-line at: <http://bloomington.in.gov/street-trees-and-landscaping>. Perhaps the single most valuable source of information there is the new 4<sup>th</sup> edition (2017) of the “Tree Care Manual.”

Bloomington hopes to soon have a complete on-line tree inventory, eventually accessible to the public, listing every individual street tree by species, size, condition and location. Ongoing efforts include choosing and planting appropriate trees in the remaining 4,000 empty tree spaces along Bloomington’s 500 miles of streets. Neighborhood associations and the Tree Commission as well as the City Parks Foundation are all working on filling those empty spaces with the right trees. New planting and maintenance of the existing urban forest are all overseen by the City Urban Forester, Lee Huss [[hussl@bloomington.in.gov](mailto:hussl@bloomington.in.gov), (812) 349-3716].

## Books of Interest

### CORPORATIONS AND THE MEDIA - Kate Cruikshank

Operating on the assumption that corporate infiltration of just about everything and the demise of genuine journalism are two major threats to our democracy, here are a couple of books that may be of interest.

A new book by Senator Sheldon Whitehouse with Melanie Wachtell Stinnett, *Captured: The Corporate Infiltration of American Democracy* (2017), provides both a slightly more historical view of how we have gotten to where we are and a broader view of the infiltration of corporate power into all branches and agencies of our government. The perspective of Whitehouse as a senator is particularly helpful in his analysis. One wishes for a bit more concrete advice on approaches to changing the situation, but the identification within the text of the groups and individuals whose influence needs to be countered is helpful. The bulk of the book was written before the 2016 election, but a lengthy epilogue applies the points made in the book to the 2016 election, ending with the following:

So, please, let's wake up and get off the couch. There are plenty of groups out there that want your participation. There are plenty of issues out there that need your voice. There are plenty of tentacles creeping around that need to be spotlighted and driven out. Find the ones that move you, and engage.

The effects of the corporate infiltration of the media is the subject of John Nichols and Robert W McChesney's *Tragedy & Farce: How the American Media Sell Wars, Spin Elections, and Destroy Democracy (and What You Can Do to Change Things)* (2005). Reading a twelve-year-old book that could have been written yesterday is not necessarily encouraging, but after detailing the demise of journalism in coverage of the Iraq war and the 2004 election, the authors conclude with a lengthy chapter entitled "Media for a People Who Intend to Be Their Own Governors" and the struggle for a reform that they believe is possible if we are willing to engage in it.

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