From the President

Three months into the new league year, I’m amazed at what we have accomplished! We’ve had two very productive board meetings, and presented a successful Fall Workshop in Fredericksburg. Linda Garvelink’s recap is in this Voter Express (page 2); if you were unable to attend, you’ll get a good feel for what the day was all about. The new Member Directory and Resource Book was distributed there (two copies for each local league) - if your league was not in attendance, copies will be mailed to your president.

Our new Communications duo have also produced a full Virginia Voter (including a printed version for those without email), distributed there (two copies for each local league) - if your league was not in attendance, copies will be mailed to your president.

We are into the election season big time now – local leagues have forums lined up for local races (it’s what we do best), and continue to do the important registration and voter education efforts that are our hallmark. We sponsored the September 26th edition of VA NEWS from VPAP, celebrating National Voter Registration Day, which had many of you in participation. We will do one more day of sponsorship, on October 26, prior to election day. And VOTE411 continues to be the place to go for candidates’ responses to important issues for Virginia voters.

We are gearing up for our next statewide event, the Pre-Session Roundtable on Dec. 6. And making plans to maintain our Women’s Legislative Round Tables (WLRT) during the GA session beginning in January. Due to the demolition of the current GA building, the Pocahontas Building near the Capital will be the Legislature’s new home for the next four years. And we are adapting to the lack of space in that building for outside groups to meet. More later on these plans!

I would like you to keep Meghan Dorsett in your thoughts and prayers – she has been undergoing tests at the hospital near Christiansburg since Sunday and expects to be home by the time you read this. Carol Lindstrom, the other half of the Communications duo, has been taking up the slack – keep her in your thoughts and prayers also!

And keep up the good work!

Sue Lewis

Election season is always the busiest time of the year for all of our local Leagues. A quick scan of the Local League Facebook pages would suggest that all of our Local Leagues are up to their elbows in the 2017 elections: from forums and debates to voter registration drives to voter education programs.

We wanted to take this opportunity to both thank and applaud all of our Local Leagues for their efforts. Our local Leagues and our local members help make Virginia and local elections accessible and fair. To each and every local volunteer, thank you. Your energy helps energize us all.
Successful LWV-VA 2017 Fall Workshops

Linda Garvelink

On Friday, September 22, 2017, more than 60 members of the LWV-VA, representing local Leagues, from across the Commonwealth, convened at the Fredericksburg Hospitality House in Fredericksburg, VA for the LWV-VA 2017 Fall Workshops. The objective of the Workshops was “Enhancing League Engagement.”

The morning began with JoAnn Ross, LWVUS National Coach for LWV-VA, talking about the “transformation” of the League that was discussed at the 2017 LWVUS Council. The LWVUS transformation videos can be found at https://www.youtube.com/user/LleagueofWomenVoters; scroll down to the third section and select “A Transformational Journey” and “A Transformational Journey – Part 2.” The goal of the transformation very generally is to have the LEAGUE speak with one voice at the national, state, regional and local levels – to be ONE LEAGUE! LWVUS will share more information throughout the coming months as we head toward the 2018 National Convention.

The LWV-VA has enjoyed a robust growth in the past year; we now have more than 1,635 members and growing! The state and local Leagues are striving to offer these new (as well as the long-time) members a fulfilling and challenging membership experience that uses the broad swath of talents members bring to the League. Long-time, as well as new members, are looking for their space in the League.

The League will never discourage those who join to support the Leagues mission and activities but prefer to keep a low profile. But for those many members who want to be fully involved in the League, the workshop provided ideas – old and new – for “Engaging with Voters.”

Maggi Luca, LWV-VA Voter Services Director, discussed the success of Vote411.org – one of the League’s most successful efforts to get candidate and ballot information to voters using concise and easy to access electronic information. Maggi also discussed voter registration and how League members could engage voters at the polls by handing out Vote411 printed materials and providing other information about the League as voters wait to cast their ballots.

Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV) efforts are important. The U.S., in general, has a dismal election participation record with more than 35% of eligible, registered voters not voting for various reasons. Sometimes it takes a four-letter word “VOTE” to get voters to the polls – this is the message of the GOTV postcard pilot program LWV-VA is sponsoring this election year. Local Leagues that did not pick up the postcards at the Workshop are encouraged to email Linda Garvelink, LWV-VA 1st VP, memberships@lwv-va.org, with the number of postcards your League would like for their own mailing efforts. Postcards are provided FREE. Local Leagues can mail the postcards as “last-minute” reminders to low-propensity or another selection of voters in your area of the Commonwealth. As a “cheaper” alternative, local League members can walk various sections of their district(s) to deliver the postcards in person to voters.

Valerie Fillgrove, LWV-VA Legislative Coordinator, urged both long-time and new members to come to Richmond during the General Session for the Women’s Legislative Round Tables on each Wednesday from January 17 through February 28, 2017. She gave some tips on how to talk effectively and LISTEN to our delegates and senators comments about the bills we support. She urged members to report back to her about their conversations with the legislators. Sharing information is vital to the success of the League’s advocacy efforts.

Another effective option for getting more non-board members actively involved in League activities is an Observer Corps for local and regional government agencies. The LWVUS published a helpful guide Observing Your Government in Action, now available on the LWV-VA.org website in the “Members’ Corner/LWVUS Resources.” This booklet includes advice about establishing and maintaining an Observer Corps and it provides sample reporting documents. Reporting is essential to keep the local League Board and all members informed of important developments.

The second panel focused on “Engaging with the League.” Meghan Dorsett, LWV-VA co-Director of Communications, reported on the publication of the LWV-VA Virginia Voter. The Virginia Voter is published four times a year and includes more detailed articles and in-depth information about League issues. The LWV-VA Voter Express is published the remaining eight months. Additionally, LWV-VA will issue “Action Alerts,” calling for member action on specific issues relative to League positions throughout the Virginia legislative session (from January – March). It is important for members to call and/or email their delegate and senator about the issues as outlined in the Action Alerts. Meghan also reported on the development of new “special interest” Facebook pages relative to LWV-VA positions. The full list can be found on www.LWV-VA.org Members’ Corner/ Facebook Groups.

Sue Lewis gave a brief outline of why and when Leagues across the Commonwealth and the nation host Planning Meetings to solicit input for studies and actions in the next two-year term. She pointed out that in 2018, LWVUS will request planning input for a “program” to be considered and voted on at the 2018 National Convention (June 28 – July 1, 2018, Chicago, IL). Planning is where ideas for “positions” grow. Positions are formed through extensive study and consensus of more than 750 local Leagues nationwide. Positions also can be formed by “concurrency” with positions of other local or state Leagues that fit the more general needs of the League.

Anne Smith, LWV-VA Program Director, invited all League members to participate in the LWV-VA’s “program” for the 2017-2019 term. The Convention approved a two-year study of Behavioral Health and two task forces: Women’s Rights and School Choice/Vouchers. The Behavioral Health and School Choice groups are hard at work and have made significant process. The Women’s Rights Task Force is looking for a leader and additional members.

Anne also announced the LWV-VA’s efforts to establish discussion groups to maintain the Facebook group pages and to monitor issues relevant to the topic. If you’d like to participate in any of the groups (see website for list), please email Anne Smith, membership@lwv-va.org and/or Linda Garvelink, membership@lwv-va.org. Please indicate if you are willing to be the leader of any of these discussion groups.

The three afternoon breakouts featured reports by the Behavioral Health study group and the School Choice task force, and a discussion of the need to have the Virginia General Assembly ratify the ERA Amendment as well as other issues that are needed to protect Women’s Rights in Virginia. See the September Virginia Voter for detailed updates on the activities of these groups; additional updates will be included in the December Virginia Voter.

The next general meeting of LWV-VA members is scheduled for Wednesday, December 6, 2017: The Pre-Session Legislative Round Table in Richmond. Mark your calendar and plan to attend.