

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF COLLIER COUNTY

Safeguards democracy through education and advocacy.

N E W M E M B E R



H A N D B O O K

WELCOME TO THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF COLLIER COUNTY

The board and members of the League of Women Voters of Collier County are delighted to welcome you. This handbook has been designed to make your League experience rich and rewarding. It explains the purpose, history, and operations of League of Women Voters of Collier County and tells you how to benefit from the many of opportunities available to you as a member.

OUR MISSION

Influence public policy by connecting people to their government.

OUR GOAL

Safeguard democracy through education and advocacy.

OUR HISTORY

The League of Women Voters was founded in 1920 at the culmination of the struggle to gain women's suffrage. Its first charge was to educate 20 million women on how to exercise their new political rights and responsibilities. Although programs and priorities have changed over the years, the League has remained true to its basic purposes. Since the 1970's, membership in the LWV has been open to women and men and now men make up a significant part of its membership. Political action based on knowledge gained from study remains the cornerstone of the LWV's diverse agenda.

OUR STRUCTURE

The League is a grassroots organization, working at the national, state and local levels through 900 state and local Leagues. When you joined LWVCC, you became a member of the League of Women Voters of Florida and the League of Women Voters (US).

League of Women Voters of the United States-www.lwv.org

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, has fought since 1920 to improve our system of government and impact public policies through citizen education and advocacy. The League's enduring vitality and resonance comes from its unique decentralized structure.

League of Women Voters of Florida- thefloridavoter.org.

The League got its official start in Florida in 1939. Today, there are 29 Leagues statewide.

League of Women Voters of Collier County - www.lwvcolliercounty.org

Founded in 1975, LWVCC encourages informed and active participation in government, increases understanding of local, state and national public policy issues and works to insure a fair electoral policy. LWVCC conducts action and advocacy as a nonprofit 501(c)(4). LWVCC neither supports nor opposes any political party or candidate for elective office, but does encourage its members to take part in the political process.

League of Women Voters of Collier County Education Fund

To help support our voter service and civic education initiatives, the League of Women Voters of Collier County Education Fund was founded as a 501(c)(3) organization to which contributions are deductible for income, gift, and estate tax purposes.

OUR MEMBERSHIP

LWVCC is committed to diversity, recognizing that diverse perspectives are important and necessary for responsible and representative decision making in a democracy. Diversity also enhances the organization's ability to respond more effectively to changing conditions and needs.

Member Expectations

Some members support League activities with their dues. Others attend social events and educational forums. Busy professionals often volunteer for time-limited projects such as writing articles, analyzing budgets, speaking on subjects in which they have professional expertise, or writing letters to elected officials as individuals (only the president may speak publicly for the League). The League can be a training ground for those who aspire to political office. It also offers opportunities for research and writing, chairing committees, monitoring or lobbying governmental bodies, interviewing candidates and leaders, and leading discussions.

OUR MEETINGS

Membership Meetings

Regular Membership Meetings are held on the second Monday of each month, October through May, at the Hilton Naples, 5111 Tamiami Trail North, Naples, FL 34103 (unless otherwise notified). These meetings are open to the public. The Voter (our newsletter) and our website provide detailed information about each meeting. You may reserve for yourself and your guests on line or by phone. Try to arrive early so that you have enough time to check in and to socialize and get to know other members.

Some recent speakers included:



David Lawrence, Jr.
Chair, Children's Movement of Florida



Kathleen Passidomo,
Representative for District 106,
Florida House of Representatives



Ray Judah,
Florida Coastal and Ocean Coalition Coordinator
and former Lee County Commissioner

Regular Membership Meetings consist of a lunch (optional) at noon, a program at which speakers of local prominence share their knowledge, points of view, and expertise on topics such as government, education, climate change, the justice system, and social policy. A short business session from 1:40 pm-2:15 pm concludes the meeting.

Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting is held in the spring before our General Meeting. We use it to set goals, elect officers, amend bylaws, adopt a budget and determine local positions and studies.

Lively League

A Lively League is a gathering, usually an hour or so before the general meeting, at which we study an issue of importance or reach consensus on a study.

OTHER EVENTS

Legislative Seminar

Held annually during the state of Florida's legislative session. Legislative Seminar gives you the opportunity to watch your Legislature in action, become informed about the League's legislative priorities, and meet with your representatives. You will learn firsthand that the League has clout and is listened to because League members do their research and the legislators appreciate facts.

Conventions and Councils

- A national convention is held in even years in locations throughout the country.
- A state convention is held in odd-numbered years in locations throughout Florida.
- State and national councils are held in the year between conventions.

These meetings are comprised of delegates elected by local leagues in numbers proportionate to its membership. Any League member is eligible to serve as a convention or council delegate with board approval. Delegates debate and vote on program, budget, financial support and bylaws, and elect officers for the next biennium. Observers and guests may attend but are ineligible to vote.

OUR WORK

The League works to encourage citizens to register to vote and sponsors candidate forums and debates that are often televised and later posted on our website. We create an award winning, online Voters Guide and distribute a LWVFL Voters Guide with information on election requirements and specific amendment proposals for an upcoming election. We cosponsor Campaign for Leadership, a biannual two-day seminar that inspires local participation in leadership opportunities. To comply with IRS regulations, we separate our Voter Service Committee from our lobbying and action efforts. In addition, League meetings, publications, webcasts and speakers pass on to other groups and the public the wealth of information on issues that the League produces. The League also coordinates studies and educational forums for members and the public with other civic organizations. Recent forums were on water quality, increasing the size of the county commission, and amendments to the constitution. We recently concluded a two year study on Charter Government in Collier County.

OUR PRIORITIES FOR 2013-14

GOVERNMENT

Goals:

- Educate members and the community about state and county government and important government issues, and influence government through active participation.
- Research and discuss pressing local, regional and state government issues to identify those that deserve further study. Report these findings to the League Board and membership for consideration for advocacy.
- Suggest programs for “Hot Topics” meetings to address current issues.
- Schedule “Lunch with Leaders” with key civic and government leaders to learn more about issues under consideration.
- Offer programs through a Speakers Bureau.
- Schedule “Capital Reports” discussions during the Legislative session.

Action/Advocacy:

- Monitor City and County government meetings, especially Board of County Commissioners and Naples City Council.
- Lobby Legislators for League legislative priorities.
- Act on email “Action Alerts” to influence government decisions.

EDUCATION

Goals: Support and influence the promotion of high standards for student achievement through adequate funding, well-rounded curriculum and the highest levels of professionalism for teachers, administrators and school board members in the Collier County Schools.

Education: Organize educational programs relative to the goals for the committee and general membership. Conduct interviews/meetings with administrators and School Board members.

Action/Advocacy:

Promote civics education in public and private schools.

Monitor Florida legislation relative to the education program and take appropriate action.

Participate in a national, state or local study, if available.

SOCIAL POLICY

Goal: Secure equal rights and opportunity for all. Promote social and economic justice and the health and safety of all Americans. (*LWVUS, LWVF*)

1. Monitor and support local efforts to provide basic health care to those in all age groups not otherwise covered.
2. Monitor and promote programs for Collier County Schools that provide comprehensive health education, health services, and a safe, healthy environment.
3. Support measures to provide adequate living and working conditions in Collier County.

Education/Action: Network with groups and agencies with similar interests/concerns, including Public Health Department, Collier Health Network, Medical Society of Collier County, Collier County Emergency Medical Services, Collier County Department of Housing and Human and Veteran Services, Collier County Hunger and Homeless Coalition, Collier County Public Library Outreach Department, Department of Children and Families, Healthy Teens Coalition of Collier County, Florida Healthy Teens Coalition, Naples Alliance For Children, Citizens’ Foster Care Review Board, Collier County Public Schools (School Nurse Program, Health Education), Leadership Coalition on Aging, Other local Leagues

Education: Invite speakers to committee meetings and general meetings who are experts in the designated areas.

Action:

- Bring issues to the board when it would be appropriate for the League to speak.
- Send letters and op-ed articles with President's signature.
- Send letters, emails, make telephone calls as individuals on local, state or national issues that come under the umbrella of Social Policy in the League of Women Voters.
- Respond to action alerts on related issues.

JUSTICE

Goal: Support and influence policies and decisions to promote delinquency prevention and assure justice for all Collier citizens by reducing juvenile delinquency, reducing human trafficking and promoting restoration of rights to former felons.

Education: Organize educational programs relative to the goals for the committee and general membership.

Monitor the following programs, agencies and organizations in Collier County:

- Juvenile criminal justice systems with emphasis on rehabilitation, alternatives to incarceration and diversion programs for youth.
- Youth & Delinquency Services Division of the Collier County Sheriff's Office
- Various courts serving youth, e.g. Juvenile Court, Dependency Court, Truancy Court and Teen Court, Department of Juvenile Justice; and,
- PACE (Practical Academic Cultural Education) Center for Girls, Immokalee
- Monitor prison privatization issues in Southwest Florida.

Action/Advocacy: Participate in the work of the following groups, provide committee updates and enlist member support as needed:

- Juvenile Justice Council (CCJJC)
- Drug Free Collier
- Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) Advisory Committee
- Juvenile Detention Center Advisory Committee
- Collier County Youth Resource Center
- Substance Abuse Coalition of Collier County (SACCC – Drug Free Collier)
- Collier County Coalition Against Human Trafficking
- Florida Rights Restoration Coalition

Monitor Florida legislation relative to the Justice Program and take appropriate action.

Continue to study the experiences of Collier County female juveniles who are in conflict with the law.

OUR COMMITTEES

Study and Action Committees: Our study and action committees are self-selected. All members are more than welcome to join any study committee, anytime. Chairpersons are always looking for interested people. Information about committee meetings and field trips is published in the Voter, our newsletter, and is available on our website. Our Study and Action Committees include:

- Environmental Affairs (formerly Climate Change)
- Education
- Government
- Justice
- Social Policy

Service Committees: Some service committees are board appointed (the asterisk indicates this), others are staffed by member volunteers. Without the assistance of all of these members, the League could not function. Consider volunteering.

Our Service Committees include:

Audit

Bylaws (appointed)

Communications

Finance

Hospitality

Nominating (elected)

Publicity

Speakers Bureau

The Voter

Voter Service

Website

OUR PUBLICATIONS

The Voter

Our online newsletter, published October through April. All back issues of the Voter are available on line under Publications.

The Florida Voter

The online newsletter published quarterly by LWVFL. It is available on the state's website (currently being rebuilt) under Resources (<http://thefloridavoter.org>).

Capitol Reports

Legislative updates from LWVFL's lobbyist published from time to time during the Legislative Session.

Study and Action

The League of Women Voters of Florida's guide to public policy positions. Updated and published every two years, Study and Action provides information about the League's program and advocacy positions on issues facing Florida and the United States as a whole, including government, education, justice, social policy, sustainability and natural resources. It is available on the state's website under Resources: <http://thefloridavoter.org>

Impact on Issues

Includes the official statements of position of LWVUS. It traces significant past actions and achievements, and indicates links among positions. The LWVUS public policy positions reflect the 2010-2012 program adopted by the 2010 convention of the League of Women Voters of the United States. Available on the LWVUS website: <http://www.lwv.org> in the password protected membership section under Essential Publications. You will find many other publications of interest on the LWVUS website.