

The
OTER

VOLUME 44 NUMBER 9

October 2005

Calendar (League activities in bold)

October 2005

11 Tu 7:30-9 p.m. **6th District Legislative Debate**
Gibbsboro School auditorium. Please join us!

18 Tu 6:00 p.m. County Freeholder Caucus
16th floor, Camden Co. Courthouse, Camden

20 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
Homestead Youth Association Pennsauken

November 2005

2 W 7:30 p.m. **LWVCC Board Meeting**
Home of Annette Dorf-Hills

15 Tu 6:00 p.m. County Freeholder Caucus
16th floor, Camden Co. Courthouse, Camden

16 W 10:00 a.m. **Voter Registration**
After the naturalization ceremony, Federal
Courthouse, Camden.

17 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
The Camden Technology Center/Learning
Theater, 601 Cooper St. Camden NJ

19 Sa 8:30 - 3 pm **85th Anniversary Conference**
Come help us celebrate women's suffrage at
the Trenton Marriot and War Memorial.

December 2005

7 W 6:30-9 **Program Planning/Holiday Party**
Home of Bobbie Porter

At its Oct. 2005 meeting the LWVCC board:

1. Agreed to explore establishing a committee to look into benefits provided illegally to Camden County employees.
2. Agreed to pay \$100 to become an official member of the South Jersey Regional Equity Organizing Project.
3. Agreed to invite Judy Cambria to speak to us about school construction funding issues, with the aim to possibly undertaking local action.

**Have you renewed your
membership?**

Pretty soon I'll be purging my list of non-renewed members for the e-mailed *Voter*. The membership book is almost ready to print. And we need every member! If you've been putting off renewal, please don't wait any longer!

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CAMDEN COUNTY

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

The annual kickoff was a very successful event. I want to thank all the League members and guests who came out to welcome our state Executive Director, Danzey Burnham, and a special thanks to our League participants. Ms. Burnham's message addressed the major issues with the School Construction Corporation and the progress of charter schools. Ms. Burnham appealed to members of the Camden County League to join the various program committees that have been established for the 2005-06 program year. For those who wish to participate, but have travel constraints, the committees are set up to receive electronic and teleconferencing communication. For more on Ms. Burnham's presentation and the rest of the Kickoff meeting, see Anne Maiese's report on page 3.

Some of you may not be aware, but the League called a press conference on September 28th to express its concern that the School Construction Corporation has mismanaged the funds allocated for new school construction. Presently the Inspector General's Office is scrutinizing the School Construction Corporation and hearings are being held to address these concerns. The League of Women Voters advocated for and supported the establishment of a school construction program, but is very disappointed and outraged over the mismanagement and waste of government funds. The School Construction Corporation has exhausted its allocated funds and has had to shelve over 200 projects because the funds are no longer there. At our most recent board meeting the Camden County League voted to take a closer look at the ramifications and long-range impact that this loss of funding will have on Camden County schools.

The League of Women Voters of New Jersey Fiscal Policy position promotes limits on taxation and spending by municipal, county, school and state governments. Unfortunately, Camden County local government has paid out over 30 million dollars for benefits that should never have been offered. The League board voted to exam the feasibility of an in-depth review to determine what impact, if any, this will have on Camden County residents. A major concern is that the state pension plan is facing a two billion dollar shortfall that has a negative impact on the state's ability to balance the budget. It is more alarming when we are faced with the same concerns at the local level. Who pays for all of this?

As you can see, the scope and depth of these fiscal problems are severe and if allowed to continue will ultimately lead to a more repressive system of taxation.

Ann Saunders

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization of men and women that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

The League of Women Voters of Camden County, LWVCC Voice Mail Line: (856) 795-7878

President: Ann Saunders (856) 232-1041 Voter Editor: Ed Gracely (856) 629-2869
1st Vice President: Lisa Castellani (609) 239-4947 Voter Distributor: Barbara Sielaff
2nd Vice President: Rosemary Leach (856) 354-8009

Web site: <http://www.lwvnj.org/camdencounty> e-mail: lwvcc@hotmail.com

***The VOTER* is published ten times a year to keep the membership and public informed of the activities of the League of Women Voters of Camden County. For subscription or membership information call (856) 795-7878.**

“The League At Work”

LWVCC Kickoff Report

Anne Maiese

“The League has important work to do on the issues facing New Jersey, and each member’s contribution is important.” This was the message Danzey Burnham, the new Executive Director of LWVNJ, gave LWVCC members and prospects on September 28 at the Cherry Hill Library. Members of the LWVCC Board also outlined upcoming local activities and the opportunities to participate.

Among the many issues facing New Jersey, the League is concentrating on several related to education and fiscal policy. The recent Attorney General’s report on waste and mismanagement by the School Construction Corporation has prompted a strong response from the League. We were instrumental in getting the fund established in 1997 and are outraged that so much public money has been taken away from needy schools. A League representative will now attend all meetings of the Corporation to monitor its activities. We have reaffirmed our support for adequate facilities in *all* districts, and have proposed a surcharge on the New Jersey income tax to fund them.

Meanwhile several committees are working on the education issues mandated at our April convention. One has been evaluating charter schools and the extent to which they are providing innovative methods to the public schools, visiting several to get a first-hand look. Their report should be ready next spring. The committee studying school regionalization has begun its work also, and both groups welcome new members. Much of the research can be done at home without attending meetings, and Danzey encouraged everyone who is interested to contact her.

Lisa Castellani invited members to become trained as moderators, Winnie Rowell-Bullard

outlined Voters Service activities, Ed Gracely urged members to contribute to *The Voter*, and Deborah Berkowitz explained the process of orienting new members.

Members of the audience asked about the positions of gubernatorial candidates on property taxes, commented on the Clean Election experiment, and declared that the state pension system needs the attention of the League. Danzey pointed out the E-Voter alerts members to opportunities to become informed and to take action on many of these issues.

Getting there - Directions!

Camden County Courthouse: Take 676 north to Mickle Blvd. Flow right at the fork (don’t go on Campbell Place), then turn right onto 5th street in a few blocks. The courthouse is at 5th and Federal, a block up from Mickle.

Camden, Federal Courthouse: 4th and Cooper, but we generally car pool. Call 856-795-7878 if you’re interested. *About 3-4 blocks from the City Hall PATCO station.*

Gibbsboro School: 37 Kirkwood Road. From 295, take Exit 32, onto 561 Haddonfield Berlin Road toward Berlin. Go about 3.5 miles. Turn left onto Washington St; go about 0.1 mile. Bear right onto Kirkwood Rd; go about 0.1 mile. School is on the left.

Pennsauken, Homestead Youth Association: Route 38 west, exit onto Cuthbert toward Merchantville. Pass Courier-Post on Cuthbert (also called Magnolia), then take next little road left. In a block, turn left onto Clayton. Watch for signs.

Voorhees, Vogelson Regional Library: Driving south on 30, turn left onto Somerdale Road, just above the Echelon Mall. Go under the train bridge in about a half mile, then turn right onto Burnt Mill. Soon turn left onto Laurel Road. The library is on your right. Burnt Mill Road also crosses 544 (Evesham Road) north of the library and White Horse Road (an extension of Springdale) south of it. If you know where the Echelon Mall is, you’re home!

**THE ROLE OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT IN
OUR DAILY LIVES**
Part 1
Camden County Administrator
Ross G. Angilella

County Government is probably something of a mystery to most people. It is not widely addressed in school, particularly as compared to the state and federal governments. Furthermore, the structure of county government is not uniform – it often differs from county to county. By contrast, state and federal governments are fairly uniform, with their neat divisions between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches.

Still, county government is important. For many Americans, including Camden County residents, it is their prime source of many key public services. In our County, these include the offices of the Prosecutor, Sheriff and Fire Marshal, the County Jail and Youth Center; the 911 Emergency Communications Center; the maintenance and snow plowing of county roads and bridges; the operation of county parks; provision of cultural events and entertainment; mosquito control; and the administration of Camden County College, the Vocational School, and library system. County government also provides many health services including free flu shots; inspection of restaurants and other businesses that sell food and alcohol; drug treatment; services to children, senior and disabled citizens, and veterans; operation of the County Animal Shelter; and a wide variety of economic development and job training services that benefit our local economy. All of these programs and much more are provided with an eye toward the most efficient use of taxpayer dollars to get these jobs done.

In New Jersey, county government is run by a Board of Freeholders. In every other state in the country, freeholders are known as county commissioners. New Jersey is unique in referring to its elected county officials as freeholders. Unlike the federal and state governments, county freeholder boards perform the legislative and executive functions of county government as well as some judicial functions. County government is therefore more compact than either its federal or state counterparts.

The Camden County Board of Freeholders consists of seven members, each of whom serves a three year term. They are all elected at large, meaning voters of the whole County get to choose each one. Their terms are staggered, however, so that the whole Board is not up for re-election in any one year. Each Freeholder is assigned as a liaison to several County departments. In this way he or she becomes particularly knowledgeable about these departments and exercises an oversight function over them to the benefit of the Board as a whole. In many counties, the Board is headed by a chief executive officer called the County Executive who is elected by the people. There is no such position in Camden County, although one of the Freeholders is also designated Director by the Board, and takes on additional functions more akin to a chairman than a CEO. The County has an appointed Administrator who, along with four Deputy Administrators, actually runs the departments, and prepares the annual County budget.

LWVUS Report: Next Steps on Election Reform

Report on a Forum Sponsored by The League of Women Voters Education Fund and The McCormick Tribune Foundation (March 2005)

To read the full report, visit:

http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Voter_Information2&Template=/TaggedPage/TaggedPageDisplay.cfm&TPLID=41&ContentID=1954

PROVISIONAL BALLOTING: CASTING AND COUNTING.

Forum participants expressed the belief that provisional ballots are an important innovation in election administration – in 2004, more than 1.6 million people cast provisional ballots instead of being turned away at the polls. However, the procedures and standards that states used to qualify and count these ballots varied widely. In addition, the fact that so many people had to cast provisional ballots, presumably because their names could not be found on the voter rolls, highlights deeper flaws in the voter registration system.

STATEWIDE REGISTRATION LISTS: THE NEXT BIG ISSUE.

The Help America Vote Act requires that all states create a statewide computerized voter registration database by January 2006. Forum participants agreed that these databases, if done right, hold the potential to reduce registration-related problems and help elections run more smoothly. But many states are behind in getting their databases up and running and there is little agreement on how a good database should work.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE: POLLING PLACE OPERATIONS.

Election Day 2004 proved a stressful experience in many polling places across the country. Underlying the problems were fundamental management issues, such as ensuring that polling places have the necessary people and equipment to meet demand. Forum participants agreed that poll worker recruitment and training efforts are woefully inadequate to the task of staffing 200,000 polling sites and ensuring efficient and fair elections. Participants also discussed entirely new approaches to polling place operations that are designed to put the “service” back in “voter service.”

VOTING TECHNOLOGIES: TODAY AND TOMORROW

Traditionally, most Americans have paid little attention to voting technologies. But not any more. After the 2000 election, the nation became intimately familiar with the pluses and minuses of the wide variety of technologies Americans use to cast their ballots – from punch card voting and optical scan systems to electronic voting technologies. Participants in the forum highlighted the tradeoffs associated with various technologies, agreeing that no single system provides all the answers. In addition, they emphasized the role of state and federal officials in providing resources, guidance and technical assistance to localities that are trying to make their way through the voting technology maze.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Professionalization. This includes uniform standards, training to the standards, and accountability. Professionalization also means rethinking how we recruit and train poll workers, especially because we now depend on an aging volunteer workforce. And, it means reimagining the polling place — today, we are working with a 19th Century model, but imposing 21st Century expectations upon it.
2. A new focus on service. We seem to have forgotten that government has a responsibility to help voters, that voting should not be an inconvenience for people, and that the voter – the customer – should come first.
3. Research and development. We need improvements in ballot design, in the interface between the voter and the machine, and in error rates. And we need to look at which systems hold the greatest promise, and which are nearing a technological dead end. The League of Women Voters believes that voting technologies must be secure, accurate, recountable and accessible. The development of systems that fully meet these goals will come only through a much more serious R&D commitment, as well as clear performance standards.
4. New federal resources and commitment. America needs to get real about the resources that are required to run elections in a manner consistent with our democratic ideals. You get what you pay for, and right now we are paying the price for our miserly approach to election administration. We need continued, permanent federal funding, with associated oversight, to make the transition to a 21st Century system that delivers on the promise of efficiency, security, accessibility and fairness.

LWVNJ Fall Workshops

Saturday, October 15, 2005

Douglass College Center
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ

Come join fellow League members from all over the state for a morning of learning, updating, and networking. Hear our keynote speaker, Jennifer Langer, update us on the status of Charter Schools in New Jersey. Sign up for one of six morning workshops. Save the date, and help the state League spread the word. Registration forms will be mailed to each League member in early September.

October 15th Schedule:

8:30 – 9:00 Registration/Continental Breakfast

9:00 – 9:05 President's Welcome

9:05 – 10:00 Keynote Address: Jennifer Langer, NJ Charter Public Schools Assoc. (See below).

10:15 – 12:15 Workshops (choose one)

10:15 – 1:15 Discussion Leader Training

12:15 – 1:15 Optional lunch and President's Workshop

Morning Workshops (Subject to change):

Libby Sharpe Memorial Discussion Leader Training

Public Speaking

Running and Winning (Led by our own Anne Maiese)

Government Issues

Membership Recruitment & Retention

Fiscal Policy and Ed. Comm. Update

Lunch Session

President's Roundtable

Registration Fees:

By Oct. 1st, 2005 **\$25**

After Oct. 1st, 2005 **\$30**

*Lunchbox (must be preordered): **\$10**

Keynote Address:

Jennifer Langer, *Executive Director*
NJ Charter Public Schools Association
“The Status of New Jersey Charter Schools”

Starting with a brief history of Charter Schools in New Jersey, Ms. Langer will discuss the new "Quality Standards" developed for Charter Schools, the physical facilities, funding issues and new innovations. The 2005 LWVNJ State Convention approved an update of the Charter Schools position. Ms. Langer's address is the first part of this update.

Call for County Meeting Attendees

Q: What activity do many Leagues do regularly, and the Camden County League only occasionally?

A: Attend and report on local governmental meetings.

We should be doing this more often!

As a county League, the bodies most of interest to our members as a whole are those at the county level. Some examples of meetings that are open to the public:

1. **Freeholder meetings and caucuses:** These are listed in the *Voter*. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to fully understand the decisions made at these meetings, because there is little discussion of the proposed resolutions, and they are often voted upon in blocks. Anyone who plans to attend a Freeholder meeting should try to obtain a copy of the agenda, ideally in advance. Review it, looking for topics of interest to the League, like open space purchases or major funding allocations. See if any of them generate controversy -- sometimes other attendees will ask questions about specific items.

Anyone recognizably a League member (whether wearing a button, or known to be there for the League) should **strictly refrain from commenting** on proposed resolutions or asking questions that imply a position (“Why doesn’t the resolution call for more funding for the libraries, which badly need it?”). Even if you preface this with, “Speaking for myself”, you may still be seen as implicitly representing a League view

Simple questions, are, with caution, appropriate. For example, “What kind of voting machines has the county purchased -- in other words, what features do they have?” Or “Can you explain resolution 23? It’s not clear to me who is receiving the funding.”. In general, it is easier to ask questions at a regular Freeholder meeting than at a caucus. The latter are business sessions and you have to arrange in advance to speak, whereas regular Freeholder meetings have public portions built in.

2. **CC Municipal Utilities Authority (CCMUA)** meets monthly, typically on a Monday evening at 6. The CCMUA makes decisions that affect all of us. Their agendas and minutes are online.
3. **CC Library Commission:** Also meets monthly. Some meetings are around the county, others in the Vogelsson Library (Voorhees branch). I know we have members very interested in library issues. Does anyone attend these sessions?
4. **Open space advisory commission:** This is a topic near and dear to League members. Wouldn’t some of you like to go, attend a meeting, and tell us what is currently happening vis-à-vis open space preservation?

I would love to have some reports on these meetings for the *Voter*. If you do so, please remember to write in a way that will be clear and interesting to someone who wasn’t there. Most League members will not want to read an article that emphasizes the awards and recognitions given to residents at a Freeholder meeting, for example, or that uses jargon from the meeting or the agenda. Explain, elaborate, and be selective. What was *interesting* in the meeting? Don’t worry about deadlines -- I can always use an article in a future issue if it’s too late for the upcoming one. A few hundred words is about right -- half a page or so. I hope to hear from some of you!