



Winnebago Voter

January / February 2011

January / February Calendar

Monday, January 10, 6:30 – 8:30 pm
Winnebago County LWV Board Meeting
1936 Hazel St.

Tuesday, January 12: 11:45 am
Food for Thought Lunch
Vitale's Italian Cuisine, 215 W. Murdock Ave.
Tina Haffeman, ESTHER
Need for a warming shelter in Oshkosh (see p.2)

Thursday, January 20: 7 – 9 PM W. Michael Slattery,
"Arms Control, Facing Security Issues and Deficit Financing", Manitowoc City Hall's Council Chambers, 900 Quay Street, Manitowoc, WI *(See page 4)*

Monday, January 31: 7:00 – 8:30 pm
Coughlin Center 625 E. County Rd. Y
Panel on Winnebago County board size and committees
(See p. 4 and →)

Tuesday, February 1: 7:00 – 8:00 pm
Circuit Court Judge Branch VI Candidates Forum
Oshkosh City Hall, Room 400 (see p. 3)

Saturday, February 5: 9:00 – 11:30 am
Winnebago County LWV Lively Issues Brunch
Coughlin Center, 625 E. County Road Y *(See p. 7)*

Wednesday, February 9: 11:45 am
Food for Thought Lunch
Vitale's Italian Cuisine 215 W. Murdock Ave.
Mark Weisensel, Winnebago County Aging and Disability Resource Center (see p. 2)

Monday, February 14: 6:30 – 8:30 pm
Winnebago County LWV Board Meeting
Place TBD

Tuesday, February 15
Spring Primary Election
Polls Open 7 AM to 8 PM

"A Fresh Look at County Board Organization"

Monday January 31, 6:30 - 8:00 pm
Coughlin Building
625 E. County Road Y, Oshkosh

Come to hear panel members discuss their county's experience with smaller county boards and restructured committees.

Panel Members

James Dwyer

Waukesha County Board Chair

Lance Pliml

Wood County Board Chair

Martin Farrell

Fond du Lac County Board Chair

Moderator Steve Hintz

Winnebago County League of Women Voters is sponsoring this public meeting to provide background information about changes the Winnebago County Board might consider in its size and committee structure during 2011.

Check out these web addresses:

www.lwvwinnebago.org

www.lwv.org

www.lwvwi.org

Circuit Court Judge Barbara Key Talks about Recusal and Impartial Justice

At the November Food for Thought Lunch Judge Barbara Key addressed the issues of impartial justice and recusal--two big topics that concern the local and state Leagues. (*Judge Key, right, against mural at Vitales.*)

She began with interpreters who are used to aid defendants not fluent in English. Five years ago under state Supreme Court Justice Shirley Abramson, a rule was passed setting standards for translators. As a result of this, translators need to have passed a test to qualify them to act as translators in court rooms. To further equalize this issue, the translators are paid at the state level. So, having an interpreter during a trial should not be an issue for defendant or prosecutor.



The next issue of impartial justice she touched on was that of public defenders. Attorneys allocate part of their burden to pro bono cases, but some of them do not tell the judge if they are doing casework pro bono. The Winnebago County Circuit Court judges are trying to form a group to buy more legal assistance for defendants, for example in landlords / tenant cases. Usually defendants don't qualify for legal aid unless they are indigent.

The bulk of her presentation dealt with the issue of recusal on the local as well as the state level. She wanted us to understand that only in Wisconsin can a defendant ask for a substitute judge. Such a privilege does not exist in other states.

Of the 1,700 cases per year that go to trial in the county only in 5 to 10 cases has the judge recused himself or herself. The notion of recusal, she said, is subjective. A judge usually looks at the case and asks how his or her recusal or failure to recuse will look to others. She gave us a handout of the "Disqualification of judge" from the state's statutes as well as a copy of the recusal portion of the *Wisconsin Supreme Court Rules*.

Judges do discuss with each other notions of recusal. They consider how close a relationship between the judge and the defendant is "too close." They don't want to encourage judges to "abuse" the system. They also consider the appearance to the public and their friendship with the attorneys on the cases. Judges must say why they have recused themselves from a case, but they need to be circumspect so that they do not influence the judge who will be handling the case.

Not surprisingly the Gableman campaign ad and the subsequent Supreme Court decision (3 to 3) came up in the question and answer session. Judge Key complimented the state League on its lobbying the Legislature to tighten the campaign finance laws which would prevent misleading ads and make clearer who the sponsors of such ads are.

Upcoming Food for Thought Lunch Speakers

Wed Jan 12, 11:45 am

Tina Haffeman will speak about the need for a warming shelter in Oshkosh, as identified by a task force of ESTHER, an interfaith group focused on social justice.

Wed. Feb 9, 11:45 am

Mark Weisensel will speak about the county Aging and Disability Resource Center. Mark is Supervisor, Aging and Outreach Services, Winnebago County Dept. of Human Services.

Update: Oshkosh/Winnebago County Health Department Consolidation

(Ann Marshall, who has been attending the consolidation meetings of the Winnebago County Board and following the progress of the consolidation, submitted this article.)

Doug Gieryn, Director of Winnebago County Health Department spoke at the June Food for Thought luncheon about the possibility of consolidating the Oshkosh and Winnebago County Health Departments. The League has a position that intergovernmental cooperation offers opportunities for more efficient and economical governmental services. Because of this position and because discussions between the County and the City were already underway on this issue, a League representative has attended all City and County meetings where this question was on the agenda.

Talk of consolidation stemmed from the fact that the Oshkosh City Health Department Director retired in December, 2009 and the County planned to move its Health Department to the newly acquired Oshkosh B'Gosh building. There is plenty of space to incorporate city health staff. Of interest to note is that currently only three Wisconsin counties have more than one health department. Winnebago County has four separate departments.

The assessment of information gathered so far is that consolidation would likely benefit Oshkosh residents and may provide eventual benefits to all county residents as well. There would be better coordination and provision of services such as maternal/child health services, and crisis/disaster responses. There are more grant options available for a consolidated department. Services can be allocated based on needs--now being done by location. There will be a greater capacity to address public health emergencies--an example of which would be the 2009 H1N1 flu epidemic.

The City Board of Health raised some concerns that they believe have not been addressed by the County so far and need to be dealt with. Some services that are important to the City are not now a priority of the County. Examples are lead paint investigation, frequent inspection of public swimming pools and inspection and licensing of temporary food vendors. The City is also concerned that their public health employees be retained and receive fair and equitable treatment if the consolidation occurs.

A resolution was presented to the City Council on November 23, 2010 "...directing the City Manager to negotiate the possible consolidation of the City Health Services into the Winnebago County Health Department ...". Although this resolution seemed vague, it did acknowledge that any plan to consolidate would include **negotiation** of the sticking points. A representative of our League spoke in favor of the resolution. It passed 4 to 3. Efforts will be made to continue to follow the process and to keep League members informed

Circuit Court Judge Branch VI Candidates' Forum

The only local primary race is the Winnebago County Circuit Court Branch VI three-way race. LWV Winnebago County will host the forum at the Oshkosh City Council Chambers (Room 400) in City Hall, 215 Church Street from 7 to 8 PM on February 1. The candidates are Daniel Bissett, Edmund Jelinski and Caroline Carver. The forum is open to the public and will be telecast on Oshkosh CitiCable 10.

League Makes Statement on County Board Size and Committees

Beginning in November, League President Kathy Propp asked members to sit in on county board committee meetings. Here is the statement she read at the December 13 meeting of the Winnebago County Judiciary and Public Safety Committee.

“The League of Women Voters can support the redistricting timeline which is on your agenda today if the Judiciary Committee does not endorse a board size resolution at your January 10 meeting.

The Winnebago County League of Women Voters respectfully asks the Judiciary Committee to postpone action on a county board size resolution until your February 14 meeting.

We have set the date of Monday January 31 for our public forum on the topic of county board size and committee structure. We plan to invite officials from other Wisconsin counties which have recently downsized and changed their county committee structure to find out how it is working. Winnebago County Board supervisors and the public deserve a chance to gain information from the experience of other counties before making a decade-long decision on board size. There is no reason to fear a public discussion about alternative sizes and committee configurations.

2011 is not the time for the public to petition for a referendum on board size. During 2011 the Winnebago County Board and the Judiciary Committee have an opportunity to take seriously their every-ten-years responsibility for setting board size and redistricting and to demonstrate that they care about input from their constituents.”

(Editor’s note: the timeline was approved. The full county board is scheduled to vote on board size for the next ten year cycle at their Feb. 22 meeting.)

The Winnebago County LWV has had a position on reducing the size of the county board for a long time. It has followed with interest the changes in board size of other county boards in Wisconsin. It is interesting to note that the number of counties in Wisconsin (72) and other states in the Midwest was decreed by Northwest Ordinance of 1787. For an interesting discussion on the history and purpose of counties read pages 233-235 of *Caught in the Middle* by Richard C. Longworth (Bloosbury 2008).

Manitowoc LWV’s W. Michael Slattery to Present Results of Arms Control Study

In 2009-2010, a five-person LWV task force reviewed the 1980s League position on arms control and concluded that, while its underlying tenets remained applicable, the position needed updating. It was felt that it should be amended to accommodate a changed world with new weapons and delivery systems, new players on the world stage and new treaties still awaiting signature or ratification.

The LWV of Manitowoc County is proud to present the results of this two-year effort by a member of the national task force and of the local league, W. Michael Slattery. His talk, “Arms control, Facing Security Issues and Deficit Financing,” is scheduled for Thursday, January 20 from 7 to 9 PM at Manitowoc City Hall’s Council Chambers, 900 Quay Street, Manitowoc, WI. All Wisconsin League members are especially invited to attend.

Dr. Slattery researched and wrote the paper on arms control and conventional weapons while other League members provided papers treating topics such as geopolitical background, state and non-state actors, missile-based defense, biological weapons and treaty urgency. All of these background papers are on the LWVUS website and in the LWVUS impact on Issues publication. The 2010 LWVUS national convention members agreed with and approved the task force’s recommendations and amendments that strengthened and updated the League’s position.

Fox River PCB Cleanup Moving Forward

Scott Stein (*pictured right*) of LF Public Relations firm described the ongoing PCB removal process on a 13.3 mile stretch of the Fox River from Little Rapids to the mouth of the river at Green Bay at the League's December Food for Thought lunch.

The current operation began last April and ended for a winter break in November. Operations will resume in spring of 2011.

The dredged material from the river bottom is moved through a pipeline to a processing facility in Green Bay. Here large debris is removed, then sand and polymer is added to the rest. Next it is "dewatered" in compressors and pressed into "cakes." The cakes containing the PCBs, sand and polymer are trucked to a landfill in Calumet County and buried beneath layers of clay.

At a two mile stretch of the river, south of the DePere Bridge—where the PCB count is very low—capping and covering of gravel and sand was used to bury the PCB's. This method prevents the PCBs from entering the river again.

The majority of the cost of this operation is borne by two paper companies. The cancer-causing PCBs entered the river decades ago as a byproduct of carbonless paper manufacture.

Mr. Stein described this operation as a first of its kind in the country and added that the work is ahead of schedule.

Further information about the Fox River cleanup can be found at the web site of the public relations firm Mr. Stein is associated with. The web address is www.foxrivercleanup.com.



OSHKOSH REFOCUSES ON NEIGHBORHOODS

By Ann Marshall

Enthusiasm is building for the fresh start on revitalization of older neighborhoods in Oshkosh. In the summer of 2010 the City and the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation approached a **NeighborWorks** organization in Racine to explore the possibility of creating a collaboration. In November a public meeting was held to explain the program. Dominick Martinelli, Executive Director of the Racine group spoke as did David Boehlke, a consultant and neighborhood revitalization specialist.

Mr. Boehlke pointed out that an organization cannot change neighborhoods: neighbors and local leaders can. A NeighborWorks partnership will require the community to focus on the positives a neighborhood can offer. He suggested four strategies to use to begin changing perceptions about neighborhoods.

- Name neighborhoods and give them a sense of identity residents can build upon.
- Build property values and equity investments in neighborhood homes to raise property values and push out property investors who buy cheap properties and do little to improve them.
- Set high design standards at the municipal level so neighborhoods and older homes within them are preserved.
- Engage neighbors on a block-by-block basis so they get to know each other and can work together to improve conditions in their area.

In a follow-up memo to those who attended the public meeting, Mr. Boehlke spelled out his three themes: First: What are the core outcomes of the proposed investments? Next, No one approach is the absolute best: Oshkosh has to decide where to invest its efforts and at what scale.

And finally, No project should be undertaken without commitments of enough of the right resources. One section of his memo addressed the question “Where should you start and what should you do first?”

“If Oshkosh wants to strengthen its older neighborhoods, you should start with those blocks that are closer to stable already. Remember Oshkosh has many highly desirable neighborhoods competing for good renters and strong buyers. If you focus on your least desirable sites first, you put your efforts at an enormous disadvantage. You will have to overcome too many obstacles: a poor reputation, years of disinvestment, low levels of homeownership, and fewer households with long-term occupancy. There are many older Oshkosh neighborhoods that already offer good location, well-built and well-maintained houses, solid levels of homeownership and long-term residents. Such communities are ‘neighborhoods of choice’. You need to recognize the competition right in your own city and make a tough decision. It might seem counterintuitive, but the best place to start is where there is the least need for improvement. These are strong blocks with only few signs of disinvestment and a core of stable residents. These are the places that can achieve success with the least amount of resources and in the quickest timeframe. That will help your organization and it will set a high standard for future work”.

On November 23, 2010 the Oshkosh Common Council unanimously approved the partnership with NeighborWorks of Racine. Initial funding will come from a \$250,000 allocation under the city’s Capital Improvement Program, a \$50,000 allocation from OACF and \$100,000 from the Community Development Block Grant funds.

A steering committee is being established that will oversee the program locally and direct allocations. Bill Wyman, an east side resident, will serve as chair of the committee that will be made up of 7 - 10 people.

Work on the project will begin in early 2011 with identifying key measures and conditions in Oshkosh to use as a baseline to evaluate progress. Identification of target neighborhoods will be made and community building will begin.

15th Annual **Toward Harmony with Nature Conference**

Concerned about the habitat, the watershed and the wildlife around you?
Worried about what will become of greenspace not only in your own backyard, but also in your community's? Perhaps you have your own habitat and want to learn more about maintaining it. Or, perhaps you'd like to learn how to create a habitat of your own! Then mark your calendar and plan to attend the 15th Annual "Toward Harmony with Nature Conference" to learn what you can do to improve the environment through natural landscaping.



This day-long seminar on natural landscaping is sponsored by Fox Valley Area Chapter of Wild Ones. This year's conference is being held at the Oshkosh Convention Center, 2 North Main Street from 8:00 (check in) to 4:00

- 9:00 – 10:00 Mariette Nowak will be presenting the keynote speech: “Does Your Yard Make a Difference?” Through research, naturalist and author Mariette Nowak proves that even the smallest yard can make a difference: You can increase biodiversity, heal your piece of the earth, improve the health of you and; your family, and add to the quality of your life.
 - Seven other speaker presentations on subjects related to natural landscaping
 - Conference Website: <http://thwnconference.weebly.com/index.html>
- Reservations for lunch must be made by midnight, January 21, 2010.

**Lively Issues Brunch--Saturday February 5, 9:00-11:30 am
Coughlin Building Room A, 625 E County Road Y, Oshkosh**

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Bring a brunch dish to share. Beverage and table settings will be provided.

Help shape the LWV agenda for the coming year. Bring your great ideas on possible LWV issues and studies!

LWV is a grassroots organization with positions on many issues at the local, state, and national level. How does this happen? How can you have an impact?

Program planning starts with you, the members. This is your annual opportunity to discuss the work of the Winnebago County League of Women Voters and LWV Wisconsin. We brainstorm issues to study and action to take for the coming year. Not only is the food delicious, but the conversation is thought provoking and a good way for newer members to understand the League's issues and process. The meeting results go to the Board and then to the membership at the May Annual Meeting.

This year our League studied the possible consolidation of the Winnebago County, Oshkosh, Neenah and Menasha Health Departments. We invited Doug Gieryn, County Health Director, to speak. We monitored all city of Oshkosh and county health board meetings. Ann Marshall gave a well reasoned, articulate statement to the Oshkosh City Council, which voted 4-3 to pursue negotiated consolidation of the Oshkosh Health Department with the Winnebago County Health Department (see p. 3).

County board size and committee structure are also a focus this year. The Winnebago County Board (and all units of government) are required to redistrict every ten years following the census. Our committee has researched county board sizes and committee structures to compare with that of Winnebago County. We are attending county committee meetings and monitoring the redistricting process. This study and action culminates with a major public meeting on January 31 that will feature a panel discussion by County Board Chairs from Waukesha, Wood and Fond du Lac. These counties reduced the size of their county boards and restructured their board committees.

We continue to work on a project to place historic signs in all city of Oshkosh parks, in cooperation with Ray Maurer, Oshkosh Parks Director.

The Winnebago Voter
1936 Hazel St.
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LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS MISSION

The League of Women Voters, a non-partisan political organization of men and women, encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Visit <http://www.lwv.org>, <http://www.lwvwi.org>, <http://www.lwvwinnebago.org>

Members receive the bi-monthly *Winnebago Voter, Forward* from LWV-WI, and action alerts. Meetings are open to the public. We believe open civil discourse is critical to protect democracy and move forward with positive reform.

League Membership: \$50 (\$75 for two in household), \$10 for students, \$25 limited income.
Winnebago County Voter Subscription only: \$10.00.

Dues payable to: LWV Winnebago County, 1202 Algoma Blvd, Oshkosh 54901.

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