

# League of Women Voters Bloomington – Monroe County

## League Letter – October 2017

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### Calendar

- October 3      Redistricting Committee meeting, MCPL Room 1C, 7:00–9:00 pm
- October 5      Constitution 101 (first session), MCPL Room 1B, 6:30–8:30 pm
- October 8      Member meeting, MCPL Room 1C, 2:00–3:30 pm
- October 9      ~~Board meeting, Bell Trace Private Dining Room, 7:00 pm~~ CANCELLED
- October 19     MCCSC board work session, 315 North Dr., 5:30 pm
- November 12   Member meeting, MCPL Room 2A, 2:00–3:30 pm
- November 13   Board meeting, Bell Trace Private Dining Room, 7:00 pm
- November 20   Presentation by VoteSmart’s Richard Kimball, MCPL Auditorium, 7:00 pm
- December 10   Member meeting, MCPL Room 1C, 2:00–3:30 pm
- December 11   Board meeting, Bell Trace Private Dining Room, 7:00 pm

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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



When the League of Women Voters was founded, one of its pillars quickly became education, which meant first self-education and then education of the public. I was reminded of this as I sat in the MCCSC board meeting on September 26, listening to MCCSC attorney Tom Bunger talk about the decisions made in 1994 about school board districts, what the alternative options are, and what is involved in the process of change. It is easy to feel overwhelmed by what seem to be very complicated problems and, particularly in an age when we seem to worship expertise, to feel that we can't possibly tackle them. And I was getting precariously close to feeling that way.

It wasn't a comfortable feeling because I knew that during the presidency of Nancy Lumbley (1991–1996), the League was very much involved in the definition of school board districts. I have also been going through League records from the 1970s and 1980s, when members were tackling very difficult and complex problems in city and county government such as water quality and PCB residues. They weren't geniuses or specialists in those areas; they were just extremely dedicated people who knew that if they didn't do the work, it might well not be done.

So I got to thinking about how they must have gone about their work. I suppose, judging from the documents, that the first thing was to identify what they didn't know and needed to, and then to figure out how to get that information. They were problem-solvers and organizers—they were almost all managing families, and some of them had careers as well—and they worked together to compile that information and create plans of action. The results were letters to officials, appearances at local government meetings, and tenacity—and the respect of the community for the League as a force to be reckoned with.

So as I wondered whether the League, as the community's only political nonpartisan organization, might once again be asked to be part of working through the problem of fair representation in the MCCSC school board districts, I began to realize that we have the same potential as those earlier members and, in many cases, past and present careers of researching, planning, and organizing as well. We can figure this out. We can become the experts. It all starts with figuring out what we need to know—the self-education that leads to the basis for action and ultimately to education of the public. This is the League. This is who we are.

## League Updates

### REPORT FROM THE LWVIN – Kate Cruikshank

There are at least two new Indiana Leagues developing, one in Hancock County, which is almost ready to become a full-fledged local League, and one in Dearborn and Ohio counties that is just beginning but is being led by two very dynamic young women who are already heavily engaged in the political affairs of their community. There are specific steps for a new League to go through to establish its infrastructure and procedures, and Dearborn-Ohio County is already well on its way.

LWVIN issue advocates are busy tracking the work of the interim study committees of the Indiana General Assembly and testifying as the opportunity presents itself, particularly in the areas of emphasis identified by the 2017 LWVIN Convention, namely redistricting, gun safety, voter rights, and environmental issues. These study committees can be expected to generate draft legislation for presentation in the next session, so their work provides a preview of what we can expect in January.

The work of the LWVIN Education Committee, which led us through consensus on high-stakes testing, has been on hiatus due to the illness of its chair but will soon be regrouping to focus on the next step in building the foundation for fighting back the privatization of public schooling. So we should look for more activity on that front in the coming year.

Finally, co-presidents Patsy Hoyer and Oscar Anderson have been conducting regional workshops around the state that have a large listening component in the hopes of nurturing more communication with and among local Leagues. Their hope is that as we become more adept at building a statewide network, our ability to coordinate our efforts to influence legislation will make the League an even more significant force at the statehouse.

## Reports on Program

### CONSTITUTION 101 COURSE *FULL* – Ann Birch



Reaction to the Constitution 101 course being offered at the Monroe County Public Library was enthusiastic. The course is now full with a waiting list. The first session meets on October 5, continuing through November 9 with six sessions. The course is being presented under the guidance of Robert Leming, National Director of the *We the People* program and Graduate Studies Professor at Kansas State University.

We are able to sponsor this civic education opportunity to the public thanks to a generous gift to the Bloomington-Monroe County League from 50-year member Bertina Rudman.

## REDISTRICTING PRESENTATION PLANNED – Tomi Allison

The Redistricting Committee will meet October 3, from 7:00–9:00 pm, in Room 1C at the Monroe County Public Library. Bloomington-Monroe County League President Kate Cruikshank will give an interactive presentation on redistricting reform. Any League member interested in being a host or presenter for the redistricting reform house parties is encouraged to attend.

We could use some additional help with the house parties. One of the challenges is determining the best way to be able to connect to the Internet and also show information on a TV or screen in different households with different connection and video situations. If you are computer hardware savvy and would like to help with this, please contact Ann Birch, [annbirch@gmail.com](mailto:annbirch@gmail.com).

## IT'S TIME TO UPDATE SCHOOL BOARD DISTRICTS – Deborah Myerson



Twenty-three years ago, the current seven MCCSC school board districts were carefully crafted in consultation with the League of Women Voters of Bloomington–Monroe County to achieve equal populations of about 7500 residents per district. Why were these new board districts established in 1994? Because there were major differences in the population of the board districts at that time: Some had 20,000 or 30,000 residents, while others had only 2,500. In the past two decades, population growth and migration have produced wide population disparities again: some board districts now have over 22,000 residents, while others have less than 12,000.

The Community Committee for Educational Equity (CCEE), an informal coalition of parents, educators, and residents of Monroe County, has initiated an effort to rectify this situation by requesting that the MCCSC School Board appoint a review committee to examine the school board districts. Appointing a review committee is simply an important duty of responsible governance for our community's public schools. These gross disparities have a troubling, chilling effect on the democratic process at the heart of our public school system. Attracting candidates can be a serious problem, as illustrated by at least one uncontested school board race each election cycle.

The CCEE seeks to maintain a robust public school system that provides a high-quality education with breadth and depth of opportunity to all students, regardless of race or family income. At the September 26 school board meeting, we had nine powerful voices speaking on behalf of improving the democratic process for the school board, and we definitely made an impact. Several board members were vocal in their support, but others felt they needed more time. The board placed the topic on the agenda for the Thursday, October 19, work session at 5:30 pm at 315 North Drive, the MCCSC administration building.

We invite supporters to come and be present at this meeting. Even though there is no public comment at work sessions, the witness and accountability are important! The wheels of change can be mighty slow, but they are indeed moving.

## Voter Services

### VOTE SMART PRESENTATION NOVEMBER 20 – Kate Cruikshank

*We think so highly of Vote Smart that we are distributing their materials to all of our affiliates." - *

*"Experts nearly all recommend Vote Smart." – *

*"Vote Smart is a bright light in an often desultory civic culture." - Bill Moyer*

Save the date! On November 20, Vote Smart's president, Richard Kimball, will be giving the only Indiana presentation on a Midwest tour at the Monroe County Public Library auditorium at 7:00 pm. If you aren't familiar with Vote Smart, check it out at [www.votesmart.org](http://www.votesmart.org). It's a huge nonpartisan project aimed at providing information on all candidates at national, state, and local levels based on their actions only, rather than on their campaign material or what is said about them. The website enables anyone to enter a 9-digit zip code and gain access to the biography, votes, positions, ratings, speeches, and funding information for each of their elected officials. It is a work in progress, but the bottom line is that it is based on facts and figures only.

What Kimball will be introducing on November 20 is a new tool called *On Point*, which will enable citizens to take any major issue facing Congress and instantly access over their cell phones any of the votes, public remarks, issue positions, relevant biographical background, campaign contributions, and even special interest ratings their representatives have made related to that issue. As Kimball describes it, "The creation of this kind of Voter's Self-Defense System, in this environment that is so poisoned with false and misleading facts, is our generation's greatest challenge. We must build it with such errorless accuracy that every frustrated right-wing conservative and left-wing liberal can turn to it in absolute confidence."

Kimball's presentation will be part of our ongoing collaboration with the Monroe County Public Library.

## Civic Education

### LEAGUE ENGAGES WITH LOCAL YOUTH PROGRAM – Elaine Gaul

Back in June, President Kate Cruikshank, along with League members Allison Zimpfer-Hoerr (Youth Services Bureau/Monroe County Youth Council) and Kathy Loser (chair of the Civic Education Committee) approached the Civic Education Committee with a proposed partnership between the League and the [Monroe County Youth Council](#). The committee agreed this was a wonderful opportunity to introduce students to the League and its activities.

The MCYC is a program that connects students from area high schools (North, South, Edgewood, The Academy of Science and Entrepreneurship, and Bloomington Graduation School) with partner organizations. Students contribute volunteer hours (two or three hours per student per month) to their selected organization. The organization provides meaningful activities for their volunteers—something that is both a learning experience for the student and fills a need for the organization.

On September 23, the MCYC held this year’s introductory event. Seventy students assembled to hear seven partner organizations present their profiles and give a synopsis of their volunteer opportunities. Two Civic Education Committee members, Josephine McCormick and Elaine Gaul, spoke for the League, offering two volunteer options: taking voter registration training and organizing voter registration drives, or monitoring a monthly city or county meeting through Observer Corps.

Nine volunteers signed on with us. Several of our volunteers seemed excited to hear that anyone 16 or older can join the League, and at least one volunteer so far has asked to put in extra hours and do *both* voter registration and Observer Corps!

As our next step, the Civic Education Committee will hold an orientation for the students to get to know them and to give them a more in-depth look at what the League is all about. This will be held in October. The following month we’ll set up voter registration and Observer Corps training for our crew, and by December they’ll begin putting in their service hours. Within a few months, the Committee and the volunteers together will also start working out ideas for the program’s capstone event, Global Youth Services Day (April 20), when the League and its volunteer team will host approximately 50 high school students for a four-hour service activity.

We’re definitely looking forward to working with this interested and enthusiastic group!

## Membership

### **BUILDING OUR LEAGUE – Ann Heath**

We have had wonderful growth in our League membership in the past year—new members have brought enthusiasm, energy, and great new ideas! We also have a somewhat larger number of long-term members who are seasoned in the “League way” of doing things, and have knowledge of past emphases and accomplishments in the Bloomington-Monroe County League.

We need to talk! It’s important, as the League grows, for us all to have the opportunity to know one another better. We need to talk about what we hope to see the League accomplish and how each of us might want to be involved. We need to find out the best ways to communicate with different people and to share the League’s work with others in the community. To this end, we are planning a series of small-group meetings for later in the fall. We hope to announce meeting dates soon—and hope that you will accept the invitation to attend!

### ***Welcome New Members***

Welcome to these new members who have joined us in last two months:

- Cynthia Brabson
- Cathy Counsilman
- Patty Denison
- Susan Glowacz
- Julie Gray
- Margaret Harter

### ***Renewal Time***

If you have not yet renewed your membership, the time is here. You can download a membership form at: <http://bmcilwv.org/pdfs/LWVBMC-Form-Membership-2017-2018.pdf>.

## **Observer Reports**

### **REPORT ON PLAN COMMISSION – Joyce Pace**

At the September 11 meeting of the City Plan Commission, the third hearing took place on the petition for two four-story apartment buildings on E. Third and S. Grant Streets. Despite architectural improvements, planned retail along Grant Street, sustainable features, and commitment of 15% affordable/workforce housing, significant concerns remained among Plan Commission members for this Annex Student Living project.



Primary was the issue of compatibility of these buildings with the adjoining Restaurant Row historic district. Several members of the Historic Preservation Commission spoke in opposition, urging that the petition be denied. Members of the Plan Commission expressed appreciation for the improvements the petitioner had made. However, after over two hours of discussion, a motion was made to deny the petition. It was based on the site of these two buildings being out of character in a prominent location next to the historic district and, therefore, inconsistent with the city's Growth Policies Plan and the Unified Development Ordinance. Of the eight Plan Commission members present, five voted to approve this motion to deny the petition; three voted in opposition to the motion. Therefore, with the five votes needed to approve, the motion was passed and the petition was denied. Legally, this Annex Student Living project could be presented again at a future date but would require substantial changes to be considered.

### **REPORT ON THE BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS – Diedre Todd**

The Board of Park Commissioners met on September 19. The proposed general fund budget was presented. After several years of not asking for an increase, this year the department is asking for a 9% increase. Areas for which they want the increases are the following:

- Personnel (They want to increase the salaries for seasonal workers.)
- Supplies (1% increase)

- Other services (city trails, urban forestry, emerald borer problem, mowing; 21 more mowing sights have been added to the department's list, which makes 42 total)
- Capital outlays (equipment replacement)

The budget being submitted is \$7,741,032, which is a \$665,130 increase over last year.

Other actions:

- The Weimer Lake dam will be removed. The DNR has determined that it is unsafe and restoring it is a multimillion-dollar project. It is also difficult to insure. When drained, the land will be restored. Bids will be taken in October and a choice will be made in November.
- There are 13 Park Department sites on the Energy System Group solar projects.
- The Holiday Market, which is the Saturday after Thanksgiving, will have \$5 dollar carriage rides this year.
- The Bloomington Pumpkin Launch will be at the fairgrounds on November 4. The cost is \$10 per car.
- Total attendance throughout the summer for Banneker 2017 Summer Camp was 3089, an increase of 424 over last year. The daily attendance was about 80. This camp provides meals, a safe fun environment, skill acquisition, and a field trip every Friday.

## IN MEMORIAM



League member Virginia "Ginny" (Davies) Ollis Gest, 85, died suddenly September 18, 2017, in her home at Meadowood Retirement Community. Ginny was a warm, intelligent person, who formed friendships easily and who was passionate about happenings in the world around her. Her daughter, Cynthia Roberts, recalled how her mother and Deborah Robinson developed deep, caring bonds with each other through a sewing group the three joined at church. Ginny had a lively, inquisitive intellect that led her actively to pursue many areas of study and service. Up to her final weeks, she attended monthly lectures on current world events, after reading the "Great Decisions" manual developed by

the Foreign Policy Association. She was very active in many organizations, including the League of Women Voters, as well as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. Ginny attended as many League meetings as she could and was an active participant in the discussions. She and her insightful comments will be missed by all who knew her.

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