



THE VOTER



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

<https://lwvnorthpinellas.org>

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July-August 2024

Shaping the Future of Education: Pinellas County School Board Candidate Forum

By Vivian Posey



Figure 1 Moderator Al Ruechel, Candidates Laura Hines, Danielle Marolf, Eileen Long, Erica Picard, Katie Blaxberg, Brad DeCorte

Close to 200 enthusiastic Pinellas County citizens gathered at the Pinellas Realtors Organization Building on Monday, July 22nd to hear from the candidates for Pinellas County School Board about their views on public education. Hosted by the Pinellas County Council of PTA and the Education Committee of LWWNPC, and narrated by Al Ruechel, the non-partisan event was planned to help members of the community learn about the candidates for these important positions before casting their vote on August 20th.

In attendance were candidates Laura Hine and Danielle Marolf, running for the District 1 (at large) seat, Eileen Long and Erika Picard (District 4) and Katie Blaxberg and Brad DeCorte, District 5. (Stacy Geier, District 5, did not attend). Only two of the candidates, Laura Hine and Eileen Long, are incumbents in this election.

Each candidate provided an opening statement and then answered questions that were provided by members of the community prior to the event. The candidates' main concerns and reason for running for the office of School Board included safety for teachers and children, fiscal accountability, mental health and resiliency of students, and the need for additional staff for all schools. The candidates also spoke on the topics of parental rights and responsibilities, the lack of counseling support in schools, financing for school choice, and closing the learning gaps caused by schooling during COVID. Candidates expressed a wide variety of viewpoints on these crucial topics. There was also much discussion regarding the 2024 Pinellas County Schools Referendum that will be on the November ballot. Despite the importance of this ballot measure that provides funding for teacher and staff salaries and enhancements in the arts, technology, and literacy, not all candidates were supportive of its passage.

Overall, the School Board Candidate Forum, 2024 was informative, engaging and interesting for all. When asked to comment, moderator Al Ruechel summed it up by saying, "*The League has set a standard of openness and even handedness that other groups could learn from.*"

For more information:

<https://www.pcsb.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=38625&dataid=152930&FileName=Referendum%202024%20Flyer.pdf>

<https://www.pcsb.org/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=38625&dataid=152929&FileName=Referendum%202024%20Spanish%20Flyer.pdf>

On my Mind...

By Tanya Landry, President

In the last newsletter, I mentioned I would be attending the National Convention in Washington, D.C. I did indeed attend the convention and now it seems as though that was light years behind us.



The buzzword at convention was "relational organizing," defined as mobilizing personal contacts with a volunteers' network to effect change. Grassroots organizing research has demonstrated that people are more likely to take action and share information if it comes from a friend. Relational organizing is another tool within a broad organizing strategy. There are many types of relational organizing: text banks, emails, phone banks and phone calls. In 2020 LWVUS introduced a new tool: the League in Action (LIA) app powered by Outreach Circle. All leagues were encouraged to discover the speed and effectiveness of using this tool to reach members, and anyone in the community that is interested in league events. You are not required to be a member to download the tool, and it is free.

I admit I groaned at the thought of having to download yet another app and follow another type of social media. I changed my mind during convention, when LWVUS recognized LWV Kentucky for their success in using the app for text banking to reach over 300,000 people. I quickly reached out to Jenn Jackson, LWV Kentucky president and scheduled a meeting.

Jenn was gracious with her time and met with the LWVNPC Board via ZOOM to explain how the app works and how effective it is in reaching more people quickly and tracking outcomes. She also explained that the app provides the opportunity to respond quickly to the changing environment.

The result is we have committed to trying the League in Action app. When we are ready, we will ask that members download the League in Action app, which is free. We will go slowly, posting a few events for members to share with their circle of friends. Let's take this journey together!

Meanwhile, this summer I used an "old school" relational organizing tool; the phone, to contact almost all of our members. If you haven't heard from me, you will. That's right, a real voice on a phone! What a blast to connect with all of you! You may have received a message from me, and I enjoyed the many conversations I had with members. I am grateful you shared your stories about families, suggestions for the league, the state of the world today and why the league is so important.

All your contributions to the league are important and valued; from tabling events, to attending school board meetings or donating money: we need all of it to succeed. So, as we move forward during this busy election cycle, we add League in Action as another opportunity to broaden our circle of influence. Yet, I will keep in mind that sometimes, you need a real conversation with a live voice at the other end of the phone to learn new things as well.

Exciting News!

LWVNPC has contracted for a digital billboard on US Highway 19, south of Curlew Road from September 30th to November 3rd. Be ready to see important messages about Vote411.org, Early Voting and Voter Registration deadlines with the League of Women Voters logo. Many thanks to our President, Tanya Landry for leading this "illuminating" project!

Hot Topic: Supervisor of Elections Presentation

By Beth Hovind and Jeannette McCabe



Where did 60,000 voters go? Pinellas County has the largest voter turnout in the state—in percentage of vote by mail returns (VBM) and percentage of voters using early voting. Yet there are 60,000 fewer registered voters now than in the 2020 election. Election supervisors were required to delete old VBM registrations and voters were required to re-request mail ballots. The Supervisor of Elections Office (SOE) is looking for these missing voters and so are we!

On Monday July 8, Dustin Chase, Pinellas County Deputy Supervisor of Elections and Ashley McKnight-Taylor, Director of Communications spoke at the Dunedin Library to review the current status of voting in Pinellas County. (Due to her work

schedule, Supervisor of Elections Julie Marcus was unavailable.)

While the county has a higher percentage of registered voters who actually do vote, this can still be improved upon. A significant number of potential voters still need to be registered 30 days before the next election. Registration of new, first-time voters is another concern.

Both speakers were very informative and enthusiastic, thoroughly answering questions and addressing concerns, covering many topics ranging from voting security to voting fraud. Deputy Supervisor Chase stressed that the SOE are "Rule Followers" as they strive to ensure accuracy and credibility. Efforts are made to make voting convenient in all neighborhoods, provide equal accessibility, conform precinct size, and provide viable transportation to all voting sites.

In terms of security, Mr. Chase discussed access vs. integrity. The SOE office is not connected to the internet to ensure cybersecurity and prevent hacking. Also, there is a statute against speaking specifically about security at polling sites. Police are not allowed to be in the polling site unless called to respond, but if called are prepared to respond within minutes. In addition, voting machines are checked both before and after elections to prove they are working and have not been tampered with. In terms of mail-in ballot validity, the speaker stressed that ballots must be requested so that they are not just randomly sent out to the public. The SOE also keep track of who should be legally allowed to return those ballots. To further prevent fake ballots, all ballots are returned in signed certified envelopes, and all signatures are verified.

Mr. Chase and Ms. McKnight-Taylor gave us an hour and a half of their time, expertly answering many questions from the audience. League members were encouraged to sign up as poll workers to get an inside view of the voting process. The League will be monitoring the canvassing of the general election, which occurs after the November voting, to ensure all votes are counted correctly. If you are interested in helping, please contact Beth at bethse@gmail.com after September 5th. To become an election worker, go to <https://www.vote-pinellas.gov/Election-Worker>



League Members join with their community for The John Lewis National Day of Commemoration and Action July 17th at the Clearwater Courthouse.

Welcome New Members

Haley Coet
Suzanne Preston
Teddi Sweeney
Samantha Sweeney
Lynn Howie
Angela Hack
Rob Olmstead
Erin Kaminsky
Jennifer Vigiliano
Cheriah Littleton
Linda Larrivee
Marissa Kessler
Sandi Owens



New Members Are Joining

**Board Meeting -
members welcome!**



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

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Etz4eVscx8prSI1NUs2ns9_AdA10d4_i/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 North Pinellas County and the St. Pete LWV Education Committees have joined together to more effectively address the many issues occurring in Pinellas County Schools.

The Pinellas County School Board Candidate Forum on July 22, 2024, was very successful and well attended. Pamphlets on Amendment 1, and the upcoming School Referendum were distributed. Vivian Posey was unanimously

approved as LWV observers for the Independent Citizens Referendum Oversight Committee (ICROC) which oversees the expenditure of referendum funds to ensure they are spent as voters intended.

Co-chairs Vivian Posey and Jeanne Reynolds reported they had a successful meeting with Jessica Hassle - new PCS Social Specialist, who expressed interest in doing voter education and

registration during Constitution Week – week of September 16th. Committee chairs followed up the meeting with educational resources and look forward to building a collaborative relationship.

Pinellas County School Board Meeting Observations continue. The committee hopes to have one LWWNPC or LWVSPA member to attend each meeting. It is not necessary to be on the Education Committee to attend. To assist with the Education Committee, contact Chair Jeanne Reynolds at jeannefrey@gmail.com



The Voter Service committee continues to be extremely active with many tabling events throughout

the summer months, with five in July and 6 scheduled for August. Many have been Back to School Events which have been well attended. Vote411.org cards have been very popular. Chair Linda Metzkwow has located resources on the LWVFL page which would be helpful to members who wish to make presentations on the

Amendments which will be on the November ballot.

To assist with Voter Services, please contact Chairperson Linda Metzkwow at lindametzkwow@tampabay.rr.com



Mary Giordano and Carol Bailey at the Oldsmar Goodwill Store August 10th.



Laurie Walker and Jabbar Graham Associate Vice President of Fund Development at the Goodwill Store in Clearwater August 10th.

Congratulations! Our website lwvnorthpinellas.org reached 1.2K clicks from Google Search in the past 28 days



Spotlight: Introducing Nancy Sidrow

Nancy Sidrow, the brave one, holding the baby alligator while Jacqui Farrell is relieved that she isn't.

Some people think of ideas, some talk about them and others “just do it.” Nancy Sidrow fits in the third box. Nancy joined LWVPNC in 2023 and has not been still since. Despite working full time as a mental health counselor, she has made contacts with agencies and the media, assisted in forming a League calendar, coordinated events, purchased materials and spent many Saturdays

manning tables. The League is lucky to have her energy and interpersonal skills.

For Nancy, being civic minded was handed down by her mother, Vicki Sidrow. Her mom was active in the women’s movement of the 1970’s and served many important roles including treasurer and financial secretary for LWV in Bergen County, New Jersey. In 2002, Nancy herself became active in NOW (National Organization for Women) but became much more compelled to activism given the political climate of 2016. After moving to the Gulf Coast of Florida in 2019 from Deltona, she became involved with the Democratic Club, but realized she was more interested in registering voters than canvassing, which brought her to the League in 2023. She was attracted to Voter Services and happily for the League, found it easy to connect with the right people to begin participating.

In Nancy’s own words, she considers herself, “a social worker at heart,” whose most important value is social justice. In her work as a mental health counselor, she enjoys collaborating with other agencies to empower people with mental health disorders. At tabling events, she enjoys talking to people, and finds that engaging them in a conversation about their needs and concerns can be the best way to establish a connection.

When not helping the League or her clients, Nancy loves to craft and decorate, explore new parks, hike, and bowl.

DATES TO REMEMBER

Check our Calendar for Complete Information: [Calendar](#)

September 4, 2024 4-5:30 PM	LWVNPC Board of Directors Meeting via Zoom
Saturday, September 7, 2024 12:00-2:30 PM	Ice Cream Social, North Greenwood Library, 905 N. Martin Luther Avenue, Clearwater, FL
Monday September 9, 2024 6PM	Voter Service Meeting via Zoom
Thursday, September 12, 2024 6:00 PM	Dunedin Candidate Forum, Dr. William E. Hale Senior Activity Center, 330 Douglas Avenue, Dunedin, FL
Saturday, September 14, 2024 9:30 AM	Adopt A Mile Cleanup Activity, Dunedin Elementary School, 900 Union St, Dunedin, FL 34698
Tuesday, September 17, 2024	National Voter Registration Day
Monday, September 23, 2024 6:00-7:00 PM	Voter Service Committee Meeting Via Zoom
Monday, September 30, 2024 4:30-5:30 PM	Education Committee Meeting Via Zoom
Saturday, December 14, 2024 - noon - 3 pm	2024 Holiday Open House - Chateaux de Bardmoor Clubhouse

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

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



Join us for an Ice Cream Social at North Greenwood Library, 905 N Martin Luther King Jr Ave, Clearwater, FL 33755 from 12:00 -2:30 on Saturday September 7th. This will be a get-together for members and friends to meet each other and enjoy an ice cream sundae but the door will be open if library patrons choose to stop by for a cold treat. It will be a great opportunity to meet new people and give us more visibility in the community. RSVP jacquelinefarrell20@gmail.com