

The
OTER

VOLUME 45 NUMBER 5

May 2006

Calendar (League activities in bold)

May 2006

- 18 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
Barrington Municipal Bldg.
- 20 Sa 12:30-3 **LWVCC Annual Meeting**
Cherry Hill -- Clarion Hotel. Were you there?
See report on page 3.

June 2006

- 7 W 7 p.m. **LWVCC Board Meeting**
- 20 Tu 6 p.m. County Freeholder Caucus
16th floor, Camden Co. Courthouse, Camden
- 22 Th 7:00 p.m. County Freeholder Meeting
Winslow Township Municipal Building

At its May 2006 meeting the LWVCC board:

1. Established a program planning committee to meet before the June board meeting.

2. Agreed to e-mail members to solicit their opinions about a proposed national study (and dues increase to pay for it).
3. Finalized plans for the Annual Meeting.

**2006 Edition of NJ CITIZENS
GUIDE TO GOVERNMENT**

is HERE

Place your Order Now!

\$5.00 per copy to have them mailed to you.

The Guide is filled with information about registration and voting procedures, political parties, county, state, and local government, the New Jersey courts, and legislative districts. It lists state administrators and the names, addresses, and telephone and fax numbers of the New Jersey congressional delegation and all state legislators.

Call the League Line (856-795-7878) or send a check with \$5 for each copy ordered to League of Women Voters of Camden County, Box 245, Voorhees, NJ 08043. Bulk discounts (10 or more) are available.

THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CAMDEN COUNTY

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE:



As our state government attempts to address the rising property tax and fiscal issues that seem to plague us all, a number of communities are struggling with the appropriate use of eminent domain. The right of local governments to use this option for public projects like roads and schools has never been in doubt, but in its “Kelo” ruling, the state Supreme Court gave municipalities the right to use eminent domain to take residential properties even for redevelopment projects. Local governments argue that redevelopment of blighted areas will improve the whole community, but the public benefits are not as obvious as in more traditional eminent domain uses, and redevelopment heavily benefits private developers.

Several communities in Camden County are already beginning to feel the effects of this decision. One battleground has been the city of Camden’s Cramer Hill neighborhood. As waterfront property, this area is one of the most desirable pieces of real estate in the county. The Cramer Hill renaissance was to include a golf course, luxury condominiums, and a marina, including luxury shops and restaurants. This redevelopment effort would have displaced 1,200 households if local government had successfully enforced eminent domain. The city argued that provisions would be made to house those people; the residents were not convinced, and were very unhappy about what they saw as flaws in the process. The Cramer Hill residents came together and appealed to the Superior Court to block the local government’s redevelopment project. The Superior Court ruled in March in favor of the residents, blocking the redevelopment on a technicality. The court has since refused to reconsider its decision, which is a major victory for the residents of Cramer Hill.

The issues surrounding eminent domain are complex, and the NJ League has not studied it. I do think it is a topic on which we all need to be well informed. Legislation is being proposed that would restrict what some call the “abuse” of eminent domain (but which others consider an essential part of revitalizing downtrodden areas). For example, S-211/A-2423 places a temporary moratorium of 48 months on certain uses of eminent domain and will create an eminent domain study commission to examine its use statewide.

Whatever we may think of the outcome, Cramer Hill’s community effort is a perfect example of what can be done when people join together to take a stand on an issue that matters to them. Remember that one part of the League’s fundamental purpose is to encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government. They certainly did just that!

Ann Saunders, President

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.

Getting there - Directions!

Barrington, Municipal Building: 229 Trenton Ave.

Take 295 to Route 130 (White Horse Pike). This is a complex intersection that puts you onto Route 30 a bit south of Route 41/273, Clements-Bridge Road. So, go north on 30 for a short distance, look for the left turn to 41 and go there. Trenton Ave is on your right in a few blocks.

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.*

Cherry Hill -- Clarion Hotel: Take Route 295 to exit 34B, onto Route 70 west. The hotel is 100 yards from the exit, on your right. If you are coming east on Route 70, make the jug handle at Covered Bridge Road to cross Route 70 to the hotel.

Haddon Township: Rohrer Library: Take 295 to Route 30 north. On 30, pass King's Highway. In about a mile after King's Highway, just after Nicholson Road on the left, you'll see Cuthbert Road on the right. Turn right onto Cuthbert from 30. Stay on Cuthbert for about half a mile. Just past Hopkins, turn right onto MacArthur. The library is at that corner. // This is the same Cuthbert Road that becomes Cuthbert Blvd further north at routes 70 and 38, so you could take it south from there. MacArthur is about 0.8 miles south of Haddon Avenue on Cuthbert Blvd.

Winslow Township Municipal Building: Take Route 73 South into Winslow. Pass Route 30 (White Horse Pike). Continue on 73 for another 5 miles or so. When you see signs to 536 (not the one near route 30) and Beebetown Road, you're a mile or so away. The complex will be on your right, near mile marker 10.

LWVCC Annual Meeting Reforming the Pay-to-Play System in New Jersey

The annual meeting took place on May 20, 2006. If you weren't there, we missed you!

We heard an excellent introduction to reforming pay-to-play by our speaker, Ed McCool. Watch for the details on his talk in the June-July Voter.

Bill Skinner presented the budget, which will require at least one unspecified fund-raiser to make income equal revenue. Our budget does not raise dues even though we expect that the LWVUS will increase the "per member payments" it requires from local Leagues at the national convention in June.

A new board was approved by the membership. We welcome Anne Simonoff as a newly-elected director, Phyllis Black in a new position as Second Vice President, and Mary Ann Bascou as our new Treasurer. Several other names were recommended to the board for appointment. Watch for a complete list after the August board meeting, when appointments for the new League year will be made.

The local program was approved (see the program section of your membership book for a listing).

President Saunders discussed some of the achievements of the year, such as registering over 300 voters (alone or in collaboration with other groups), moderating numerous forums, answering over 125 questions on the League Line, publishing 10 issues of the *Voter*, holding (with collaborators) the *Running & Winning* workshop, and maintaining our website:

<http://www.lwvnj.org/camdencounty>

She noted that membership declined this year, and asks everyone to keep in mind trying to increase it. She would very much like to see a televised forum in the fall, and more trained moderators so we can expand our moderating services even further.

LWVNJ Helps Girl Scouts Find “the Leader Inside”



Anne Maiese

When I participated in the Girl Scouts Conference, "Finding the Leader Inside," on May 6, 2006, I found that the activities used in our “*Running & Winning*”

Workshop worked well for a variety of ages. Sponsored by Princeton Troup #1499, the conference drew about 60 girls from central New Jersey, grades 7-12, with most in grades 7-9. After registration and breakfast, we all met in the Senate Chamber of the Statehouse, a setting that was quite impressive. Standing at the podium where Senate President Codey presides, I moderated a panel of distinguished women who answered questions from me and from the girls about leadership. Assemblywoman Linda Greenstein, District 14 (Monroe, Hamilton); Assembly Majority Leader Bonnie Watson Coleman, District 15 (Trenton area); Michele Tuck-Ponder, the CEO of the Girl Scouts of Delaware-Raritan; and Mary Lynn Hopps, Director of the Women in Learning and Leadership program at College of New Jersey, gave them some terrific advice about preparing through education, believing in themselves, and working hard.

I also found that the New Jersey Citizens Guide to Government was quite helpful during the three classes I taught afterwards. These sessions were divided by grades and held in one of the committee meeting rooms in the Annex Building. Our topic was letter-writing, both to newspaper editors and to public officials. For the first, I used handout I had prepared, but for letters to officials, I was able to have them refer to the section on that topic in the Guide, and I showed them how to find their districts and representatives' names using their town's name. Each of the girls took home a Guide, and several parents said they planned on going to our website to order more.

Once more, the need for more (or better) civic education, for both girls and boys, became evident to me, as I watched even the seniors struggle to determine which level of government, if any, would be able to do something about each of the issues they cited as ones of concern to them. I am hoping that the League can become more involved in this effort, either through the schools or through additional programs like Girl Scout conferences and the Running & Winning Workshop.

Regionalization of School Districts A Conference at Eagleton May 13, 2006

Ed Gracely



Three of us from the LWVCC, and over 70 other League members and interested parties attended the panel discussion

on school regionalization May 13 at the Eagleton Institute in New Brunswick. As you may know, the LWVNJ is currently reviewing our position on this topic. The session on May 13 was developed by the review committee as part of that process.

We learned that at one time in the late 1800's New Jersey had over 1,300 school districts. A state law at that time mandated consolidation, and the number dropped to 376. Today we are back up to 603 districts (excluding a few special ones).

There is some evidence that reducing the total number of districts would save money, but the evidence is limited and weak. Economies of scale and reduction in administration are partly offset by the tendency of bigger combined districts to initiate new programs and the need for additional intermediate administrative personnel (assistant superintendents, say). And, many costs are not affected by the number of districts.

On the other hand, there were many *educational* benefits to consolidated districts. Notably, coordinated elementary school programs for all children who will attend a common high school, better ability to balance class sizes, staff with more specific expertise (rather than one person who does everything), and opportunities to create more varied programs. The downside is the loss of truly local schools with focused attention to a small group of children.

The session raised as many questions as it did answers. Clearly, there is a lot to learn on this complicated topic.

Running and Winning Workshop in 2006

Phyllis Black, Chair



The Running and Winning Workshop this year was very special with outstanding publicity on NBC Channel 10, NJNTV, the Courier Post, and the Cherry Hill Sun. Our media consultant, Melanie Sole, did a superb job in making the community aware of our goals to create a leadership experience for the fifty-three teenage girls from Cherry Hill High School West. Joel Porter took a wonderful series of digital pictures of different aspects of the workshop, and it was exciting to view them on the Internet.

Twenty-nine volunteers from our League, the Camden County Chapter of the American Association of University Women, the South Jersey Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, and the Chinese Women's Association of New Jersey facilitated the group interviews with the female elected officials and the important issue of Property Tax Reform in New Jersey.

Comments from the teenage girls were insightful and eloquent. "I learned a lot about the possible career paths I can take in the future. I was also very inspired by the officials' stories and words of advice," stated one teenage student. "I never realized that local officials can affect my life more than the President of our country and have the ability to change things for better or worse," said another girl. "I learned that every group, each legislator, school board member, and local and state issues are interconnected, and it's important to see things from this broader perspective", a third teenage girl pointed out.

Facilitators and female elected officials also made meaningful comments on their evaluations. One facilitator said, "the girls speeches are terrific, and the girls are so bright and talented." Another facilitator stated, "I enjoyed working with the students and their enthusiasm was contagious." A female elected official indicated that "the presentations of the girls' platforms on improving the tax burden for New Jersey citizens was excellent and that the teenage girls had a good grasp of how the tax system might be changed." Allison Staffin, the Vice Principal and our liaison with Cherry Hill High School West, and Dr. Timothy Brennan, the Superintendent, were all involved and said that the teenage girls were still talking about their experience after Spring Break when they returned.

The Running and Winning Workshop is a team effort from everyone who is involved, and its success is dependent on each person who participates. Thank you for another great year----to the committee, the volunteers, the female elected officials, the teenage girls, and the school personnel who made this workshop a unique and transforming experience.