

# League of Women Voters

## South Bend Area

*"I never doubted that equal rights was the right direction. Most reforms, most problems are complicated. But to me there is nothing complicated about ordinary equality." ~Alice Paul, 1920*

Spring, 2010



Annual Business Meeting LWVSB

### School Board Member Guest Speaker at League Business Meeting

The League of Women Voters, South Bend area held its annual business meeting on June 9th at Polito's Restaurant in South Bend. Members joined together for food, fun, and conversation. Topics included the local program positions and key League accomplishments in 2009-2010 including the launch of this newsletter.

Following dinner League members heard from South Bend School Board member Stephanie Spivey. Stephanie spoke about the challenges she faced during her campaign and her position on the critical issues currently facing the South Bend school District. Also at the annual meeting League President Lisa Plencner gave her 2010 President's report. (See below!)



By Lisa Plencner, Remarks from annual business meeting, June 9, 2010

### President's Ponderings

I come from a very small family. Even my extended family is small. Growing up, our holidays were rarely different from most other days...especially after my grandparents were gone. It's always just me, my mom, my dad, and my brother gathered together around the dining room table. It's not sad or lonely, it's just who we are. I'm not used to a big group and certainly not used to sisters.

And now here I am in my 40<sup>th</sup> year of life with this big huge family of sisters! And I feel blessed. As I gathered the materials together to do my President's Report, it hit me just HOW much like a family our little group really is. Look around right this minute. Just about every single one of you at this table knows every other one. If even only a little.

As President, I can even tell you what I rely on each of you for and what specialty each of you brings to our league.

Our VP Elizabeth Bennion sure does make sure our candidate's forums go off without a hitch doesn't she? Her ability to wrangle candidates and generate press is quite amazing. I couldn't ask for a better and more capable VP. Thanks for being my right hand.

And Glenda Rae Hernandez? How long exactly have you been Treasurer? I rely on you to keep our membership list up to date. And those reminder letters

go out religiously. And anyone who has been in public with Glenda Rae is bound to know EVERYONE knows Glenda Rae. And I do mean everyone. I thought I knew a lot of people...I ain't got nothing on Glenda Rae.

Emily Conway is my go-to for veteran "how is it traditionally done" advice. I use Emily as my kind of respect barometer. If Emily seems on board, we're doing okay.

Kimber Sorenson-Brugh and Barb Phelps. Notice how I put those two together? They're sitting together aren't they? Two peas in a pod. I think the only thing that keeps Kimber from trying to do every single thing in the whole wide world is Barb telling her to save time for shopping! Not that Barb isn't just as willing to help with whatever you ask.

Need advice on how to reduce, reuse and recycle? See Kathleen Petitjean. Forget drill, baby drill, it's green, baby green. Our leader in saving our favorite sister - planet earth.

I have a sister here I shared a very special event with... the inauguration of our President. Yup, Jill LaFountain took me all the way to DC. First time I ever set foot in the place, and what a thing to go for! Can you say PARTY girl? This woman is devoted to her party.

Speaking of parties, Julie Vuckovich has been working

for the democratic party for a very long time too. Although she often gets tagged as "Ms. Vuckovich works for...with some "important" man's name to follow" I would like to say, anyone who knows Julie knows she is incredibly important in her own right. As far as professional heroes go...she's mine.

When you think peace think Lois Clark. I can't even make the peace sign without seeing her face. She is our top notch peace consultant. Between her and Glenda Rae, I'm really not sure why we even have war anymore.

I've known Kelly Sanford much longer than most of you. Poor me. Of course I'm kidding. She's going to hate me for saying this but Kelly just loves to be a fundraiser. Okay not really, no one really loves that do they? But I can tell you it's how her mind works. Money, money, money. Again, just kidding. She's filled with fantastic ideas for how our little non-profit can try to get some funds. But stay away from her dark humor....

And Geri Pawalski... communications guru. She's actually burning to tell me about a new communications plan she's concocted. I've got chills. Geri, does this mean we're moving past a phone tree?

Amanda Ceravolo, thank you for reminding us that the press is our friend and we need to use them to our advantage. Please don't ask Amanda to share the way

she's had to talk me down before and after my press interviews. She's an excellent consultant...I'm a terrible student.

Another one of our press people, Marti Heline, brings her journalistic integrity to our league which keeps us mindful of our non-partisan status. I think she's a helpful reminder to all of us that we need to always look at every side of an issue. I know that's what makes our league great and that's what I love about it. We all should be pressing one another to do exactly that. Think of it like... What would Marti do?

Linda Wolfson, you're not getting skipped. Try as you might to get involved with other things so you can run off and leave us, we will never let you go. You're like the big sister we're all jealous of. What do you mean you know Ellen Bravo? What? You put your bras in the trash cans too? Some of us want to beat you at your overachieving ways, but know we can't so we'll just have to carry out the excellent ideas you come up with. Thanks for giving me so many of them.

So, with good reason I stand here before you feeling like I am the big ole proud momma of our family and I am so delighted to call you all sister.

And let me tell you...our family has much to be proud of. I'd like to point out that the places we've been the most successful are the places in which we do what we love. Let's keep that up. I think we've done an excellent job highlighting each of our members' strengths and I'd like to continue that focus.

~Lisa

# Using Tax Policy to Improve Our Community

by Linda Wolfson

On **Monday, August 9, 2010**, the South Bend Common Council will conduct a public hearing on Bill 25-10, an amendment to South Bend's current tax abatement ordinance. The League of Women Voters of the South Bend Area supports the passage of this legislation.

Under the current South Bend Abatement Program, property taxes for new or expanding businesses may be "phased-in" for up to a ten year period if the project provides certain economic development and other public benefits. The length of the abatement period is determined by a point system for possible public benefits.

Bill 25-10 would revise the current ordinance by adding important public benefit options, clarifying the criteria used to determine compliance, and providing basic requirements for all developments receiving public financial support in the form of tax breaks. It would create tax abatement procedures that are essentially the same as those adopted last year by the St. Joseph County Council.

## **Public benefits promoted by the Ordinance**

According to the proposed ordinance, companies may receive a three-year base level of abatement if they meet basic requirements. These include paying all company employees at least a Poverty Wage (currently \$8.80 per hour), and the requirement of an Affirmative Action Plan for both the applicant and the construction contractors.

One to seven additional years abatement may be received for benefits addressing a range of community needs, including the payment of Self-Sufficiency wages, defined as the wage rate that provides a full-time worker an income sufficient to meet basic needs without subsidies of any kind (currently \$12.90 per hour).

Companies can also receive benefit points for meeting energy-efficient building standards at the Silver Level of higher, as prescribed by the LEED rating system, or for developing a business whose primary function is the manufacture, distribution or installation of renewable energy products and materials.

Benefit points are available for companies that locate in the Economically Distressed Area, defined as the fifteen South Bend Census Tracts with the highest levels of poverty and unemployment, and the lowest levels of median income. Any company, despite its location, is eligible to receive points for employing residents of Economically Distressed Areas.

Projects that employ local companies for at least 75% of construction work, who employ at least 50% of construction workers who are residents of St. Joseph County and who use construction contractors who pay the Common Construction Wage Package will also receive additional benefit points.

For the complete text of the proposed ordinance, visit the Community Forum for Economic Development website: [www.communityforum.typepad.com/](http://www.communityforum.typepad.com/)

## **Why does the League support this Ordinance?**

The League of Women Voters supports legislation only in accordance with our National, State and Local Program. Three positions of the LWVUSA provide the basis for our support of the proposed SB ordinance revision. Our Position of Meeting Basic Human Needs reads: *"The League of Women Voters of the United States believes that one of the goals of social policy in the United States should be to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families and that the most effective social programs are those designed to prevent or reduce poverty."* The League program also contains strong language in support of nondiscrimination and Affirmative Action and advocates both legislative and regulatory approaches, as well as litigation.

Finally, the Guidelines for economic development assistance from the federal government are addressed in the LWVUSA Program on Urban Policy. *"The cornerstone of a national urban policy is a commitment to helping cities achieve economic strength. Federal programs to encourage private reinvestment in central cities should counter an eroding tax base and provide jobs for the inner-city unemployed."*

## **Voice of a Veteran Leaguer**

Although there are many members who have gone before me for many years, I still have some history with LWV. There had been a League many years ago in Marshall, but it had disbanded. When many of those 'old' members found out that I was a member of LWVUS, they decided to reinstate the Marshall County League. We had about 25 members - several were well-stated in their particular political party, but joined knowing that the League was a non-partisan organization. We stayed together for about five or six years, but the dues got to be so high due to the National dues rising, so we decided we just could not keep up. After they disbanded, I wrote to National asking them for the closest League to Plymouth and they put me in touch with the South Bend group. I had done a lot of voter registration and other voter programs, plus I had done the Newsletter for the Plymouth group, so when South Bend found out about my history with a Newsletter, they gave me a 'job'. I did the master sheets on my computer then took them to a local printer, then sorted and banded the newsletters in to order needed for Bulk Rate and took them to South Bend the Notre Dame Post Office) to mail. I was not able to participate in very many of the projects of SB, but did attend several programs including campaign debates by several local officials and two who were candidates for the U S Representative seat.

It was my appeal to the non-partisanship of the League and their working on various projects that tweaked my interest in the beginning, and continued with the Marshall County League, and much more when I became part of the SB League. There I met so many members who had been in the League for some time and had so much to offer in the purpose of the League. I so much appreciated the camaraderie of the group and so much enjoyed my evenings with them. Due to my worsening physical situation, I can't drive and it would be difficult for my husband to take me to meetings, etc.

I extend a "Hello" each time I correspond with President Lisa to those who are still active from my days with you all. In reading the roster list, there are not many names that ring a bell, but I salute you for the number of members you now have. You have come a long way since I was active and I extend my best wishes for the coming days and years for all of you.

~Mary Lou Wise

## **What you can do:**

**1. Become fully informed.** Read the ordinance in full and question issues that are unclear to you. Kimber-Sorenson Brugh and Glenda Rae Hernandez have attended most meetings of the Coalition for Responsible Tax Abatement —Lisa Plencner and Linda Wolfson have also been part of the process. Contact any of us for more information and/or discussion.

**2. Once you are informed, share your information** – with family, neighbors, friends, and co-workers. Your opinion is very valuable and as the date of the public hearing draws near, opposition to the strengthened ordinance could necessitate informed discussion.

**3. Share your views with elected officials.** If you're from South Bend, contact your Council member (at-large and district) as soon as possible. If you're from Mishawaka, let your representatives know how you feel about what's happening in South Bend.

**4. If you can, attend the August 9 meeting of the South Bend Common Council** – whether or not you choose to testify at the public hearing and whether or not you reside in the City of South Bend. The economic health of South Bend impacts all of us. The meeting will start at 7 pm in the Council Chambers on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of the County City Building.

## **Meetings and Events**

### ***Lunch with the League***

*Second Friday of each month at The South Bend Chocolate Factory- Speakers TBA.*

*July 9, 2010*

*August 13, 2010*

*September 10, 2010*

### ***Evening with the League***

*Third Thursday of each month – Place and topic TBA*

*July 15, 2010 (see info included)*

*August 19, 2010*

*September 16, 2010*

### ***Urban Garden Market***

*Every Saturday at LaSalle Square 9:00am – 1:00pm*

### ***LWVSBA Board Meetings***

*Fourth Wednesday of every month at 5:30pm in the basement of the South Bend Public Library (Main) – Everyone welcome*

## **The League of Women Voters**

### **South Bend Area Presents:**

*“Evening with the League”*

*Thursday, July 15<sup>th</sup>, 5:30pm*

*At Borders Bookstore,*

*4230 Grape Road Mishawaka.*

*We will be continuing our Book Club discussing Ellen Bravo’s book Taking on the Big Boys (Chapters 4-8)*

*Call Kimber at 255-1466 for questions or directions. This event is free and open to the public. Copies of the book will be available at Borders for purchase if needed.*

Please help your Newsletter team get the word out about the wonderful activities involving LWVSBA. Submit articles to:

Amanda Ceravolo – [ahart@ywcasic.org](mailto:ahart@ywcasic.org)

Barb Phelps – [bphelps@memorialsb.org](mailto:bphelps@memorialsb.org)

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Want to find out more about your League of Women Voters?  
Visit us online at

[www.lwvsouthbend.org](http://www.lwvsouthbend.org)