

Voter Newsletter

Working to improve our government and engage all citizens in the decisions that impact their lives.



Greetings, St. Paul Leaguers!

As difficult as it is to believe, there are more changes occurring than ever, but our LWVSP is working right in the heart of it all to continue to register voters in local high schools and to organize candidate forums. One of our goals this year is to increase collaborations and partnerships with other groups with a similar mission and to educate people on the basic role of government and of citizens in a democracy. Read more in this issue about the

League's ongoing involvement with the St. Paul Board of Education, our participation in the annual Children's Museum Civics Day, an update on the Oral History Project, Co-President Mary Vik's talk on the history of Voting Rights, and Co-President Mary Voight's trip to Germany where she learned more about the EU's efforts to engage its citizenry through civil society organizations (CSOs), and more.

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No More War

Civil Society Organizations and Democracy-Building in the EU



Brandenburg Gate, Berlin. The Cold War border between East and West.
Flickr.com © [wemcr22brigitte](#)

While living and working in an abbey for three months in Bavaria, Germany, the guests staying there exposed me to a movement in the European Union (EU) that is actually the “third leg” of the creation of the European Union called “civil society organizations” or CSOs. The EU’s inclusion of the civil society “leg” is an attempt to re-assert influence on government and commerce in an era where “global corporate power eclipses most individual nations’ power” (*The European Dream* by Jeremy Rifkin). Keep in mind, the creation of the European Union began after the end of World War II around 1950 out of a desire to say, “No more war”.

Examples of civil society organizations are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and not-for-profit organizations and include religious institutions, the arts, education, culture, health care, sports, public recreation and entertainment, social and environmental advocacy, neighborhood engagement and activities that create community bonds, social cohesion and democracy-building.

An example of their success occurred in August of 1992 in the former East German city of Rostock when Vietnamese immigrants were attacked by neo-Nazis. Civil society groups from both East and West Germany organized candlelight vigils to protest the racist violence against the Vietnamese, to resist any return to barbarism, and to embolden Jews and other foreigners to remain in Germany (*Berlin Now: The City after the Wall* by Peter Schneider).

In the 22 nations in the EU, CSOs represent a \$1.1 trillion dollar sector employing more than 19 million full-time workers. The EU and US economies are roughly the same size, \$18 trillion, but CSOs are a larger part (12.6%) of their economy than in the U.S. (4.9%). The EU is the first government body to formally acknowledge CSOs as a full-fledged partner in public policy-making, as an “intermediary between the State, the market and citizens”. CSOs are demanding a place at the United Nations, World Bank, IMF and WTO as well as in every EU country.

Continued...

Whereas we've come to believe that the marketplace is critical, essential and primary, civic groups in the EU are pushing back in order to re-gain a central role because they believe markets and government grow out of culture and civil society, and are essential glue. Civil Society in the EU is a social refuge in a globalized, impersonal, remote market-based world, and CSOs create intimacy and trust, shared purpose and collective identity.

CSOs seek to establish universal codes of conduct, not of a technical or professional nature but rather influencing human behavior itself. Their legitimacy is not grounded on professional expertise but flows from a deeply felt sense of human conscience. They appeal to human empathy rather than rational calculation. Their goal is less materialistic and more idealistic. Their efforts are designed to advance not merely economic growth but quality of life, while trying to accommodate multiculturalism and human rights at the same time.

CSO's are more favorably regarded and enjoy higher levels of trust than either the commercial or government sectors.

While there are conflicts between CSOs and the governing body in Brussels, the EU has been more open to integrating CSOs because they bring with them the kind of local, grassroots credibility that Brussels so desperately needs to effectively maintain its legitimacy. In the U.S., however, opinion leaders are more favorably disposed to business and government with 40% in the US (versus 28% EU) favorable to commerce. 46% in the US (versus 17% EU) are favorable to political institutions, and only 34% in the US (versus 51% EU) were favorable to civic groups in U.S.

Europeans believe that re-establishing civil society standards and partnering with CSOs is the most effective way to amass enough political power to provide an effective counterbalance to the commercial arena. They believe it is an antidote to a world increasingly defined in strictly commercial terms, and activists argue that over-reliance on a deregulated global marketplace has led to unbridled greed and exploitation while diminishing the traditional role of government as an agent and provider of essential social services. Their success is due to the fact that they fill a vacuum left by market and government failures.

I hope this information about civil society work in the EU inspires us and reminds us of the importance of this work here in St. Paul. Thank you for all of your efforts!

— Mary Voight, Co-President



Learn More

European Commission | International Cooperation & Development | Civil Society
<http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/civil-society>

European Commission | European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
<http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/>

Civitas | Global Citizens United By
Natural Ethical Standards
<https://www.civitas.org>

European Academy Berlin
<http://www.enlargeducation.eu>

“Romancing the Civil Society” in *The European Dream* by Jeremy Rifkin

“The New Racism” in *Berlin Now: The City after the Wall* by Peter Schneider



Book Club

Join Us!

The Book Club meets the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 10:15AM in the Sun Ray Library, 2105 Wilson Ave. St. Paul 55119. All are welcome!

Upcoming Books

September 14, 2016

American Amnesia: How the War on Government Led Us to Forget What Made America Prosper

October 12, 2016

Whistlestop: My Favorite Stories from Presidential Campaign History

November 9, 2016

The War on Science: Who's Waging It, Why It Matters, What We Can Do About It

December 14, 2016

Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis

January 11, 2017

A Good Time for the Truth: Race in Minnesota

February 8, 2017

Listen, Liberal: or What ever happened to the party of the people?

March 8, 2017

The Age of Sustainable Development

April 12, 2017

A Nation of Nations: A Great American Immigration Story

Future titles will be announced in the next newsletter.

Co-President Mary Vik Speaks At The JCC Women's Roundtable

For the JCC Women's Roundtable in July 2016, I was asked to speak on the topic of the League of Women Voters, in general and from the perspective of my own involvement with the League. Since the League is almost 100 years old, I began with a little historical background about voting rights in this country, or lack thereof. And I found that the old adage is true: if we don't learn from history, we are forced to repeat it.

For example, in the mid-19th century, women banded together with men to work for the abolition of slavery as well as for the right of women to vote. In 1870, when the 15th Amendment to the Constitution was passed granting suffrage to African-American men but not to women, the women doubled down on their efforts. Success came in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution and the League of Women Voters was born.

In the meantime, voting rights for all African-American citizens had been curtailed in the Southern states almost as soon as Federal troops left the South at the end of Reconstruction.

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) was signed by President Johnson in 1965 to curb those practices and to grant equal access to the ballot to all.

But that was not the happy ending one might think it should be. Even today, a court of law in one of our states is ruling on the validity of laws passed by various state legislatures to curb its citizens' access to the ballot.

So the battle for voting rights isn't over and, in my opinion, the League's constant emphasis on registering voters and holding candidate forums to enable citizens to make informed choices at the polls is as important today as it was in 1920. These are the thoughts I shared with the Roundtable members.

I also brought some of our League's studies and updates to share with the Roundtable, as well as a LWVMN feature article on Clara Uheland, the LWVMN's first president.

I appreciated the opportunity to brief myself on some of the history of voting rights in this country and to share that and my enthusiasm for League with the women who were there.

— Mary Vik, Co-President

Oral History Project



The League of Women Voters St. Paul Oral History Project, funded by grant money from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through the Minnesota Historical Society, is now complete.

The transcription of the eighth and final interview is finished and the transcripts and audio CDs will be delivered to the Minnesota Historical Society.

Our League retains rights to the transcripts and audio CDs as well. Watch for an announcement about their posting

on our [website](http://www.lwvsp.org) (<http://www.lwvsp.org>) and for how we might use them in our celebration of League's 100th birthday in 2020!

The original grant application included a request for funding for photography but this expense was denied. However, we still hope to include photos as well as quotes from some of the interviewees in a display of some kind and on our website.

If you have ideas, please let [Amy Mino](mailto:amy@minofamily.net) (amy@minofamily.net) or someone on the Board hear from you!

Thank You, Kate!

League of Women Voters St. Paul extends a heartfelt “thank you” to oral historian Kate Cavett, who conducted the interviews and oversaw their transcriptions. We hope she enjoyed working with our League as much as we enjoyed working with her!



August School Board Report

As students prepare to head back to school, The Saint Paul Board of Education is also preparing for the 2016-2017 school year. During the August Board meeting, the Board listened to presentations about district-wide school readiness updates. Interim Superintendent Dr. John Thein expressed his excitement for his first day of school by saying he “can’t wait to see the smiling faces of all the students and staff on September 6th and 8th”.

Dr. Thein, a former educator, administrator, and superintendent of Roseville Public Schools, was named the interim superintendent last month when the Board officially voted Valeria Silva out of the superintendent seat. This decision was heavily criticized and led to the immediate resignation of Board member Jean O'Connell, who strongly disagreed with the actions of some of the Board members and the lack of transparency in this matter. Silva received a separation agreement worth \$787,500 and will serve full-time as a special consultant through September 2017. No details have been provided yet about the

search for her permanent replacement.

Another important topic discussed during the Board meeting was about clarifying the role of school resource officers (SROs) in district high-schools. The board voted 5-0 to approve a new contract for police officers assigned to work at high-schools, which includes additional training, monthly meetings with student advisory councils, and new distinguishing uniforms. The contract comes after a video of a school resource officer at Central High School arresting a former student suspected of trespassing was posted on Facebook and within hours was viewed nearly 206,000 times. The officer was widely criticized for his actions as many believed he was being unnecessarily aggressive. This contract serves as a way to improve relationships between school resource officers and students.

— Elizabeth Zalanga

Civics Saturday at the Minnesota Children’s Museum

Mary Vik invites two young visitors to vote for their favorite color. The occasion was the Minnesota Children’s Museum’s annual Civics Saturday on July 16. The Museum asked LWVSP to participate along with other civic organizations in order to introduce children to the concept that there is a world out there in which they can play a valuable part when they turn 18!



UPCOMING EVENTS

September 14 @ 10:15AM

Book Club
Sun Ray Library

September 26 @ 6PM

Board Meeting

October 12 @ 10:15AM

Book Club
Sun Ray Library

October 24 @ 6:00PM

"Let's Talk: Voting Rights Then and Now"
Penumbra Theatre

October 25 @ 6:00PM

Board Meeting (Note: The meeting is on a
Tuesday for this month only)

November 9 @ 10:15AM

Book Club
Sun Ray Library

November 15 @ 6:30PM

"In Our Own Backyard: Homelessness and
Affordable Housing." Amherst Wilder researcher
Ellen Shelton will speak at a meeting of the League
of Women Voters of Roseville, Maplewood, and
Falcon Heights. ROMAFH members are studying
affordable housing in our cities. The meeting is co-
sponsored by the LWVSP. The meeting will take
place at the Autumn Grove Roseville Park Building,
1365 Lydia Ave. W. It is free and open to the public.

December 3 @ TBD

December Lunch

December 14 @ 10:15AM

Book Club
Sun Ray Library

The Council Of Metropolitan Area Leagues (CMAL)

The topic for the year is Emergency Preparedness Planning
for the Metro Area.

The schedule is as follows:

October 15, 2016

Terrorist attacks and civil disobedience

January 21, 2017

Man-made disasters such as hazardous spills, infrastructure
collapse, and nuclear plant issues

March 18, 2017

Public health threats such as epidemics, antibiotic resistance,
and anti-immunization trends

The October meeting will be hosted by the Minneapolis LWV
and will be held at the Washburn Library, 5244 Lyndale Ave.
S, Minneapolis, MN 55419. The meeting will probably start at
10:00, but that start time has not been finalized as of yet.

If anyone is interested in attending, they can call or text Vicki
Barnes at 920-585-2027 to get the correct start time for the
meetings.

Save The Date!



"What can we do today to ensure that all Americans have
unimpeded access to the polls? What are the important
rebuttals to fears about voter fraud that we can employ to
encourage advocacy for the poor and disenfranchised?"

Join the discussion at the opening event of the Penumbra
Theatre's "Let's Talk" series. Penumbra's Let's Talk Series
creates space for compassionate and challenging
conversations around issues of social justice, equity, and the
arts.

On October 24, the Theatre will host a reception and
discussion of "Voting Rights Then and Now". Hosted by
Sarah Bellamy, the event begins at 6:00pm with
refreshments and light bites, followed by a 90-minute
presentation and discussion.

Tickets (\$20) can be purchased online or via phone.

Phone: (651) 224-3180

Email: boxoffice@penumbratheatre.org

Website: <http://penumbratheatre.org>

Penumbra Theatre 270 N. Kent St St. Paul, MN 55102