

**MARCH 2011
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CALENDAR

**Tuesday
July 5** **Luncheon Meeting**
Noon-University Club
New Library Director

**Tuesday
July 26** **Board Meeting**
5PM, United Way

**Tuesday
Aug. 2** **Luncheon Meeting**
Noon-University Club

**Tuesday
Aug. 23** **Board Meeting**
5PM, United Way

**Tuesday
Aug. 30** **5th Tuesday**
Denise Downs
205 345-5202

**Tuesday
Sept. 6** **Luncheon Meeting**
Noon-University Club
Public Education Study

**Tuesday
Sept. 27** **Board Meeting**
5PM, United Way

CIVICS 101: MEET YOUR LOCAL LEADERS

The League of Women Voters of Greater Tuscaloosa will sponsor “Civics 101: Meet Your Local Leaders” next fall, in conjunction with University of Alabama’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). Members of the Tuscaloosa City and County School Boards, the Tuscaloosa County Commission, and the Tuscaloosa City Council will talk about how their organizations function and explain major issues that they face. The series is open to the public and will provide an opportunity to ask questions and learn how to stay informed about local issues of concern.

Where: Bryant Conference Center

When: Tuesdays, 12:00 – 1:30 pm (bag lunches welcomed)

September 13: Tuscaloosa County School Board

September 20: Tuscaloosa City School Board

September 27: Tuscaloosa County Commission

October 4: Tuscaloosa City Council** (OCTOBER Lunch meeting here not University Club)

Parking passes will be available at the desk in the Conference Center lobby.

5TH TUESDAY, AUGUST 30TH

We will have a 5th Tuesday on August 30, 2011, from 5-7pm. It will be held at Denise Downs’ house, 1036 Brandywine Road, Tuscaloosa, AL 35406. Phone # is 345-5202.

Directions:

1. Cross the US 82 bridge (McFarland Blvd.) going North (West) and follow signs towards Rice Mine Road (turn right past Buddy’s/Powell’s and Barton’s Nursery.)
2. At the light turn left onto Rice Mine Road.
3. At the next light, Northridge Road, turn left and proceed up the hill (towards Verner Elementary and Northridge High School.)
4. Turn right into the entrance of Riverchase (Yorktown Road.)
5. Drive 3 blocks to Brandywine Road, (the 4 way stop) and turn right.
6. 1036 is the 4th house on the left (pink brick) .

APRIL LUNCH MEETING

By Isabelle Marrero

Dr. Joyce Lanning, Volunteer Environmental Educator and LWVAL member was the guest speaker at the LWV April Luncheon meeting. Her topic was sustainability development and living with the future in mind.

She urged the group to create an ecological footprint network through economics, environment and equity, starting with potable water, greenhouse gasses and carbon fuels. We are presently using one and one-half "earths" much of renewable energy and we must create green jobs that cannot be outsourced, such as solar power. Support of the Environmental Protection Agency is an absolute necessity in establishing a local footprint with an emphasis on green infrastructure.

Energy efficient building codes, turning away from fossil fuels and deforestation to alternative fuels and better use of energy in the industrial sector were some of the points stressed. "Comprehensive community

planning represents the most effective tool available for the implementation of a green infrastructure network" Lanning stated. Such a policy rarely entails risk and must include communication among multiple stakeholders.

The costs associated with this include "availability of existing data such as inventories of environmentally sensitive resources, the level of public involvement and the thoroughness of the plan." Local government efforts must be evaluated and compared with a system for grading healthy, prosperous and inclusive communities. Lanning also stated that we must drive the movement of city and county government to "advance deep reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, execute clean energy solutions and achieve tangible improvements in local sustainability."

Sustainability activities should include the economy of improvement of green jobs and the local food system; environment

by development of ecosystems, water, air quality, waste and resource conservation; and the education of society in the arts, health, safety and affordability of workforce housing, race and social equity. The speaker's command of her subject was extremely instructive to the group and her presentation produced many post-luncheon discussions.

MAY LUNCH MEETING

By: Isabelle Marrero



Dr. Frank Constanzo, Superintendent of the Tuscaloosa County Schools, graciously took a break in his post-tornado busy schedule to speak before the LWV at their May luncheon meeting. He stressed what the County schools were striving for at this time was a return to normalcy.

There were three tornadoes in the county, damaging Samantha and destroying Holt Schools. In Coaling alone six teachers lost everything and, all in all, there were 3000 students who lived in the path of at least one of the twisters. All schools are now open, except for Holt, while 500 volunteers are helping in moving students, equipment and supplies to other schools. The system is hoping that they will not be required to meet the 180 day standard set by the state.

School bus drivers for the county have been instructed to pick up all children waiting for a bus, no matter what school they were in, and teachers and volunteers will sort them out when they arrive at the designated school. There has been an outpouring of prayers and support from all over the United States. The second storm did the most financial damage and there is pressure to survive financially. The biggest problem is lack of local funding. Tuscaloosa County is the 9th largest system in Alabama but it is one of the poorest in local funding. Due to proration, 34 million dollars was lost and the system is living on borrowed money, as much as \$25,000,000. Constanzo stated that "we cannot continue to do that".

The Education Trust Fund is supported by income tax, but county citizens have voted down increases in past referendums. "We must change how we fund an education budget of \$160 to \$170 million dollars." To consolidate schools would not be of much help as it would be run by the county but there is a large inequity in funding between the city and county. Sales taxes are for capital improvements and this will not balance a budget, and if this happens, the state takes over the

school system and lays off people to make up the difference.

Sixteen schools were destroyed in Alabama and this county alone will lose 27 teachers and 200 administration and support staff over cuts of three million dollars set to be made next year. The fuel bill, for instance, will cost \$1,000,000. In addition, next year, nursing staff, special education teachers and librarians will be cut. Teacher salaries are mandated by the state and not by local School Boards. "We have GOT to have more local revenue in order to survive." Money has to come from grass root efforts to raise property taxes.

There are 18,096 students in the county schools - 18 elementary, eight middle and six high schools along with a Regional Education Center. We are the 4th largest employer in Tuscaloosa County with almost 2100 employees. Approximately 2500 breakfasts and more than 11,000 lunches are served daily. Proration's effects on school budgets has been devastating and will be worse next year. We desperately need public support for education committed to ensuring academic success for every child. Dr. Constanzo asked the group to "advocate with the Legislature and local officials for increased funding for education."

June Lunch Meeting

By: Isabelle Marrero

Congresswoman Terri Sewell, of the 7th Congressional District, the first black Representative from Alabama in the U. S. Legislature, spoke to the LWV June Luncheon meeting. She stated that she knew about the history of the League of Woman Voters and its importance in a society where women earn only 78 cents of a dollar compared to men.

Although 90% of the work force is comprised of women, very few are CEO's and women compose only 17% of Congress. Rep. Sewell was elected to the presidency of the freshman class in the present House and was then thus offered the opportunity to be the only woman among the eight Legislators to accompany President Obama into the Capitol for his State of the Union address.

She mentioned that she has held meet-

ings with the people of the 7th Congressional District to help victims of the April 27 tornado with FEMA and other agencies register for assistance. Her first bill presented in the House was a Small Business Start Up to aid in re-employing those who were wiped out in the storm. Alabama ranks 7th of all states in the WORST categories of the economy and the speaker stressed that the budget was the most pressing issue before the country. We must show fiscal responsibility and make wise cuts when balancing the budget instead of wasteful and abusive spending.

Any cuts in Medicare and Health Reform should be made with precision. We must try to out-innovate and out-compete foreign investors and must invest in the country's infrastructure such as roads and bridges and even techno-

logical upgrades in things such as high speed Internet. In rural Alabama, high speed Internet was not available until last year. Rep. Sewell stated that the nation's debt must be reduced by shared sacrifice without continuing to give millions to oil companies. There should be unity on a non-partisan basis. "We don't have to see eye to eye to walk side by side."

The congresswoman said that she realizes that she drinks from wells she didn't dig, standing on the shoulders of women who blazed a trail before her. Receiving a Pell Grant was a necessary investment in her education and the audacity to run for office came from women like the late Shirley Chisholm, who had stated that "service is the rent we pay for the privilege of living on this earth."

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Sewell is a member of the Agriculture Committee in the House and is working on a farm bill as someone who represents a rural area, pushing for a free trade agreement and direct subsidies for small farmers and businesses rather than large companies. While this area may not receive more

money, it is important not to cut back its appropriations. Her goal is to one day make it to the Ways and Means Committee, which will require seniority and positioning herself. Rep. Sewell is also interested in the Transportation and Infrastructure Committees.

Stressing that the nation must invest in Science and Technology for the future, she promotes better science education and preserving such jobs in Alabama. The speaker was well received by the group as a beacon for more women in politics in the years ahead.

LEAGUE MEMBER: PEGGY HAMNER



Peggy Hamner with her rescue kittens from T-Town PAWS

I grew up on a farm in central Kentucky. My parents encouraged my interest in a college degree and a career in science, a rather unusual ambition for a girl in the 1950s!

Just before starting my Freshman year at Wellesley College in Massachusetts I met Bill Hamner, then a

Sophomore majoring in Zoology at Yale University. After commuting between the 2 universities for 2 years while I started a major in Physics, we married (and are now into our 51st year together). Yale at that time was men-only, so I dropped out and worked during Bill's Senior year. He pursued his Ph.D. at UCLA, we produced 2 sons, then I returned to college when Bill became an Assistant Professor at the University of California at Davis. Because his passion was field work in marine biology, it was clear that I had to switch majors or get left behind on the beach! I finished with a Master's degree in Marine Ecology and for the following 35+ years we were research partners, living and working in the western Pacific, in Antarctica, and southern California.

Meanwhile our sons grew up, married and each had 1 daughter. The older son moved to Seattle and the younger son in 2007 became an Assistant Dean for the College of Nursing at the Univer-

sity of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. When we retired from UCLA he suggested we move to live near him, and we did, despite the fact that he was the only person we knew in the entire state! We have now been in Northport for almost 3 years and are delighted with our decision.

Joining the League of Women Voters of Greater Tuscaloosa has contributed to my appreciation of life here. I had long been a fan of the League and its mission to educate voters through nonpartisan information and I met several members of the local chapter soon after arriving. I much enjoyed their company and concluded from that small sample that becoming a member myself would be an excellent way to meet more interesting people and to learn about local and state politics! Participating in League activities has been educational and a pleasure, and I hope to be an active member for many more years.

KATHRYN BYRD, LWVAL PRESIDENT

This article has two parts. The first is designed for our newer members and those needing a bit of review on League structure. The second highlights the recent LWVAL (State) convention and LWVUS (National) Council. Hopefully those who do not need a refresher course will scan down to the discussion on the recent convocations.

REGARDING LEAGUE STRUCTURE

Most of you are aware, at least on a casual basis, that the League of Women Voters is a three-tiered organization: the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS or "National"), the League of Women Voters of Alabama (LWVAL or "State"), and the League of Women Voters of Greater Tuscaloosa (LWVGT or "the local League"). Each performs an important function that complements the work of the other two tiers. League members are generally most familiar with the "goings-on" of their local League. Members attend general meetings to listen to programs (for us, at the University Club), help out at public functions such as candidate and issues forums, and some participate on the local board. The work of the local League culminates each year with the annual meeting (unless the meeting place is partially blown away by a tornado just prior to the annual meeting, as happened to us this year). Check out the local website at www.lwval.org/tuscaloosa/.

Our state organization, LWVAL, provides leadership to local leagues, and represents the League in matters pertaining to state government. The LWVAL lobbies members of the Alabama legislature on issues for which the state has positions, provides action alerts when necessary, and

occasionally joins select groups with common interests to work on interests within the League's "program." Examples include our work with Alabama Citizens for Constitutional Reform (ACCR), tracking legislation of interest, discussing it on the LWVAL website during the legislative session, and last year's statewide gubernatorial debates, which we co-hosted with the Student Government Associations at UA and Auburn and other groups. State positions are determined through programs of study conducted by the local leagues in Alabama. We currently have two state studies underway, one on Health Care in Alabama, and the other on charter schools, with an eye on their place (if any) in our state. You can learn more about LWVAL by going to www.lwval.org.

Our national organization (LWVUS) is comprised of members belong to Leagues in all fifty states, the Virgin Islands, and Porto Rico. Its programs (areas of interest) are national in focus, and positions are achieved through extensive study of a particular issue (such as the current study on the role of the federal government in education), followed by undergoing a process of determining the consensus of the local leagues. LWVUS lobbies Congress, the Supreme Court, and other governmental bodies (such as the federal Department of Education or United Nations). "National" also sends out action alerts on federal issues, and also provides materials on selected topics to the membership. Support is also given to local and state Leagues in such areas as League management, membership recruitment, Voter Service, and so forth. For further information on LWVUS issues, member information, procedures, and more, check

out the national website at www.lwv.org.

This above discussion is very basic. It doesn't address the tax-exempt arm of the League, the League of Women Voters Education Fund. There is LWVUS-EF and LWVAL-EF, and local leagues have Ed Fund accounts through the LWVAL-EF.

REPORT ON ALABAMA STATE CONVENTION AND LWVUS COUNCIL

State Convention 2011

The League of Women Voters of Alabama had its biennial convention April 30 – May 1st in Mobile. All six local leagues, including the LWV of Greater Tuscaloosa, were in attendance. I presided over the business of the convention as the final duty of my term as LWVAL Co-President, along with Charlotte Ward from LWV of East Alabama (previously known as the Auburn League). The prescribed business of the state League was conducted with relatively few complications. No changes were made in the state by-laws, though it was recognized that some updating will be necessary before the next convention. The budget was passed after a few adjustments were made. No new studies were adopted, but two existing studies were extended: Health care in Alabama and Charter Schools. Once the studies are completed, the local leagues will meet to determine if they come to consensus on different aspects of the issues under consideration. The business of the LWVAL Ed Fund was also completed.

Business was not the only focus, however. The State Board felt that two topics needed to be fea-

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tured through speakers and forums, hopefully providing information to be brought back to the membership of the local leagues. The BP Gulf Spill and issues related to the Gulf and other Alabama waterways received the attention of our luncheon speaker, two panels in the afternoon, and even a boat ride in Mobile Bay. Dr. Melitza Crespo-Medina of the University of Georgia, Department of Marine Sciences discussed the controversy about the extent to which bacteria in the Gulf of Mexico can break down the "sludge" left by the spill.

The first panel focused on the Gulf spill and recovery, and there were differing views on the progress being made in the recovery. Highlights of the panel included the emphatic speech of Dr. George Crozier, Executive Director of the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. Crozier argued that physically "the Gulf has quite remarkably digested the bulk of this oil, but he also asked, "Why has the human component not responded as effectively as the Gulf?" Bob Higgins of the Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance, bemoaned the slow economic progress being made, in terms of lost tourist trade, the devastated seafood industry, and the slowness of compensation payments to those affected by the damage. The procedures of the federal government were explained by Pete Tuttle, US Fish and Wildlife Services, Department of Interior Case Coordinator for Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Recovery. Casi Callaway, Executive Director & Baykeeper of Mobile Baykeeper, argued for the importance of all Gulf Coast lawmakers in Congress to unite behind legislation to direct the punitive Clean Water Act fine to the states impacted by the bill. At present the congressmen are squabbling over how much each state should be awarded. This amount could range between \$5.4 billion and \$21.1 billion.

The second panel, moderated by LWVAL board member

Hattie Kaufman, broadened the scope of the discussion to include selected environmental issues across the state of Alabama. Panelists Joyce Lanning, LWVAL Natural Resources Chair, and Cindy Lowry, Executive Director of the Alabama Rivers Alliance, will discuss energy and water policies and environmental management in Alabama, as well as state and federal environmental legislation.

Focusing on a different topic, Ethics Reform, James Sumner, Executive Director of the Alabama Ethics Commission, explained the key achievements of the unusual Special Legislative Session in December 2101. (Gov. Bob Riley, whose term of office did not end until the January inaugural ceremony, presided over the newly elected legislative body, which had been sworn in just after their election in November.) Sweeping changes transpired, and Sumner ended with the statement that most of what he had been seeking to make the Ethics Commission more financially stable, and, therefore, more independent of legislative whims. Because Ethics Reform had been a long time passion of the LWVAL, the entire audience left feeling very elated.

National Council 2011

In even years, the LWVUS holds the national convention, and in odd years, the LWVUS holds the "Executive Council" (now shortened to just "Council"). Limited business is transacted; in fact, 2011 marks the final Council at which a budget must be passed. Attendees were primarily LWV state presidents and board members, two of whom can be official voting delegates. LWVAL had only one delegate. The primary focus of the 2011 Council was preparing for the 2012 election year. Each state League was assigned to a group that included a large League (for me, Virginia) and maybe another smaller state League (for me, Kentucky). Each League was

charged with completing a very thorough plan for its respective state. At each point, the issues were discussed, with interaction among those at the assigned table and with other state Leagues as well. When the final document is completed, it will be turned in to the LWVUS office for further suggestions.

Do you have any questions or comments? If so, please contact me, Kathy Byrd, LWVAL President, at 758-2137 or at kcbyrd@aol.com.

Hi fellow members of LWVGT! Sometimes it helps to explain to others why you have chosen to do something that's important to you. To that end, I thought I would jump start a conversation about WHY we joined the League. The League has benefited me professionally and personally, allowing me to grow as an individual and participate more fully in the political process. I encourage everyone to get involved and join us in our efforts to strengthen citizenship and knowledge of the political process. Let others know why you joined and what League means to you. Why did YOU join the League? Have you invited someone to join you in League today? Scarlett Gaddy - LWVGT, LWVAL Membership Chair



League of Women Voters
Of Greater Tuscaloosa

"Dedicated to making Democracy work."

Denise Downs
1036 Brandywine Road
Tuscaloosa, AL 35406

Photos by Peggy Hamner

Planning and Zoning Position Relevant

By: Hattie Kaufman

Thursday evening, a public meeting to discuss the plans for rebuilding the tornado-ravaged parts of Tuscaloosa was held, attended by nearly 300 people. I think it is instructive to see how the developing plans comport with LWVGT's position on planning and zoning, adopted in 1978 and updated in 2008.

Our position calls for plans to be developed by a board that is representative of the general public. The 50-member task force involved in the

current effort appears to meet this criterion.

Planned changes should be effectively publicized. So far, the city appears to be seeking comment and making its plans available to the public as they are developed.

Our position calls for city/county coordination. This does not seem to be part of the process. The plans discussed Thursday end at the city's portion of Holt and do not include those parts of Holt in the county.

We oppose spot or strip zoning. The plans call

for the development of "village centers," or areas of local commerce within the residential zones, to promote a walking environment and cohesiveness of community. We may want to rethink this portion of our position.

We encourage the development of green space. The plans presented include significant green space linking neighborhoods and parks.

We will keep watching to see what develops in this long-range process.