



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF COLLIER COUNTY**

VOTER

March 2006

Volume 31 Issue 6

MONDAY— MARCH 20

Lively League...10:30 am

Civic Education

Jack Bovee, Social Studies Coordinator for the Collier County Public Schools, will speak on the status of Civic Education in the State of Florida. Civic Education is a State League legislative priority. Mr. Bovee is the Legislative chair for the Florida Council for the Social Studies. He works closely with Ann McDowell, LWVFL lobbyist for Civic Education from the North Pinellas League. He also follows the progress of legislation on a national level. A question and answer dialog is the format. **Lunch will follow.**

General Meeting...12:30 pm

Collier Education Issues

Michele LaBute, Chief Operational Officer for the Collier County Public Schools, will speak on how the 65% Solution, housing, and concurrency are affecting the School District. These are major issues affecting all residents of Collier County. Mrs. LaBute has worked for the district, as a teacher and administrator, for over thirty years. She will take questions about these and any other issues, after her initial remarks. **The meeting will take place at the Norris Community Center, 8th Street, across from the Naples City Hall. The cost for lunch is \$12. The deadline for reservations is noon on Friday, March 17. Call the League at 263-4656. Reservations must be honored or cancelled before the deadline.**



Education Notes

The District School Board of Collier County will hold its next regular meetings on Thursday, March 16. Budget hearings will begin at noon. The regular Board meeting is scheduled for 2 p.m. Meetings are held in the Martin Luther King, Jr. Administrative Center, 5775 Osceola Trail. The building is located on property behind Barron Collier High School. Student drug testing and the budget are key issues the Board will be dealing with, as they head into negotiations with the three employee unions. Those unable to attend the meetings in person may watch via Cable Channel 20. The meetings are repeated at noon the following Saturday and Sunday.

Kathy Ryan

Education Chair

President's Message

Please note that our League Board has decided to wait until after the election of officers at the Annual Meeting on April 17, to publish the 2006 Membership Roster. A listing of our members will be available at our meetings this spring. The 2006 Roster will be available at the October meeting.

The 2006 Regular Session of the Florida Legislature begins on Tuesday, March 7, and ends on Friday, May 5. You will be receiving Email ACTION Alerts from our Action Chair, Chris Straton, requesting that you contact your legislator on issues vital to League program positions. Please make sure we have your correct Email address. To be fully informed about what is happening in Tallahassee subscribe to Capitol Report at the LWVF office at lwwf1@comcast.net, (850) 224-2545, 540 Beverly Court, Tallahassee, FL 32301-2506. The subscription cost is \$20 for Email, \$25 for U.S. Mail, and \$35 for Fax.

Our Action Alert network from LWVUS has been urging us to protect our Civil Liberties and not to compromise away too much government secrecy in the name of homeland security and anti-terrorism without important checks and balances. I do hope you have participated in this national effort to make a difference by contacting your congressmen on this important issue.

We are very fortunate to have Sandy Parker, Kathleen Slebodnik, and Chris Straton representing our League at the LWVFL 2006 FL Legislative Seminar – March 19-21, 2006, in Tallahassee to lobby our legislators. While our League is paying the \$135 registration fee for each of them to attend, they are funding their housing and transportation.

Thank you to Sandy Parker and her committee, Ann Bleakley and Jen Walker for the excellent specifications and grant proposal they worked on so diligently to provide us with a new website --coming soon.

While Jen (Editor) and Alan Walker (Publisher) are away, Kathy Ryan has once again graciously agreed to edit and publish this Voter. Thank you, Kathy!

I look forward to seeing you at our March meeting. The education of our children is our hope for the future.

Sheilah Crowley

LWVCC Board Members

President	Sheilah Crowley
1 st Vice President –	
Administration & Publicity	Jennifer Walker
2 nd Vice President –	
Membership	Sandy Parker
Secretary	Nancy Wolfe
Treasurer	Marjorie Joder
Hospitality	Nancy Wolfe
Voters Service	Sandra Brown
Natural Resources	Nicole Ryan
Justice	Dr. Bernice Schmelz
Education	Dr. Kathleen Ryan
Government	Chris Straton
International Relations	Alda Pierce
Work Force Housing	Co Chairs:
	Kathleen Slebodnik
	Chris Straton

LWVCC Off Board Members

Social Policy	Ann Campbell
Historian	Barbara Elliott

Become Involved

Join a Committee

Membership

Welcome, New Members: A warm welcome is extended to the new members who joined our League since the last *Voter* was published:

Susan Calkins

Kathleen Dennison

Michaelle Crowley

Gail Maiocco

Rep. Mike Davis, District 101

Renate Scheye

Dr. Morton Friedman

Volunteers Needed For Our Membership Drive: In less than 9 months, Collier County voters will go to the polls to elect a U.S. Senator, two members of the U.S. Congress, a Governor and the cabinet, 5 representatives to the Florida legislature, 2 county commissioners, and 3 school board members. There will most likely be constitutional amendments on the ballot as well. Come the fall, there will be lots of work to do!

Our membership drive to welcome 30 new members between January 1 and March 31 is underway. Volunteers are needed to return phone calls to prospective members, distribute membership brochures, and host information sessions in your own home or clubhouse -- we'll provide the speakers! Must be willing to commit just one hour per month. Please contact Sandy Parker, Membership Chair.

Information Sessions for New and Prospective Members: The next get-together will be on Tuesday, March 14th, from 2:30 to 4pm. If you, or someone you know, might be interested, please contact Sandy Parker, Membership Chair.

Membership Roster

While the 2006-2007 Membership Roster will be available in the fall, a mid-year Roster is now available. Pick one up at the March 20, General Meeting, or contact Sandy Parker, Membership Chair, to make other arrangements.

Sandy Parker, Membership Chair

LWVCC Website Redesign Update



At its February meeting, the LWVCC Board approved the website committee's recommended design firm, and the content for the new site is now being written. The committee remains on track to complete the transition in the spring.

Online Roster: One of the many advantages of the new website is that members will be able to update their contact information (address, phone number, and email address) online through a password-protected portion of the website. Members will also be able to access each other's contact information in this online Roster, in the same way they look up this information in their paper Rosters today. Members who would prefer not to be listed in the online roster should notify Sandy Parker before March 31.

*Stay tuned for updates on the website project in upcoming issues of *The Voter!**

Sandy Parker
Website Committee Chair

Social Policy Committee Report

Quality Child Care Was The Subject of February Meeting

In this first year of Voluntary Universal Pre-K for four-year-olds in Florida, it has been difficult to meet the program goal of monitoring the implementation of quality programs. The school district elected not to participate (they will do so this summer), and the rest of the program has been moving along erratically, according to reports. There are limits that the voters did not anticipate when the issue was on the ballot as a constitutional amendment: children receive just three hours of education; transportation to and from the facilities is not provided, nor are nap times or meals. In some cases, the children stay on for the full day, and parents are charged the going rate for the balance of the time. Some facilities have eliminated their infant/toddler programs in order to accommodate the four-year-olds in the VPK program. These are but a couple of the changes observed to date. We hope to continue our monitoring efforts next year, as agencies and parents alike adjust to the new system.

Meanwhile, our spirits were elevated as we listened to Jean Mekeel, Executive Director of **Step By Step** Early Childhood Education and Therapy Center, a private, not for profit organization, which has been assisting children and their families in Collier County for over 25 years. They are licensed to provide child care to 93 children. Services include pre-K programs, (also including children from the VPK program), developmental day and home-based programs, art and music programs, therapies to include speech & language, physical and occupational, and recreation. Nursing support is available for children who need it. Children with and without special needs learn and play together in the same classrooms. Step by Step is an early care and education program that provides all young children, regardless of their diverse abilities, a safe, nurturing environment that supports their social, emotional, cognitive, language, and physical development. It is a unique place, located at 5860 Golden Gate Parkway. To visit, call 455-9525.

Ann Campbell
Social Policy Chair

March Meeting to Examine Health Care for the Underserved in Collier

We have asked Keith Riley, DMD, who works for Collier Health Services, Inc., and the Ronald McDonald Care Mobile program, to bring us up to date on the efforts to provide access to health care for individuals, who either have no health insurance or are in the Medicaid program. We know that hundreds of children with dental needs have been identified during the screening process. How are these and other needs being met? The meeting is on Wednesday, March 8, at 8 a.m., at Crissy's Wild Side Café. All members are invited to the breakfast meeting, which costs \$8.50. Guests are welcome. Please contact Ann Campbell for reservations by Monday, March 6.

His Excellency, George Washington

The next selection for the government committee book discussion group is His Excellency, George Washington by Joseph Ellis. Call Sandy Parker if you will joining us on Tuesday, March 7, 2006 at 4 p.m.

Brother, Can you Spare a Dime? Or an Hour?

The Government Committee is looking for individuals willing to give up an hour of their time to attend the upcoming Board of County Commission meetings on March 14 and March 28. No experience is necessary. You just need to go down to the Government Center, attend the meeting for an hour wearing a League of Women Voters button, and then give me a call and let me know what, if anything, significant happened. Recommended times would be between 10-12 noon or 1-3 pm. What is the purpose you ask? Let the public and elected officials know that the League cares about what goes on in their meetings.

Chris Straton, Government Chair



COLLIER COUNTY LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS



A New Local Study: Workforce Housing in Collier County



Rationale: Collier County is faced with a crisis in workforce housing at income levels below the current median income of \$66,000 per year. A rapidly increasing population with a large number of well-to-do retirees has pushed up housing costs to the point that workers willing to live in the county cannot find suitable housing to either buy or rent. The three largest employers, the school system, government, and hospitals, are experiencing severe worker shortages along with other smaller businesses. Many residents are also selling their homes at these higher prices and moving out of the area.



At its April, 2005, annual Meeting, members voted to “study the issue of workforce housing in Collier County.” Finding appropriate solutions to this problem that the League can support are the subjects of this study.



Scope of Study: Study the range of existing and publicly and privately proposed initiatives to address the workforce housing needs of Collier County, the housing needs of those residents whose income is between 80% and 150% of the county’s median income, as defined by the county.



Plan of Study:

1. Collect information on housing units needed in Collier County and compare this to units available for purchase/rent.
2. List existing resources and proposed initiatives at the state and local levels to increase workforce housing supply, i.e., zoning by right, density bonuses, community land trusts, etc.
3. Establish objective criteria with which to evaluate proposed initiatives that will enable LWVCC to take action when specific plans are proposed.
4. Establish consensus on criteria.
5. Using these criteria, write positions on public and private initiatives to increase the workforce housing supply in Collier County.



Established Positions: League has established positions dealing with housing for very low and low income citizens.



LWVUS - Fair housing criteria relates to equal opportunity for access to housing without discrimination.



LWVF - At the conclusion of a study of farm worker issues, League will support policies to provide a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.



League Members who are interested in participating in this study are asked to contact Kathleen Slebodnik, Housing Committee Chair.



Justice Committee Report

Street Gangs in Collier: Who and Why?

The Justice Committee's February 13, meeting at the Central Library featured a presentation by Sergeant Ron Byington, coordinator of Collier County Sheriff's Office Street Gang Unit. In that capacity, Sgt. Byington is responsible for implementation of strategies designed to combat and control street gang activity, organizing training programs within the Sheriff's Office, and working with outside levels of law enforcement and the judiciary on focused enforcement of gang suppression.

Sgt. Byington showed a video to help demonstrate certain clothing, hand signs, and graffiti used by gang members to declare their affiliations. We learned that a gang consists of three or more people, with a common identifier, who are involved in criminal activity. Florida Statute 874.03 has a list of eight criteria, which can identify members; two are sufficient to alert the Gang Unit. The Street Gang Unit has six investigators and an analyst, but all deputies on road patrol and in the schools receive training.

About the gang members: 95% are male; females tend to join the male gangs rather than form their own; the average age is 17, but there are younger kids from middle schools and even higher elementary grades as well as adults; 70% are full time students with a poor school history and below average grade level. Kids join gangs to meet their needs for excitement, friendship and even protection. In Collier County there are currently 960 gang members or associates. They use graffiti to challenge one another to fights, many of which are extremely violent. They like to be photographed and to brag about themselves (one reason that stories about them won't be in the newspaper). They use the Internet to post pictures of themselves with their hand signs.

Sgt. Byington told us about "Operation Razor"; a program in which the Sheriff's Office works with Immigration and Naturalization Services to deport gang members, who are over the age of 18, to their countries of origin. For the younger members, efforts focus on diversion, referral to Juvenile Justice, and rehabilitation. In some cases referral to a one-day boot camp along with their parents has been found to be effective. Also important are community awareness and the willingness of citizens to report problems to law enforcement. A successful gang control program will reduce recruiting in the schools and neighborhoods, and will convince the gangs to get out of town.

JUDGE BRODIE TO SPEAK AT MARCH JUSTICE COMMITTEE MEETING

The Monday, March 13, Justice Committee Meeting will take place at 9:00 a.m., in the second floor conference room of the Collier County Courthouse (make a left when exiting the second floor elevator). The Honorable Lauren Brodie will speak on juvenile substance abuse, the new Substance Abuse Coalition, and the status of the juvenile court in Collier. She will also be available for questions. Ann Allen is the contact person for this meeting. Call to let her know you plan to attend. Parking is available in the parking garage with tram service to the courthouse.

Ann Campbell for Bernice Schmelz, Justice Chair

VOTER SERVICE

LWVCC is partnering with the Supervisor of Elections in the 2006 **Get Out the Vote (GOTV)** campaign to create voter awareness, as part of a statewide effort. Sheilah Crowley and I represented the League at the launch of GOTV on February 21. This program will urge residents to register to vote, to update their voter information, to volunteer as poll workers, and to vote in the Primary and General Elections. The primary Election is September 5, and the General Election is November 7, 2006. In order to be eligible to vote, a person must be registered 29 days prior to the election, August 7, for the Primary and October 10, for the General Election. Each month a different group is targeted, and although there is no specific schedule yet, I anticipate that we will be demonstrating the voting machines and helping to register voters in the schools during April.

PLEASE email me, if you are interested and willing to help. We need several of you. Here's your chance to be part of democracy in action!

Sandra Brown, Voter Service Chair

Everglades Coalition Conference Re-Cap

The theme for this year's Everglades Coalition Conference focused on examination of progress. Tough questions were asked. Are we making enough progress? Are we making the right progress? Are we inadvertently hampering progress through current planning decisions?

Many have felt frustration at the pace of restoration implementation. For example, for our federal partners, the Army Corps of Engineers, authorization for Restoration projects by the Corps must come from the federal water bill – the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). WRDA has not been reauthorized since 2000. Thus, in order to get restoration jump-started, the South Florida Water Management District (District) has developed the Acceler8 program, which detailed how the State would proceed at an accelerated rate with eight specific restoration projects.

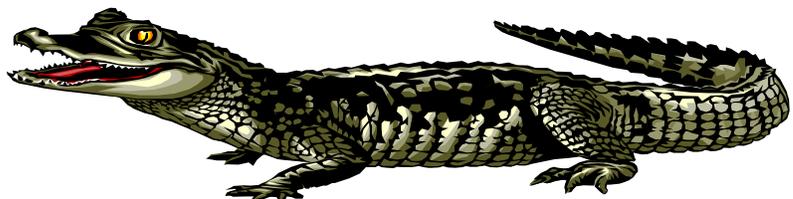
Acceler8 projects include restoration of the Picayune Strand, where canals are currently being filled in and roads torn out in order to fix damage done by a failed subdivision known as Southern Golden Gate Estates. This project will be a tremendous boost to our western Everglades Restoration. According to the District, Acceler8, when completed, will provide an additional 500,000 acres of water storage. At the conference, the District also announced that half of the land necessary for CERP restoration (200,000 acres) has been purchased. CERP, or the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Project, is an important component of the overall Everglades Restoration program. The prompt purchase of the lands necessary for restoration is a crucial and time-sensitive matter. With the rising cost of land, and the rapid rate of agricultural lands being purchased by large development companies, there is no time to waste in acquisition of key parcels of land.

Among the speakers at this year's Conference was former Senator Bob Smith (NH). He shared his perspective on how to ensure the Congressional intent for funding restoration. First, water for nature must be the Number One priority. Any leftover water can then be utilized for people. While this was the original intent of Everglades Restoration, and the intent of the members of the Everglades Coalition, there are some who would prefer that these priorities be reversed. Senator Smith believes that the mantra of "water for nature" must continue to be reinforced so that the message remains strong and clear. Secondly, Senator Smith discussed the need for everything within the footprint of Everglades Restoration be used only for restoration purposes. This is a timely issue, considering the threat of conversion of the Everglades Agricultural Area (EAA) from agriculture to development in the future. We must remain vigilant in our message that such conversion is unsuitable. Finally, the Senator spoke about partnerships and the necessity for restoration to truly be a state-federal effort.

The message about partnerships was echoed by Colonel Robert M. Carpenter, District Engineer for the Corps, who indicated that without reauthorization of the WRDA, or an equivalent water bill, restoration cannot be completed. Carpenter stated that the public must get involved and push federal Legislators to reauthorize another water bill that will allow the Corps to proceed with restoration projects.

While the need for continued advocacy for restoration and constant vigilance for securing water for nature first is not a new theme, the Everglades Coalition Conference is a great opportunity to become reinvigorated. The Conference provides the much-needed venue to meet with all the agencies involved in restoration, along with the key decision-makers and environmental and civic advocacy organizations, all of which are dedicated to restoring America's Everglades.

Nicole Ryan, Natural Resources Chair



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Welcome new members

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MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Event	Date	Time	Place
LWVCC Board Meeting	Monday, March 6	noon	River Park Community Center
Government Book group	Tuesday, March 7	4 p.m.	See page 4
Social Policy	Wednesday, March 8	8 a.m.	Crissy's Wild Side, see page 4
Justice Committee	Monday, March 13	9 a.m.	Court House, see page 6
New Member Coffee	Tuesday, March 14	2 p.m.	See page 3
County Commission Meeting	Tuesday, March 14	9 a.m.	See page 4
School Board Meetings	Thursday, March 16	noon	Administrative Center, see page 1
Lively League	Monday, March 20	10:30 a.m.	Norris Center , see page 1
Monthly General Meeting	Monday, March 20	12:30 p.m.	Norris Center, see page 1
County Commission Meeting	Tuesday, March 28	9 a.m.	See page 4
LWVCC Board Meeting	Monday, April 3	noon	River Park Community Center

The VOTER is published monthly, during the winter season, by the League of Women Voters of Collier County. Editor & Publisher: Kathy Ryan. Next issue will be April, 2006. Please send newsletter items to Jennifer Walker. Deadline for the April issue is March 15.