



THE VOTER *LWV*

*The official newsletter
of the League of Women
Voters North Pinellas*

<https://lwnorthpinellas.org> lwnnpc.info@gmail.com

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March-April 2024

LWVNPC Annual Luncheon, April 13, 2024

Keynote Speaker: Kevin Hendrick, Superintendent Pinellas County Schools



Keynote Speaker Kevin Hendricks

Forty people attended the Annual Luncheon and Business Meeting at Trinity Presbyterian Church in Clearwater. Superintendent Kevin Hendrick gave an thorough overview of what is going on in Pinellas County schools today. A key concern discussed by Superintendent Hendrick is one shared in many educational settings: student disengagement after Covid. During the pandemic, students became accustomed to remote learning. They began to doubt the value of on-site attendance, and overall school attendance rates decreased throughout the state. Superintendent Hendrick spoke of the need to motivate students to attend school by offering educational activities

that were also fun and exciting. He gave examples such as field trips, academic competitions, student leadership opportunities, athletics, and performing arts.

In addition to Superintendent Henrick's address, new LWVNPC Officers and Board of Directors were installed. Outgoing president Marti Folwell's unwavering commitment and work for the mission of the League of Women Voters is a shining example to us all. She has been a member of LWV for more than 50 years and has served as president for 4 nonconsecutive terms.



Newly elected president Tanya Landry with outgoing president Marti Folwell



Marti Folwell & Gayla Larson



Education Chair Vivian Posey presents Dr. Hendrick with gift.



Honoring President Marti Folwell: Tanya Landry; Trinity Presbyterian Minister Dawn Conti; Marti Folwell; Jacqueline Farrell

Jacqueline Farrell addressing the assembly



Board of Directors for 2023-2025

Vice President 1 Jacqueline Farrell
Secretary Gayla Larson
Director Mina Harkins
Director Linda Metzkwow
Director Vivian Posey

Elected Members of the Board for 2024-2026

President Tanya Landry
Vice President 2 Beth Hovind
Treasurer Dennis McDermott
Director Bryan Beckman
Director Bill Jonson
Director Jeanne Reynolds

2024-2025 Nominating Committee
Chair Marti Folwell

From Our President: Marti's Musings

Note: This is Marti's final column as President of LWVNPC. We salute Marti for all her service and are glad she will continue to be a valued member of our League.



Monday, April 22, was Earth Day.

As we make choices daily about the best way to live our lives, let us keep in mind what kind of planet we will be leaving for those who follow us: children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, etc. Knowledge and awareness are increasing about such things as plastic pollution, the growing need for space for trash disposal, the need for clean air and water, toxins in our environment, extinction of wildlife, global warming--the list goes on ad infinitum.

My plea is that we all pay attention, read, study, observe what we can do or not do to improve our shared situation while still working for liberty and justice for all.

Martha (Marti) Folwell, President, LWVNPC

Important News: Change in Dues Structure!

LWV is switching to a new member portal for all Leagues across the country. There is no action that members need to take right now, but we want to provide you with an overview of what these changes will mean for you.

This year, you will still renew in the usual way. When the system launches in January 2025, you will receive an email to log in to the portal, but you will not be asked to renew again until a year after your most recent renewal. You will be given the option to sign up to auto-renew annually, and your membership will last a year after your last renewal. Once you have access to the portal, you will be able to update your own information, including contact information.

When it comes time to renew, you will receive an email reminder. Dues will no longer be a fixed rate but will be pay-what-you-can. The recommended dues amount for all members across the country will be \$75, but members can pay any amount (min. \$20), including the current dues rate.

Under the current system, LWV of North Pinellas County pays a fixed rate per member to LWWFL and to LWWUS. Under the new system, a percentage of dues will go to the state and national League. This means that when you renew, if you would like to make an additional contribution directly to LWV of North Pinellas as some members choose to do when they renew, this will need to be separate from choosing a higher dues amount. A higher dues amount benefits the League as a whole and allows us to offer the option of lower dues to increase our member base but does not exclusively support the local League.

There will still be the option to renew by check for members who don't use the internet, but members who are able to access the portal and renew that way are encouraged to do so.

On a member level, we hope these changes will make managing your membership easier. On a League level, this is expected to increase membership around the country and increase our ability to empower voters and defend democracy. We will keep you informed as we receive new and relevant information.

Young Adult Focus Group via Zoom, March 7, 2024



On March 7, 2024 Jacqui Farrell, Tanya Landry, and Gayla Larson met with seven young voters via Zoom and with two individuals in calls outside of the Zoom session. Participants were in the 18- to 34-year-old age range, of varied race, gender, and ethnicity. They were homogenous in that all had college degrees or some college. This is what they told us:

They all planned to vote, even though they had peers who were not going to vote. This focus group ranked where they got information on issues and how to vote:

All reported that to best communicate with them, they prefer infographics that are simple, informative, and shareable. See examples below:

Where they get their information	
Peers	6
Family	6
YouTube	5
Internet	4
Instagram	4
Tik Tok	2
Print news	2
Cable news	2
Facebook	1
Threads	1
X (previously Twitter)	0



Our focus group reported that they all received voter education in high school, but felt it was cursory, and that little information was presented on legislative processes.

They had a slight preference for mail-in ballots. Focus group members commented that mail-in ballots gave them time to look at choices and research candidates.

What issues did they rank most important:		
Inflation/Cost of Living	7	These young adults were knowledgeable and motivated. We learned from them that we need to reach out to young adults in more challenging populations, such as those not attending college or just entering community college. We need to promote Vote411.org (the League's voter resource site) since they report doing online election research but had no idea how much time Vote411.org could save them. Two key issues are important to young people this fall: legalizing marijuana and protecting abortion. We need young voters to know their vote is critical and where they can educate themselves about the issues. We also need to continue spreading the word about the need to re-register for mail-in ballots in Florida.
Mental Health	7	
Abortion	7	
Gun Violence	6	
Future of Democracy	6	
Environment	5	
Immigration	5	
Ukraine	5	
Student Loan Forgiveness	4	
Gaza	4	
Other Issues: racial inequity, education	0	

For more information on young voters: <https://circle.tufts.edu/our-research/youth-media-democracy>



In case you missed it... Disinformation during Elections

by Barbara Letvin

How do we protect ourselves from *Artificial Intelligence* interfering with our elections? The Brookings Institute recently held a forum including Shana Broussard, Commissioner of the Federal Election Commission. The 2020 election was decided in a handful of states by fewer than 50,000 votes--a reason for concern in 2024. The first amendment is the 'buzz saw' that makes monitoring disinformation enforcement difficult. Tech companies

could be required to have digital water marks on their AI, but people don't pay attention to disclaimers, and this would not cover outside threats. If civil rights are abused by AI, the culprits could be prosecuted but the concern is that Black voters would be discouraged from going to the polls. The best protection is education on how to identify AI, with particular focus on young people. Brookings regularly hosts forums on timely topics of the day: <https://www.brookings.edu/events/the-dangers-posed-by-ai-and-disinformation-during-elections/>

7 Electoral College myths, a deeper dive

The Electoral College is not the major reason why the outcome of an election may not reflect the wishes of the American people. As many as 30% of eligible voters are not even registered, and of those who do register, only about two-thirds can be counted on to vote. For tens of millions of Americans, Election Day is a workday, not a national holiday. Our major political parties rely on primaries, caucuses and other methods that often favor the more extreme base than the middle-of-the-road Democrat or Republican. Many Republicans in deep red states stay home, like their counterparts in deep blue states believing that their votes don't matter. <https://www.tampabay.com/opinion/2024/04/10/lets-bust-seven-myths-about-electoral-college/>



Editor's Note

Jacqueline Farrell/ Co-Editor

Last month I included a book in our Media section called: "Against Civility." Although I did not endorse it, I wrote that a reader had found it "interesting." I did this knowing full well that League of Women Voters policy is civility at all times, in words and in actions. I chose to include it after much soul searching because I think that sometimes we can understand oppositional viewpoints better if we are willing to read or listen to them.

Understandably, some readers were upset with my choice, and I respect and appreciate their feedback. I wish to reiterate that even though the book was mentioned, the LWV never condones uncivil behavior in any form.

LWVNPC Members in Action

Evy Bernstein and Nancy Sidrow were busy during the month of February. On Saturday, February 24th, they participated as vendors at a fundraiser fashion show held at Ruth Eckerd Hall in Clearwater. They spoke with several of the 200 plus women in attendance and provided information about LWVNPC. The show was a joint effort of two organizations: General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), which provides scholarships for Women on the Way at SPC and Women with Purpose, an organization which assists women with cancer with non-medical bills (rent/mortgages; utilities; car payments/insurance, etc.).

On February 29th, they hosted a table outside the Department of Health-Pinellas Mid County on Ulmerton Road, Largo, where they provided important information about mail-in ballots and rights of returning citizens. They also assisted voters in checking their voter registration and mail-in ballot status.



Evy Bernstein and Nancy Sidrow at Ruth Eckerd Hall



Nancy Sidrow, Sabrina Rainford of Pinellas County Department of Health, Evy Bernstein

Night at the Library, February 23, 2024

League Members gathered at North Greenwood Library for this annual event which honors, celebrates, and promotes African American history and culture in Clearwater, Florida.



Tanya Landry, Beth Hovind, Linda Metzkwow, Bryan Beckman, Eliseo Santana, Mike Hughes



Tanya Landry with Former Indiana LWV President Lowell Hearne

“One of the successes I most remember from my time as League president (c.1971) was getting my Board to support my refusal to provide League information to our local newspaper unless they used our first names, not “Mrs.” followed by our husbands’ first and last names and eventually we got our way. Hard to believe that was such a struggle but it was!” Lowell Hearne

Hot Topic: Florida Environmental Legislation That Can Affect You

On February 27th, Haley Busch, from 1000 Friends of Florida, shared important information on environmentally related state legislation from the 2024 legislative session. This was an excellent opportunity to learn about changes and proposed changes that can impact our environment, health, and everyday lives. Haley also shared how we can take personal action to provide feedback to legislators, as well as reducing our own impact on our environment. Look for more environmental learning opportunities throughout the year from our Environmental Committee.



Haley Busch



Barbara Letvin, Cathy Protopapas, Nancy Sardinia-Lambert, Chair Bryan Beckman, Tanya Landry, Haley Busch, Beth Hovind, Chris Taylo. Back row: Greg Hietpas. Not pictured: Marti Folwell, Lois Rogers-Watson.

Indian Rocks Beach Candidate Forum, February 28, 2024

Tanya Landry moderated this Candidate Forum for City Commissioners.

*Front Row: Candidates Suzanne Douglas, Janet Wilson, Jude Bond.
Back Row, Carolina Tave, Linda Metzkwow, Tanya Landry, Sue Cornett,
Bill Jonson*



Young Men's Leadership Initiative, March 9, 2024

On a windy Saturday, Tanya Landry and Linda Metzkwow participated in this summit event at the Pinellas County African American Museum. The event is held to encourage young African American men to pursue options in service, agriculture, vocational training, and entrepreneurship. LWVNPC was there to encourage young people to pre-register to vote at 16-17 years of age.



Tanya Landry and Linda Metzkwow

Community Conversation on Higher Education: April 17, 2024

The League of Women Voters of Florida hosted a community conversation in Tampa that addressed a range of topics related to higher education in Florida.



LWV of Hillsborough Pasco President Teresa Potter, LWVNPC President Tanya Landry, and LWVSPA President Jackie Aziz

11th Annual Walk for Willa, April 20, 2024

Tanya Landry and Linda Metzkwow participated in this event to raise money and awareness for the Willa Carson Health and Wellness Center and its mission of providing health care to uninsured and underserved persons and communities of Pinellas County



Willa Carson Board Member Rosalyn Atkinson, Tanya Landry, Willa Carson Executive Director Kimberly Nunn-Crawford



Linda Metzkwow

Spring Family Fun Festival, April 20, 2024

Nancy Sidrow, Beth Hovind, and Jacqui Farrell participated in this festival at Tarpon Springs Boys and Girls Club. It was sponsored by "Speak up for Mental Health," an organization whose mission is to remove the stigma of mental illness, provide education on mental illness and suicide prevention. LWNPs members were able to connect with several young parents.



Jacqui Farrell, Nancy Sidrow and a native Floridian.



Growing Membership

On March 26th, four new members had drinks and dinner at Grillsmith Countryside with Jacqueline Farrell and Tanya Landry of the Membership Committee. The occasion served as an impromptu new member orientation. It was wonderful getting to know Juli DiGiorno, Barbara Turner, Laurie Walker and Ann MacMurray, and even more interesting to find out they all attended the same church! Look for more new member activities in the future.

Welcome New Members

Karen Anderson-Gustaffson

Terrye Conroy

Kristina Kovarik

Ann MacMurray

Suzanne Pierce

Barbara Turner



New Members Diana Carsey, Barbara Turner, Fran Mitchell, Ann MacMurray, Juli Digiorno



New Members Mary Giordano and Suzanne Pierce

Board Meeting - members welcome!



The LWVNP Board meets the 1st Wednesday of each month at 4:00pm. Minutes for the March 2024 meeting can be found at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nDs_em4skPO_xoki3jqyAqPpe_Eb-ElGy/view?usp=sharing

Please join us for any upcoming Board meeting to learn how you can participate more fully. Contact Gayla Larson nbslarson@gmail.com to obtain the link to join these informative and busy meetings.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

Education Committee



The Education Committee met virtually on Monday, February 26, 2024, at 4:30 pm. Items discussed included the ongoing virtual mentoring project with the Take Stock in Children program, the newly formed Young Adult Voting Focus Group that has been organized by Jacqui Farrell, Tanya Landry, and Gayla Larson, and the Leon County video competition for high school students on the topic of voting.

Jeanne Reynolds attended the February 13th School Board meeting as a representative of LWVNPC. She shared the following observations from this meeting: the meeting agenda was followed without any challenges. Results of the Social Studies instructional materials (textbook) selection committee were discussed. Martin Shapiro, Education Committee member, participated as a member of the selection committee and commented that the process went very smoothly. School Board members discussed the current Superintendent's contract and unanimously endorsed an extension. There were many expressions of confidence in his ability and performance to date from the Board members.

The LWVFL State Education Action Team is creating a School Board Candidate Assessment form. This form can be used by voters to help them determine the candidate they feel is best prepared for the position of School Board member. As soon as this form is finalized, it will be made available to local Leagues for distribution.

LWVNPC has been asked to participate in planning and hosting a Pinellas School Board Candidate forum this summer. The date is still to be determined.

VOTER SERVICE



Chair Linda Metzkwow reported that the Voter Service committee was represented at Night at the Library on February 23rd. During the event, Linda connected with L. Josey Filler of the Community Engagement Team of the Clearwater Police, who would like to coordinate with LWVNPC.

LWVNPC Voter Services Committee member Nancy Sidrow has contacted the Pinellas County Health Department and will be having voter education and sign-up events at Largo, Clearwater, and Tarpon Springs Health Departments.

On Saturday, March 9th, Voter Service attended the Young Men's Leadership Initiative Empowerment Summit for Ages 12-18 at the Pinellas County African American History Museum in Clearwater, hoping to encourage those 16-17 years old to pre-register to vote.

On March 18th, Heidi Davis Vote411 trainer for Florida, was the guest speaker at the LWVNPC Voter Services Committee Meeting.

Good news! The LWVFL Board voted to absorb the entire cost of individual chapters for 2024 Vote411 and LWVNPC will not need to contribute \$75.00 to LWVSPA for one half of the 2024 cost.

Voter Services member Diana Carsey is assisting with the statewide campaign to research names of returning citizens in order to send them postcards with voter information.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION GROUP



Chair Bryan Beckman reported that the recent Hot Topic was very successful, and Haley Busch presented the pending legislation well. It was suggested that we establish a monthly calendar of Hot Topics going forward.



Legal Help Needed!

The LWVFL has put out a call for any Bar Certified Attorneys to volunteer to work with Returning Citizens researching their records to ensure they are legally eligible to vote. This is a pro bono service offered by the Florida League to all Returning Citizens. If interested, contact Cecile Scoon, Co-President LWVFL at cecile@lwvfl.org

LWVFL is looking for volunteers to work from home on their computers to research current addresses for any Returning

Citizen Postcards returned as undeliverable. The FL League will furnish you access to a White Page Service for the research. If you would like to assist with this project, please contact LWVFL.

We have a busy election year coming up, and many of you have expressed interest in working with LWVNPC at events. If you want to help, please contact lindametzkow@tampabay.rr.com. Also, you must pass the Voter Registration Quiz to assist!

Use Your Website!

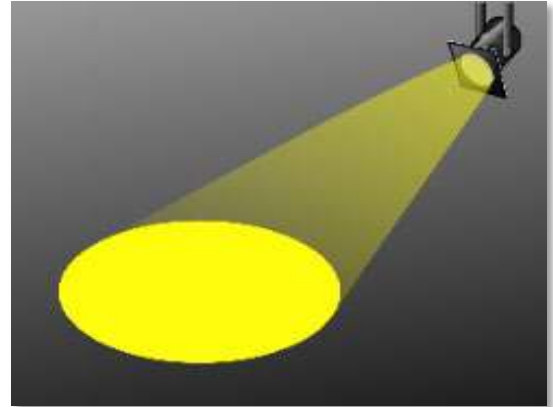
FYI, we have a terrific new website: <https://lwvnorthpinellas.org/>. Check it out! You can view photos; connect to Facebook, Instagram and X; read about our Board; view the blog and newsletter; and best of all, access the calendar for scheduled events and sign up to volunteer! And **(this is important)** because after the May/June 2024 issue the newsletter will no longer be delivered via email, but will only be available on our website under News tab. You can view the latest issue and archives for past issues.

In addition, please take advantage of the information available to you on our "Members Only" website section. Here you can access the current active membership roster/directory, as well as the training guide, and the Voter Registration Certification Quiz. This portion of the website is password protected; so, please contact Gayla Larson (nbslarson@gmail.com) to obtain the password. You may also call her at (727) 393-2069.

Want to leave a Google Review for LWVNPC? Go to:

<http://search.google.com/local/reviews?placeid=ChIJW4V5OYDxwogRIIzWPBfytgg> and look to the LWVNPC description on the right side of the page. Look toward the bottom of the page to: “Reviews.”

Spotlight: Introducing Dennis McDermott



Dennis McDermott has recently joined the LWVNPC board of directors as Co-Treasurer and has already been instrumental in making some smart financial decisions regarding our assets.

Dennis comes from Buffalo, New York, and attended the University of Buffalo (UB), where he graduated with a degree in Geography. Early in his career, he began to consider the question, “Why do some cities flourish and others not?” Within the next 10 years, he returned to UB, this time earning an MBA in Finance and Marketing. He spent the majority of his career working with JP Morgan Chase, where he was involved in a broad range of community economic development projects in the Northeast. The focus was often on adapting existing properties to new uses. He came to believe that a necessary element of successful community development is an efficient transportation system, something he feels is lacking in affordable housing considerations for the North Pinellas area

While working with JP Morgan Chase in White Plains, New York, Dennis was also involved in Corporate Social Responsibility Programs, and it was here he became familiar with the local League of Women Voters. JP Morgan Chase became a sponsor of the local Voter Guide. Dennis reports that he got to know some great people through the League and developed a respect for the organization.

After retiring from a thirty-year career with JP Morgan Chase in 2014, Dennis moved to Clearwater in 2016. In 2020, he again noticed the League of Women Voters of North Pinellas, when LWVNPC opposed a referendum converting the Landings Golf Course to a light industrial area. LWVNPC joined with Keep Keene Green, Suncoast Sierra Club, Clearwater Neighborhoods Coalition and the Clearwater Environmental Advisory Board to educate the public and the referendum was defeated. In Dennis’ words, good things happen when organizations “bring likeminded people together, tell them what’s going on, and make some noise.”

When he’s not supporting the League, Dennis looks forward to trips to Alaska to see family, fish, fly on a float plane, and eat delicious freshly caught seafood.

Sketches of Florida: Voting

By Niki Amarantides

While still dark, I made my way over to the Palm Harbor Community Center wearing a fleece pullover and carrying a cooler of apples, nuts, a sandwich, and yogurt. It was going to be a long day. Polls are open today from 7 am to 7 pm for the Republican Presidential Preference primary. And even though all but one candidate had pulled out of the race, all Republican hopefuls are on the ballot: Trump, Haley, DeSantis, Christie, Ramaswamy, Binkley, Hutchinson.

That day only 140 Republican voters came in to vote, plus some confused No Party Affiliation (NPAs) and registered Democrats—not realizing it was a closed primary for Republicans only. Some walked in with mail-in ballots thinking they could drop off their ballots (they couldn't). Early Voting Drop Boxes were only available up until the day *before* Election Day. If they wanted to vote on Election Day, they had to have their mail-in ballot cancelled and then they were allowed to vote (after having their photo ID verified and their registration checked). If they had brought a spouse's ballot to drop off, that ballot could not be received. Several were also at the wrong voting precinct: the Community Center might have been where they voted before, but precinct lines had changed, and they needed to go to their current precinct if they wanted to vote.

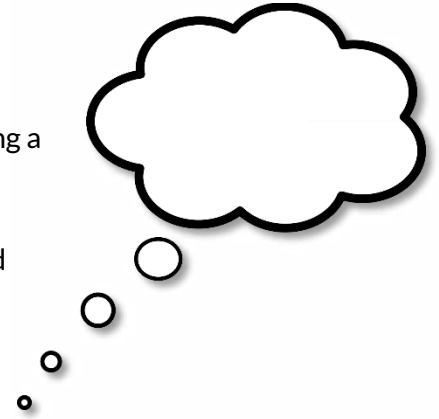
The EVID machines we used to verify registration and ID were efficient, but I was surprised that the next step for the voter was to pick up a paper ballot and pen, step over to a privacy station and fill in their ballot. The last step was to feed their paper ballot into an optical scanner, a kind of lock box for their paper ballot (ballots are kept for at least 22 months after an election cycle).

Election security was on the minds of several voters that day. They wanted to know what kind of ID we require, what kinds of machines we use, and how they could trust that their vote will be counted. The 2020 election still seemed to be on their minds—even though the Heritage Foundation found only ten cases of election fraud in Florida in 2023 (and many of those involved returning citizens who were confused over whether or not they had the right to vote).

https://www.heritage.org/voterfraud/search?state=FL&case_type=All&fraud_type=All&combine=&year=&page=0

By the end of the day, I thought about how Florida could simplify their voting system. For instance, why not accept all mail-in ballots on Election Day and consider them as provisional ballots for a final vote count after Election Day? Why not let people vote at the “wrong” polling place and consider their ballots as provisional to be counted after Election Day rather than sending them away and hoping they have the time to get to the correct polling place. How could signage be improved for Early Voting and drop boxes? How can messaging be improved so that voters get an email or a new voter registration card with their new polling place when they move? How can potential voters be reminded that the last day to register for the 2024 General Election is October 7, 2024? How can the Board of Elections remind voters that they have to request a mail-in ballot *every* election cycle and that they will not automatically receive one like they have in years past?

After a long day it was also clear to me that election staff and volunteers take pride in their work and are committed to election integrity and efficiency. I am also impressed by how Florida is one of only 18 states and the District of Columbia that allows 16–17-year-olds to pre-register to vote. Signed into law in 2007 to encourage younger voter participation, pre-registration can happen when applying for a driver's license or by applying [online](#). Then those



who turn 18 on or before election day will be automatically registered to vote (with their voter registration activated 30 days before the election). Imagine if high schools across our county and our state made pre-registering to vote a graduation requirement, underscoring the importance of voting and cultivating a new generation of leadership.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Monday April 29,
2024 @ 4:30 pm

LWVNPC Education Committee Meeting Via Zoom

Wednesday, May 1,
2024 @ 4:30 pm

Monthly LWVNPC Board of Directors Meeting via Zoom. For an invitation or to attend, contact lwwnpc.info@gmail.com to receive an agenda. Open to all current LWVNPC members only.

Saturday, May 18,
2024 @ 9:30 am

Adopt A Mile Cleanup: For more information contact tlandry@conquestsystems.com

Monday May 20,
2024 @ 6 pm

Voter Service Committee via Zoom

Monday May 27th,
2024 @ 4:30 pm

Education Committee via Zoom

For Zoom links to meetings, please contact Gayla Larson at nbslarson@gmail.com

*For a complete listing of **Volunteer Activities**, to to <https://lwwnorthpinellas.org/calendar/>*

Thoughts on Civility...



“One of my favorite Southern traditions is adding the phrase “bless his/her/your heart” to any demeaning or derogatory remarks about a person. It is a polite way to soften an unflattering remark. Even though you don’t approve or agree with what that person says or does, politeness shows you respect them and wish them no harm. Isn’t that what we all should do?”

Civility, by Aaron Fodiman, Publisher, Tampa Bay Magazine/March/April 2024