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2022 Annual Report

**President’s Report**

If we thought 2020 and 2021 were troubled years, 2022 so far seems even more uncertain and arduous. Every week there are more stories of issues in our government and society that continue to remind me of how important our work in the League is.

In my first year as president, I’ve been learning a lot, about League procedures and keeping an organization going. I must thank our Board and Terri Parks for their invaluable support and knowledge along with the many behind the scenes volunteers and Amelia Palka, our Office Manager. Thank you and keep up the GOOD work!

Our League finances have remained stable. We have not had to withdrawal any funds from our investments at TIAA. As we know the market has been very volatile, we believe that our investments in Mutual Funds are well diversified and will remain sustainable through this challenging market. The investment committee chair is Rebecca LaCivita and quarterly reports are included in the board meeting minutes posted to our website.

I have also been managing our work with the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, BMHA, in providing Elections Services to the Residents Councils at various locations. I cannot forget the complex task that Nora Mikes is doing to coordinate the bi-annual BMHA Commissioners Election. Our BMHA activity is an important part of our operations and our mission. Please consider volunteering to work with and support this community.

And as the following reports indicate our League is vibrant and engaged with our community partners.

***2021-2022 LWVBN Board of Directors:*** *Kat Cejka, Susan Czyrny, Marian Deutschman, Susan Dombrowski, Barbara Gunderson, Jennifer Hoffman, Shirley Joy, Rebecca LaCivita. Alberta Roman, Mary Ann Turkla, Liz Zausmer and Lori Robinson, president*

**Voter Services Committee**

**Barbara Gunderson, Chair**

**Leading up to the Primary Election on June 23, 2021:**

* We met with two Self Advocates of Western New York regional groups to present information on issues-based voting and encourage GOTV.
* We held a Buffalo Mayoral Candidate Forum.
* We hosted two voter registration tables.
* We distributed 200 LWVBN election reminder cards and 120 LWVNY Voters Guide 1 cards.
* We posted candidate information on Vote411.org.

**Leading up to the General Election on November 3, 2021:**

* We presented issues-based voter information at the Western New York Independent Living Alliance conference.
* We hosted 29 voter registration tables at colleges, universities, and community settings.
* We registered 127 new voters.
* We held a Buffalo Mayoral Candidate Forum, and an Erie County Sheriffs/Buffalo City Controller/Amherst Town Supervisor Candidate Forum.
* We distributed 2198 LWVBN election reminder cards, 4870 LWVNY Voters Guide 2 cards in English: 2000 LWVNY Voters Guide 2 cards in Spanish, and 1588 early voting site list leaflets.
* We co-sponsored two voter information webinars with PUSH Buffalo, SANYS, the Buffalo branch of the NAACP, and the Buffalo Jewish Federation.
* We distributed 371 doorknob hangers containing voter information in six low-turnout, underserved precincts in two Buffalo Municipal Common Council Districts: Lovejoy and North.
* We collaborated with many civic organizations in Erie and Niagara Counties to disseminate voter information and get out the vote.
* We posted candidate information on Vote411/org

**In 2022:**

* We held six Candidate Forums for school board candidates in various Erie and Niagara County communities.
* We formed a Community Events Voter Registration, Information, Education Committee which is researching new ways to implement this mission.

Due to the pandemic, New Citizen Naturalization ceremonies have been cancelled in favor of individual interviews. We are awaiting the return of Naturalization Ceremonies.

*Members: Mary Bisson, Susan Gibbons, Patti Meyer-Lee, Helen Mayo, Terri Parks, Maria Evancho*

**Youth Program Committee**

**Barbara Gunderson, Chair**

**High School:** We visited three high schools, Niagara Falls High School, Lafayette International High School, and Maryvale High School. and presented voter registration and issues based voting information. We registered or pre-registered 155 students to vote.

**College**: We are reorganizing the college voter registration and information effort under this committee. Volunteers have agreed to be liaisons to individual colleges and universities, and we will be sending information on what we can do regarding voter registration, information, and education to college and university student affairs staff soon.

**Students Inside Albany:** Our two Students Inside Albany this year, who would have been able to attend in person, were Maria Evancho of Nardin Academy High School and Aharar Akib of Olmsted High School. The conference was canceled at the last minute due to COVID 19.

**Grant:** We received a grant from LWVUS for $500 predicated on our visiting five high school classrooms between January and June 2022. Unfortunately, as of this writing, we have been unable to fulfill that commitment due to ongoing pandemic restrictions at the schools.

*Team: Sharon Dobkin, Cindy Havey, Karen Keaton, Judy Weidemann, Deborah Cohen, Michele Greco, Lauren Pristach, Ramona Gallagher, Cynthia Pristach, Elizabeth Zausmer, Carol Campbell, Maria Evancho*

**Program, Issues and Events (PIE) Committee**

**Marian Deutschman, Chair**

Chairs or representatives from the program committees form this committee. We welcome other members to help us plan programs. Committee chairs distribute summaries of their meetings to this committee and to the board.

Our role is to discuss and recommend approval of programs, events and actions proposed by those committees and other League members. Based on our recommendations, the board decides whether to grant approval or denial. Most actions are in the form of letters to media or elected officials and must conform to League positions. The president keeps us informed of program items for LWVNYS, LWVUS and conventions. In its role as a clearinghouse for programs, this committee continued to be involved in some virtual programs during the pandemic.

The LWVBN Discussion group continued its monthly discussions on Zoom with participants submitting articles for discussion. After using Zoom extensively, we tried one meeting in a restaurant and then moved to the League office library. We welcome new members. Call Marian Deutschman for further information.

Money in Politics committee led by Janet Massaro has kept us all informed on the redistricting process.

We held a very successful outdoor event at Providence Farm Collective in Orchard Park on July 21 with a tour of the farming area and a potluck. We met refugees who provided their background and involvement in the program, and we learned the history and goals of the collective from board members.

We held a new member meet-up on Zoom on August 18.

The September program was a hybrid meeting held at the Theodore Roosevelt site. The panel included Lee Coppola, Dr. James Campbell, and Sandra Tan. Lynda Stephens coordinated the program titled “Democracy at Risk: Has Journalism Failed the American People?” We had good diversity of opinions.

The October 2 meeting was a collaboration of 10 organizations chaired by Lyle Toohey at Daemen College. It was a hybrid conference titled “From Suffrage to the ERA – Equity, Resilience & Activism.” The program included Sally Roesch Wagner as keynote speaker and a panel of experts on women’s issues.

On November 9 we co-sponsored a program on Critical Race theory with a keynote speaker and panelists at a dinner meeting at Ilio diPaolo’s Restaurant. It was cosponsored by AAUW.

November 22 program was held at Canisius College Science Building. Maxine Insera arranged a panel with Justice for Migrant Families. The panelists described the situations they face as migrants.

The December lunch meeting at Classics V was coordinated by Alberta Roman featuring Dr. Vasquez who works with immigrants and refugees.

The January Zoom program featured Dr. Robert Dahlgren and focused on civics education. Susan Czyrny coordinated the education program with emphasis on the book “Lies My Teacher Told Me.”

Ramona Gallagher conducted virtual advocacy training on February 19.

The virtual program on March 12 was coordinated by Pat Townsend. Elizabeth Lowes was the speaker who covered the West Valley facility and other environmental advocacy issues.

On April 13, we participated in a double concurrence on Zoom set up by LWVNYS on Elections Administration and Voting Rights for the Incarcerated.

The May 4 meeting at the History Museum was coordinated by Gladys Gifford on the Outer Harbor with two speakers including visuals by Jay Burney. Expert speakers were Margaret Wooster and Claudia Rosen.

May 24 meeting at the Westminster Presbyterian Church was coordinated by Liz Zausmer, chair of the Diversity, Equity & Inclusion committee. It was a collaboration with NAACP, Jewish Federation, and National Action Network, Buffalo chapter, on Playing the Race Card, facilitated by the game developers. (The May 14 massacre at Tops Market led to a postponement of this program until the fall.)

*Committee: Janet Massaro, Alberta Roman, Susan Czyrny, Lori Robinson, Gladys Gifford, Barbara Gunderson, Ramona Gallagher, Pat Townsend, Nora Mikes, JoAnn Mecca, Liz Zausmer, Terri Parks, Maxine Insera, Lynda Stephens*

**Local Government Committee**

**Marian Deutschman, Chair**

This committee initiated an effort to make the local program focus that has been voted on at the annual meeting more realistic and meaningful to members. A special committee was formed by our president to address this issue and make changes. We suggested launching a LWVBN Speaker’s Bureau to spread our knowledge on crucial issues to groups seeking speakers. That has not been implemented.

We revised the listing of our continuing responsibilities and action items. We investigated civics education and local government budget inequities. We reviewed videos for possible study and action, especially related to the American Rescue Plan, the Buffalo Transformation Fund, and a meeting of The National Association of Counties.

We read parts of a report on the Sheriff’s Dept. prepared by a political science professor at Hilbert College. Kathleen sought information on mental health and prisoner education issues. We understand that the new sheriff has begun work on some of the recommendations from the Task Group Report. Kathleen is still pursuing the chair of the County Legislature’s Safety Committee for more information, and Susan was attempting to interview the CEO of Peace Prints of WNY.

We rejected recommendations to study ranked choice voting, and marijuana legalization. We are working on expanding the committee and selecting study and program issues that are of interest to this committee, our members and the public. Our objective is to make politicians accountable, serve a watchdog function, and take action as appropriate.

*Committee: Lynne Vallone, Arlene Miles, Dot Brown, Kathleen McCarthy, Susan Czyrny, Lisa Parshall, Nora Mikes*

**Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) Committee**

**Elisabeth Zausmer, Chair**

1. **Works to help the League maintain a presence and relevance in a wide variety of communities.**
2. **Equips League members with information and experiences around DEI**
3. **Actively seeks out and partners with other civic organizations to utilize their experiences and expertise while collaborating to provide services within the Buffalo and Niagara communities**

During the fiscal year 2021-2022 the DEI committee has been involved in several projects:

We had set a goal of learning to use the Auto Ballot Device for the purpose of increasing the use of the device and increasing enhanced training for poll workers. We met with representatives of the BOE and SANYS at the Tri-Main Center on 9 September 2021 to watch a demonstration and actually use the machines. Here is the link to the BOE website for further information. <https://www.elections.ny.gov/machine-automark.html>

We continued to work with our partners, the NAACP, SANYS (Self Advocacy of New York State) and the JCRC (Jewish Community Relations Council) to develop Our Future is on the Ballot, 14 October 4, 2021, a Webinar that dealt with 4 proposals for constitutional amendments that would appear on the November 2021 ballot. The proposals involved the Right to a Clean Environment, Redistricting, Eliminating the Ten Day-Advance Voter Registration Requirement, and Authorizing No-Excuse Absentee Ballot Voting. We were able to include youth panelists as well as seasoned civic leaders. The participants were: Moderator, Jennifer Wilson, Deputy Director, NYS League of Women Voters; Sarah Dance, NAACP Environmental Justice Committee Chair; Hannah Gabelnick, JCRC Intern and Amherst Central High School Senior; Barbara Gunderson, LWV Buffalo Niagara Voter Services Chair; Maria Evancho, Nardin Academy Senior and LWV member; Hannah Brecher, Member SANYS; and Janique Curry, Vice President National Action Network (NAN), Buffalo.

At the end of 2021 Lori Robinson, President of LWV Buffalo Niagara, introduced the committee to two young professionals, sisters Sarah Pearson Collins and Keziah Pearson, who, in response to the murder of George Floyd, developed a deck of cards called “Race Cards”. Each card has a statement about race and is used to stimulate conversations about beliefs, stereotypes and experiences related to race. The sisters’ events are called “Pulling the Race Card”. Members of the DEI committee attended one of the events and participated in discussions about race with diverse groups of people. Because we enjoyed a positive experience, we invited our partner groups to collaborate with us and plan a similar event. Since January, Members of the NAACP, JCRC, NAN, and Westminster Presbyterian Church have been working with us to create Pulling the Race Card, a hybrid event, that will be held in the fall. A member of SANYS will be providing Tech Support.

The DEI Committee meets on the 3rd Tuesday of each month to plan activities and develop LWVBN’s understanding and implementation of DEI principles. We welcome anyone who is interested in working to help the League become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive in its leadership, membership, and work.

*Committee: Andrea Baldi, Barbara Gunderson, Marian Deutschman, Nina Lukin, Patti Myer-Lee, Terri Parks, Alberta Roman*

**Membership Committee**

**Mary Ann Turkla, Chair**

It has been another year of Covid impacting our ability to retain and encourage new members. The good news is we were able to bring new members on board because the dedicated men and women who worked with our allied partners highlighted our goals of civic involvement and education. Currently we have 225 active members in our organization. We recruited 28 entirely new members and had 15 members return after leaving the League for a period of time. A new member “meet and greet” was held to introduce them to the various League committees encouraging them to focus their involvement. With the enthusiastic leadership of our webmaster Nora Mikes, our website was updated making it easier for new and potential members to learn about our League and indicate interest in one or more of our committees. This year we are planning at our monthly events to greet current members and provide potential members with information about the League that will encourage them to join. These will help focus us as we strive to build our membership with individuals eager to continue the work the League has done over the past 100 years. Thank you to all who worked so hard this past year to keep our League vibrant.

**Healthcare Committee**

**Alberta Roman, Chair**

We held monthly meetings on zoom with Meeting notes submitted to Members, PIE Committee and President (cancelled June and July 2022 meetings).

We coordinated two events- one in December 2021 for Holiday Party for approximately 37 people at Classics’ V with Speaker Dr. Raul Vazquez. We supported his not-for-profit with food bag packing for Thanksgiving and monetary donations. The second program was in March 2022 with Speaker Elizabeth Lowes titled *A WNY Woman’s Career Path in Environmental Remediation.* The event was facilitated by Pat Townsend and 33 people attended by Zoom,

We formed a Sub-Committee on Mental/Behavioral Health in March to research how people are able to obtain mental/behavioral healthcare in Erie and Niagara Counties.

*Committee: Jennifer Hoffman, Judy Huber, Marian Deutschman, Elaine Puchlerz, Therese Warden, Lois Uhteg, Christine Reichmuth, Lori Robinson, Terri Parks*

**Waterfront Committee**

**Gladys Gifford, Chair**

The waterfront committee met October 20, November 17, January 19, February 23, March 16, April 6. We met via Zoom, 4:00-5:00 pm.

The committee continued to support actions concerning the Outer Harbor. We developed comments to the Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) concerning their General Project Plan and submitted these comments in December. Our comments supported efforts to maintain the Outer Harbor area as an ecological treasure, which buffers the city of Buffalo from storms and lake surges. We opposed development of an amphitheater at the water’s edge, on the basis of the LWVBN position, which insists on “appropriate use of a waterfront location” or “recreational activities within a framework that protects and enhances the natural environment at the water’s edge.”

LWVBN continues to be an active member of the Our Outer Harbor coalition and participated in the lawsuit brought by the coalition to insist that the ECHDC comply with federal requirement to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement for their Outer Harbor projects.

We were encouraged by the Interfaith Climate Justice Community, who held prayer vigils at the Outer Harbor and organized a protest in November.

The Erie Canal Harbor Development Corporation (ECHDC) continues to promote outdoor recreational events located on the Outer harbor which rely on access by private automobile, thereby excluding important segments of the population: mobility impaired, working poor, transit dependent. Again, the ECHDC fails to honor the LWVBN position which insists on “appropriate use of a waterfront location” or “recreational activities within a framework that protects and enhances the natural environment at the water’s edge.”

We urged LWVBN members to write to Gov. Hochul, to urge that the Outer Harbor lands be transferred to the Parks Department, to be held in trust for the public.

We organized a public event, May 4th, 2022, at the Buffalo History Museum, with speakers Margaret Wooster, author of Meander and Claudia Rosen, Buffalo Waterkeeper. The event also featured videos of the Outer Harbor by Jay Burney. More than 40 people attended, and signed postcards to send to the governor.

We maintain an email contact list of 40 people.

*Committee: Joan Bozer, James Carr, Ellen Gibson, Gladys Gifford, Janet Goodsell, Joanne Kahn, Beth Kaufman, Janet Lenichek, Janet Massaro, Joann Mecca, Terri Parks, Amanda Robert, Lori Robinson, Lynda Stephens*

**VOTER**

**Terri Parks, Copy Editor**

We produced eleven issues of the Voter in the past year. Kathleen McCormick continues to be the graphic editor and provides most pleasing editions. Nancy DeTine proofread the copy and with her usual care, made certain we produced a professional publication. Sally Metzger took care of mailing the hard copies in a timely manner. We appreciate the contributors for each issue. The Voter continues to be the most important way we keep our membership up to date on the work of our League.

**Money in Politics/Redistricting**

**Janet Massaro, Chair**

The Money In Politics (MIP) Committee's focus was on redistricting this past year. Committee members listened to the online redistricting hearings for members of U.S. Congress, NYS Senate and Assembly. We testified at the Erie County Legislature's hearings and are currently attending hearings for the City of Buffalo.

At the Erie County hearing in the fall of 2021, we criticized the Republican members of the County Commission for failing to participate in the discussions. The new county lines were essentially drawn by the Democrats. They were approved by the Legislature and signed by County Executive Poloncarz early in 2022. No further action was taken.

Buffalo redistricting began late in June 2022. Push Buffalo, other local organizations, and Buffalo citizens have been vigorously engaged. As of this writing, the consensus in Buffalo seems to be, “Let’s start over”. We will continue to follow activities as they unfold.

The MIP Committee also followed the state League redistricting activities, testifying at the new Independent Redistricting Commission’s first hearing in Buffalo and listening to other hearings as they occurred across the state. The state League kept us informed and disappointed, realizing that the League supported 2014 amendments to the State Constitution failed to improve the 2020 redistricting process.  Both Congressional and State Senate district lines were declared unconstitutional and were redrawn by an appointed Special Master. The Assembly lines have still to be decided.

*Committee: Janet Goodsell, Jennifer Hoffman, Shirley Joy, Beth Kauffman, Laura Mc Dade, Jo Ann Mecca, Margaret Meyer, Chris Reichmuth, Alberta Roman*