
League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear

2015-2017 Biennium Report



Introduction

The 2015-2017 biennium has been one of remarkable growth and achievement for the League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear (LWV-LCF). Led by Sheila Fellerath, President (2015-17), and supported by Cindy Linn (1st VP 2015-17), Jana Albritton (2nd VP 2014-16), Bonnie Bechard (2nd VP 2016-18), Sue Ann Rush (Secretary 2015-17), Stephanna Tewey (Treasurer 2014-16), Rebecca Philpott (Treasurer 2016-18), and the elected Directors Gail Bromley (Voter Services Chair), Loraine Buker and Clarice Reber (Membership Chairs), Meredith Glicksman (At-Large) and Carole Roberts (At-Large and Observer Corps), the Board facilitated the work of the Action Teams and Committees. In turn, these groups were the heart and soul of our organization and their activities and accomplishments are to be commended.

Honors and Awards

The capstone of our achievements was receiving the League of Women Voters of North Carolina Outstanding Local League Award (40 or more members) at the 2017 convention in Greensboro. This award recognizes effectiveness in promoting voter education and participation in government at the local, state, and national levels, membership growth, affecting issues of local state and national interest, outstanding programs and events over the past two years and collaboration with local and state partners and other local leagues.

Not only was our local league honored, but also one of our members, Gail Bromley, received the highest state award given to an individual league member. The Gertrude Weil Award for Leadership and Service was presented to Gail at the 2017 annual convention. This award represents courage, vision, tenacity, commitment and dedication to the mission and purpose of the League of Women Voters.

The work of our Environment Action Team, and that of our league, was recognized by The Southeast NC Coastal Federation, which presented the LWV of the Lower Cape Fear the Organization Volunteer Award for our work on the special use permit campaign.

Anne Eitelman, Chair of the Education Action Team was given the Unsung Hero award by the Johnson Pre-K Center PTA in Wilmington. This Center is a part of New Hanover County Schools. Anne's award was for exceeding expectations in the classroom, special programs, and/or projects that support and promote the missions and purposes of the PTA.

Shirley Rhyne and her husband were awarded Certificates of Appreciation for their work on the Johnson Center's library and for dedicated service to children and youth through activities and efforts to support and promote the Mission and Purpose of the PTA.

LWV-NC 2016 Council

LWV Lower Cape Fear was pleased to host the LWV North Carolina 2016 Council here in Wilmington last spring; it was a great opportunity to connect in person with our sister leagues across North Carolina. In addition to the substantial behind-the-scenes work of many LWV-LCF members handling Council arrangements, two of our members made significant contributions to workshop presentations. We were very happy with the success of the Council meeting and heard positive feedback from many attendees.

Membership Committee

At the close of the 2014-2015 fiscal year, LWV-LCF had approximately 67 members. We now have 103 members, a 54% increase. The groundwork for steady membership growth was laid by former membership chairs Carol Roberts and Loraine Buker, and is now ably built on by Clarice Reber and her committee.

Our membership team has developed a number of successful recruiting strategies including invitations to the public to attend our monthly Hot Topics lunches, email follow-ups to all visitors, interest surveys for new members in order to match them quickly to our on-going work, periodic new member lunches to get acquainted with each other and our League, and an annual New Member Reception.

We have experienced significant growth in the number of members from Brunswick County, from 18 in June 2015 to the current 37 members, a 106% increase, and are therefore much more able to provide League programs and services in that area.

Voter Services

Voter education, advocacy and protection are always foremost on the LWV-LCF agenda and we have been particularly successful on a number of fronts. We were able to conduct seven very successful candidate forums during the 2016 election cycle, with participation from every candidate on the ballot for each race.

Five municipal forums for the period 2015-16 were held and all candidates participated. For those, we co-sponsored with many organizations, including two Chambers of Commerce in Bald Head Island, a conservation group in Southport, two Property Owners Associations in Bald Head, and WECT-TV for the one in the City of Wilmington. The H2Go, or water commission, was also a part of our offerings in Brunswick County.

After hearing from other leagues about their inability to get candidate commitments and the necessity to cancel planned forums, we are especially gratified (and slightly awed) by our success. In addition, we continued a very successful relationship with WECT-TV, a local affiliate of NBC and Fox, which streamed the live forums and then archived them for viewing through Election Day.

Voter Services chair, Gail Bromley, has effectively led a dedicated cadre of League members who turn out reliably for voter registration drives at a variety of locales. In addition, we have distributed thousands of pieces of informational material, presented voter registration training workshops for both League members and the general public, participated by invitation at numerous community events where a League speaker was requested, and regularly attended Board of Elections meetings in the counties our League covers. In that connection LWV-LCF advocated for increased early voting hours in all three counties, two of which increased the number of hours.

After much effort, LWV-LCF received permission to do voter registration drives in the Brunswick County High Schools.

The program year in Voter Services ended by doing two meetings on Redistricting Reform, one in Southport and one in downtown Wilmington. These two meetings kick off what is hoped to be a major initiative in 2017-18 and beyond.

Education Action Team

The Education Action Team, led by Anne Eitelman and Nancy McCoy-Fennell, has been a consistent and insistent advocate on issues impacting children and our public schools.

The Education Action Team devised and executed a local plan in conjunction with the 2016 statewide “Schools Our Students Deserve” campaign; it included a letter-writing campaign to local legislators, drafting a resolution which was adopted by the LWV-LCF, and successfully lobbying the Boards of Education of Brunswick County and New Hanover County and the Town Council of Leland to adopt similar resolutions. Also, under the leadership of the Education Action Team, LWV-LCF adopted a position in support of a 2016 School Bond Referendum in Brunswick County that the voters ultimately approved. Members advocated for increased funding for public schools at both the state and local levels.

The Education Action Team also completed its study of local charter schools in 2016 and that report, written by Bonnie Bechard, has been shared with LWV-NC leaders. It is now engaged in a study of school vouchers in North Carolina, specifically regarding curriculum and accountability. In 2017 it actively supported the Smart Start Summit in an effort to increase our legislators’ and key community leaders’ attention to the critical first 2000 days of a child’s life. As part of the Action Team’s ongoing support of Pre-K education Nancy and Anne helped Principal Greer of Dorothy B. Johnson establish a volunteer program that has been active in classrooms, also planting a garden, and working tirelessly with volunteer Shirley Rhyne to make the Media Center more useful for teachers and students.

Action Team members are also in the early stages of preparation for upcoming school redistricting discussions in New Hanover County.

Environment Action Team

The Environment Action Team has also been very active this biennium. We partnered with the NC Coastal Federation in a major, sustained effort to monitor and impact proposed amendments to New Hanover County’s special use permit process. Activities included regular attendance at Planning Board meetings, a public presentation of the issue at one of our Hot Topics lunches that are open to the public, written and oral communications with policymakers and other interested parties, letters to the editor, LWV-LCF board adoption of a position on the proposed changes, and testimony before the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners at the public hearing.

Looking ahead, the Environmental Action Team is planning to join the Eagles Island Coalition to advocate for appropriate land use of Eagles Island with the ultimate goal of developing a site dedicated to education of the public about the unique environment and history of the island.

Gun Violence Prevention Action Team

This new Action Team’s mission is to educate ourselves about the problem of gun violence in our communities, assess its affects, partner with other GVP groups, and advocate for sensible gun safety laws. This difficult issue is one of the National priorities of the LWV.

In a few short months, this Action Team has compiled a briefing book that contains information about current laws, statistics, and recommendations by health care professionals on how to improve safety. Chief Evangelous, Police Chief for Wilmington, spoke to us at a Hot Topics luncheon about

efforts in our local communities to address the problem of gun violence and how we can direct our advocacy.

The Gun Violence Prevention Action Team is dedicated to the memory of the children and teachers of Sandy Hook.

Observer Corps and Community Outreach

The premise behind the Observer Corps is that everyday people have the right to know what actions their government agencies are taking, to attend public meetings and have access to public documents. By attending these local meetings, our Observers can monitor our government, but they also represent our League and get to know our local leaders.

Under the guidance of Carol Roberts, the Observer Corps has built procedures, designed forms, recruited new observers, set schedules, and extended observation of local boards. The Corps is currently monitoring the Boards of Elections for our 3 counties, the Boards of Education for both Brunswick and New Hanover Counties, and the Brunswick County and New Hanover County Boards of Commissioners. The reports are available on our website

LWV-LCF has made concerted and successful efforts over the past two years to partner with local groups as appropriate, forming new alliances and increasing our name recognition. One measure of our success in this area is the number of contacts we receive from local government officials and media representatives needing information, suggestions, or other assistance that they recognize we can provide. We are thrilled that they think to call on us.

In addition to the groups already mentioned, we have established contacts with Cape Fear Community College, local high schools in both New Hanover and Brunswick counties, Board of Elections and Board of Education, newcomer groups, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute and UNCW. Without doubt, some of these relationships are further along in their development than others but we are continuing to get our name and good work out into the community.

Immigration Action Team

This Team, led by Carole Ellis, set up a liaison with the Hispanic Organization from UNC-W and assisted them with contacts with local school guidance counselors who work with Hispanic students, whether or not they are documented. Meetings were held in the law offices of league member, Helen Tarokic.

As members have become in other issues that have bubbled up to the top, this Action Team no longer meets. However, this issue is still of great concern at the state level and there was an enthusiastic caucus at the state convention. The two issues of concentration are: having undocumented college students not have to pay out-of-state tuition and allowing a special state driver's license of some kind so they can drive legally.

Women's Issues Action Team

The Equal Rights Amendment has been the focus of this Team. Jana Albritton, chair, has worked with the state league in many capacities on this issue and shares that information with our local league.

Jana organized the final activity of this Action Team in March 2017. It involved staffing a table at a Planned Parenthood event demonstrating interactively through a virtual reality film the hurdles women seeking reproductive health care face in some areas where protesters are especially active and vocal. Albritton staffed the table spreading the word about a need for the Equal Rights Amendment's ratification by two more states in order to enshrine it in our US Constitution. She also encouraged women to join The League of Women Voters of the Lower Cape Fear in order to pursue their political activism goals.

Jana Albritten serves as the ERA-NC liaison to the LWV-LCF.

Hot Topics Speakers

Our lunch series, Hot Topics, has been a major instrument for both educating the public and recruiting new members; in the last two years, program topics have included gerrymandering, women running for the U.S. House, ERA, charter schools, clean elections, refugees, voting challenges in 2016, storm-water runoff, judicial elections and more.

May 22, 2017	<i>How Local Government Works</i> Avril Pinder, Deputy County Manager for New Hanover County
April 24, 2017	<i>Gun Violence Prevention in our Communities</i> Chief Evangelous, Wilmington Chief of Police
March 27, 2017	<i>The Rich History of African-American Sororities</i> Cynthia J. Brown, Historian of Alpha Psi Omega Chapter, AKA Sorority
February 27, 2017	<i>Why is Early Childhood Education So Important?</i> Mebane Boyd, Smart Start Family & Health Services Manager Dr. Khadijia Tribie, pediatrician.
January 23, 2017	<i>State League Initiatives for 2017</i> Janet Hoy, a Director of LWV-NC
November 28, 2016	<i>Refugees</i> Sara Pascal, MSW, Sub-Office Coordinator for Interfaith Refugee Ministry, Wilmington
October 24, 2016	<i>2016 Judicial Elections and the North Carolina Courts</i> Sheila Fellerath
September 26, 2016	<i>LWV-LCF Advocacy Efforts</i>
August 22, 2016	<i>The Brunswick County School Bond Referendum</i> Olaf Thorsen, Chair of the Board of Education
July 25, 2016	<i>Smart Yard: Keeping our waterways health</i> Tracy Skrabal, Scientist and Manager of the SE Coastal Federation Office

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- May 23, 2016 *Women Candidates in the 2016 Election*
Barbara Burrell, Professor Emeritus, Northern Illinois U.
- April 25, 2016 *Advocacy and Action Roundtables of the LWV-LCF*
Chairs of our Roundtables
- March 28, 2016 *Drawing Congressional Districts: How Did We Get to this Point?*
Roger C. Lowery, Professor Emeritus, UNC-W Department of Public and
International Affairs
- February 22, 2016 *Voting in 2016*
Sara Knotts, Director, Brunswick County Board of Elections
- January 25, 2016 *What is so Special About the SUP (Special Use Permit)?*
Karen Dunn, Clean Communities Coordinator and Tracy Skrabal,
Coastal Scientist and Manager, of the NC Coastal Federation
- October 26, 2015 *Better Representation Through Public Financing*
Melissa Kromm, Director of NC Voters for Clean Elections
- September 28, 2015 *Girls Leadership Academy of Wilmington*
Laura Hunter, founding Principal
- August 24, 2015 *Equal Rights Amendment*
Roberta Madden, co-director of RATIFY ERA-NC