



# The Voter



League of Women Voters of North & Central San Mateo County, California

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The League of Women Voters is where hands-on work to safeguard democracy leads to civic improvement.

December 2018

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## Holiday Membership Party

Tuesday, December 11  
6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
809 Lawrence Road  
San Mateo CA 94402

Linda and Wally Jansen are graciously opening their home, an elegantly restored Victorian mansion built in 1879, to the League for our annual holiday pot luck to honor our members and celebrate the season. We have invited League members who have run for local office to talk informally about their experiences as candidates and lessons they have learned. 2018 has proven to be a banner year for a diverse election featuring women and people from all backgrounds, and the League would like to encourage this trend.

Please RSVP to the EVITE or call the office at 650-342-5853. To contribute to the potluck, please click the **What to Bring List** button on the EVITE or call the office at 650-342-5853 and leave a message.

Street parking is available on Fremont Street and the surrounding residential streets.



**Contents:** President's Message, [p. 2](#) — Board Highlights — [p. 3](#) — Welcome to Our New Members! — [p. 3](#) — Observer Corps Report, [p. 4](#) — Fire and Rain: Perils of an Unbalanced Watershed, [p. 6](#) — December Calendar, [p. 8](#)

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

Ann Kuchins, President • Marie Baldisseri, Membership Chair • Ann Kuchins, Editor

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## President's Message



A gift is coming our way! Margie Gater and her company Envision Technology Marketing Group have designed and are donating two retractable banners. The Board worked with Margie and Envision but the overall design was Envision's. Many

thanks to Margie and Envision for their talents, time, and generosity! For a sneak peak, see the photos on this page and on p. 4.

Some more thank yous to the volunteers who counted ballots at Woodlake: **Betty Fleming, Jackie James, Ann Kuchins, Mary Nobriga, and Sandra Shapiro**. A special thank you to **Jackie Jacobberger** who organized this function for which the League receives a nice little stipend. If you are interested in spending an evening in conversation and light work with other League members, stay tuned for our next ballot counting function at Shelter Creek in San Bruno sometime in February.

An hour and fifteen minutes was not enough time to talk about the College Promise and SparkPoint programs at Skyline College at our meeting on November 13 at the South San Francisco Public Library. Cherie Colin, Marketing and Communications Director at Skyline, and Skyline Promise Scholar Marie were inundated with questions. After hearing about the College Promise program, we wondered why more Skyline College students were not taking advantage of the opportunities offered. Next year, the tuition will be waived for the second year students. In 2013, the completion rate for Skyline students was 11%. Partial implementation of the program began in 2014 and in that short time, completion rates rose to 16%. Full implementation began this semester with 507 students.

SparkPoint's mission is to reduce poverty. The mainstay of the program is to provide financial education and coaching where a bundle of services and resources are combined to assist people in becoming financially self-sufficient. The program is open to anyone in the community including faculty and staff. One of the most interesting services is a food pantry for eligible students, staff, faculty, and members of the community who experience food insecurity. SparkPoint receives its financing from United Way.

I hope to see many of you at the holiday party. We have invited League members who have run for local office to speak about their experiences in running for office. It is an opportunity to celebrate our members who are willing to give their time, talent, and efforts to improving our quality of life. It is also a time to socialize with old and new friends sharing similar interests who together could make things happen.

*We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give.* — Winston Churchill

*Ann Kuchins, President*



## Board Highlights

At the November Board meeting, our board

- Agreed to order two retractable signs advertising our League to be used at our events
- Decided to ask members to sign up to bring food when they RSVP to our Holiday Dinner on December 11<sup>th</sup>
- Discussed collaborating with other groups for County League Day, February 23<sup>rd</sup> and agreed to find a speaker on diversity
- Heard that the Observer Corps finished their review of the San Mateo Harbor District and are considering looking at local bond measures and the oversight committees
- Heard that we are scheduled to conduct two HOA elections and are planning on holding a training workshop on this process
- Learned that we will contact the local Girl Scout leaders to plan a joint project called Voter Girl

*Jean Johnson, Secretary*

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# Mark Your CALENDAR



## New (& Not So New) Member Orientation

**When:** Saturday, January 12, 2019 from 10:00am to 12:00pm  
Or  
Wednesday, January 16, 2019 from 6:30pm to 8:30pm

Where: League Office, 444 Peninsula Avenue, Suite 1, San Mateo

Please join us! Whether you're a new member or have been a member for a while and feel you'd like a refresher on how the League of Women Voters works, I hope you'll plan on attending. The meeting will be an opportunity to learn about the League - its mission, policies, positions, areas of advocacy, and more. In addition, it's a great opportunity to meet other League members and discover how you can get involved. Understanding that our members have busy lives, we are offering orientation on two different days and times in the hope more members will be able to attend. I look forward to meeting you.

*Marie Baldisseri, Membership Director*

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## Welcome to Our New Members!

Carolyn Belknap  
Eric and Beverli Marshall  
Caroline Simard  
Caroline Wood  
Beverley Zammit

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# Observer Corps Report

(Part 3 of a 4-part series)

This month the Observer Corps is proud to report results from its evaluation of the San Mateo County Community College District. **Marta Bookbinder** and **Ann Loper** conducted the review. Marta and Ann would like to acknowledge their gratitude to **Michell Bailey**, Chief of Staff, who was instrumental in answering questions and sharing information contributing greatly to the findings included in their report.

Each review conducted by the Corps has had the same objective, protect our right to know, which is integral to the health of our democracy. Decisions that determine the following:

- How our schools will be run
- At what level community safety programs will be funded
- How land in our towns will be used impact our lives are vital to our well-being

These kinds of decisions need to be made with public input and oversight. The Observer Corps is one important way to ensure open government and civic engagement.

The primary reason for creating and maintaining an observer program is to promote and ensure a healthy democracy; however there are numerous additional benefits. It connects with other League activities and events and, most importantly, it connects the League with the larger community. In addition to protecting the public's right to know the Observer Corps provides opportunities to increase the League's membership, resources and visibility.

It is my hope that you will consider joining the Corps. Our League's Observer Corps' mission will be expanded in 2019 to include the examination of recently passed local bond measures. We will compare what was promised on the ballot to how the approved bond dollars were spent. If our work sounds exciting to you, please join us. If you'd like to join the Observer Corps or have questions about our activities, please contact me at [mbaldisseri@att.net](mailto:mbaldisseri@att.net).



*Marie Baldisseri, Membership Director*

## Government Agency: San Mateo County Community College District

### Access

Easy access to public meetings:

Agendas:

- The College District's meeting agendas are posted on display at the entrance to the building, plus hard copies are available outside the Boardroom.
- August 22<sup>nd</sup> Board meeting 6:00 p.m. start delayed. An announcement made at 6:08 p.m. that a closed session was in progress, and the start of the open session would be delayed 15 minutes.
- Agenda packets are detailed and online 72 hours prior to meetings – the same time it is received by the Board members.

**Minutes:**

- Meeting minutes are detailed.
- As per law, recording of meetings are kept for 30 days after approval of transcribed actions taken and approved by the Board.

**Online:**

- Meeting packets are available online and are emailed to anyone interested in receiving them.

**Signage:**

- Location of agenda packets needs to be clearly posted before each meeting.
- District will investigate improved signage.

**Parking:**

- “Available Parking” signs are needed.

**Easy, accurate access to agency:**

**Contact information:**

- Online organization chart displays departments, leadership titles, and department telephone numbers.
- Trustees’ email addresses are published online in their biographies only.
- Online Staff Directory lists all department heads, their telephone numbers, email addresses, and campus locations.

**Services:**

- The District is served by public transit and has ample parking.
- The Boardroom sound system is not always effective.

**ADL compliance:**

- Sign Language needs are met when advance notice is received.
- Disabled parking available. Elevator access to second floor Board Room.

**ESL and non-English speaking accommodations:**

- District phone bank is provided for translations.
- District has Key Translators available.

**Timely responses:**

- Operators (not an automated service) are available to answer, direct calls, and respond to inquiries.
- Staff sets response priorities, conforming to timelines set by law.

**Transparency:**

**Public participation in Board meetings:**

- The Board President called for public comment during the meeting.
- A formal process and written directions are needed.

**Accountability:**

**Agency directories:**

- Changes to personnel directories are updated twice monthly.

**Access to public records:**

- District responds within 10 days.
- Underdevelopment, a new website button, will allow the public to ask/submit requests online.

**Additional Comments:**

**The District focuses on:**

- Preparing and supporting students’ education and career choices
- Accessing resources by maximizing collaboration with the community
- Creating an environment of equity and success

**Recommendations:**

- Better signage and multilingual direction will invite the public, particularly first-time visitors to navigate with ease an otherwise daunting process.
- Meetings cancelled because of lack of quorum are a concern, particularly with oversight committees serving on behalf of the public according to the law.

**Overall Rating - Good**

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## Fire and Rain: Perils of an Unbalanced Watershed

We've seen fire aplenty this year. The California wildfire season got off to an early, rip-roaring start and continues apace, stretching budgets and firefighters. Soon we're going to see rain, which we need, but which is also an ironic cause for concern for those who protect California's water quality for people and the environment. Their main worry is the extra sediment carried in runoff through fire-damaged watersheds that drain into water-holding basins.

US Forest Service research hydrologist Joe Wagenbrenner explained how the system works in a balanced, unburned watershed. When it rains, as much as ninety percent of rainfall is absorbed by the soil. The rest evaporates or is used by plants. The water in the soil percolates down to recharge groundwater and move through the substrate into streams. "It takes a long time for a drop of water to move through the soil and reach a stream," said Wagenbrenner. "As a benefit, the soil acts as a filter and the water comes out clean." In a balanced system, sediment in water is good. It provides habitat for fish and carries with it soil nutrients such as organic carbon, phosphorus, potassium, and nitrogen. These nutrients provide food for fish and micro-invertebrates while replenishing floodplains and riverbanks.

In an unbalanced system such as a high-intensity burn area, there is too much sediment and a bloom of nutrients that are not good for water quality, said Wagenbrenner. In a burned area there is likely no vegetation to absorb some of the rainfall, and in some cases, waxy vegetation burns, melts, and forms a coat on the soil that repels water. A fire can also burn the organic matter in soil itself. Organic matter helps to hold soil together, and when it burns, it becomes more friable and won't clump, making it more susceptible to erosion. With less water being absorbed by the soil, there is more runoff and more sediment on the move. As a result, the water is less clean because it hasn't gone through the natural filtration of soil.

How water managers respond after a fire depends on the severity of the burn, said Sheri Miller, a senior sanitary engineer for the State Water Resources Control Board, which is responsible for protecting California's water quality. "Each fire presents its unique set of circumstances," she said, which leads her to look at how hot a fire burns, its damage to the watershed, and if water system facilities were harmed, either above or below ground. Maps of burn areas are generated and studied for the degree of burns. A high-severity burn creates greater impacts.

"There are things we can do to mitigate for fire impacts once the fire has happened," said the Forest Service's Wagenbrenner. To reduce erosion, they might apply seed or mulch before it rains. To slow down or trap moving water that carries sediment and ash, they can use straw wattles (straw-filled tubes bound by natural fiber) and log erosion barriers, or build check dams.

After the 2017 Tubbs Fire burned one side of Kimball Reservoir, a source of Calistoga's drinking water supply, the city laid 7,000 linear feet of straw wattles around the reservoir. It helped. Water managers did additional water monitoring and didn't see elevated levels of nutrients, said Miller.

Once runoff and sediment reach a municipal water supply, additional treatment may be necessary because sediment can change the pH of water. “Almost every contaminant can be removed, but the removal can be expensive,” said Wagenbrenner. Sediment does more than affect water quality and treatment approaches; it hastens the lifespan of a reservoir, which loses capacity as it ages and collects sediment.

“Fires have been here long before humans,” said Wagenbrenner, pointing out how the natural cycle of wildfires has historically served to benefit ecosystems. Medium- and low-intensity fires can benefit a watershed ecosystem by removing small trees, allowing mature trees to receive more nutrients and water, making them stronger to resist fire and disease. Also, removing fuel from a forest renders a fire less hot.



While it may seem that there are more reported fires each year, the number is relatively constant over time according to data from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE). What has increased exponentially over the last decade is the amount of acreage that burns. Three things control the size and sizzle of a fire, says Wagenbrenner. The biggest factor is local weather, which is growing more extreme due to climate change. “If it’s hot and dry, fuel will burn hotter and faster,” he said, “and if it’s windy all bets are off.” In wind, fires can jump barriers such as roads and streams, and spread the fire by “spotting” other fires downwind. Variables in firefighting efficacy due to the size of the fire, resources, and wind condition can also affect the size and intensity of a fire.

Fuel conditions on the ground are another important factor. Most fires spread on the ground, not from tree canopy to canopy, so what is on the ground matters. That’s where forest management comes in. “Maintaining a healthy forest is one way to help prevent large fires,” said CAL FIRE’s Dennis Hall. Healthy forest management reduces fuel for fires by harvesting trees, thinning and removing other vegetation, and by conducting prescribed burns.

Urban fires and wildland-urban interface fires add another level of concern for water quality. After the Tubbs Fire, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board was concerned that hazardous waste from over 5,000 burned structures would enter waterways. Working with CAL FIRE and other agencies, the Regional Water Board identified high risk areas in need of protection within the Russian River watershed. The data was used to mitigate post-fire runoff and erosion, including the use of straw wattles to keep soil and structure material onsite and not in creeks. After a post-fire monitoring, they found that their efforts were successful.

In an urban fire, the burning of water delivery pipes can also be a problem. KQED reported that pipes made of high-density polyethylene that burned in Santa Rosa’s Fountaingrove neighborhood delivered toxins to the water mains.

A disaster like a fire can bring communities together, and those in Lake County are a good example. These communities have a history of fire and are accustomed to dealing with sediment from Clear Lake, the oldest lake in America. (Old lakes are full of sediment.)

Fires are here to stay. They can’t always be controlled, but there is much we can do through smart planning to lessen their intensity and mitigate their impact so that rain is always welcome.

*Aleta Geogre, Bay Area League Monitor*

**December Calendar**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Place</b>
Monday Dec. 3	7:00 – 9:00 p.m.	Board Meeting All members welcome	444 Peninsula Avenue, Suite 1 San Mateo CA 94401
Tuesday Dec. 11	6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.	Holiday Party Speakers: LWV members who have run for local government offices	809 Lawrence Road San Mateo CA 94402

**JOIN THE LEAGUE**

*Where new members just like you are taking advantage of leadership opportunities and making an impact.*

Name(s)

Address

City Zip Code

Phone Number (daytime)

E-mail address

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_

(\$65 one member; \$100 two members, same household; \$35 each additional member, same household. *Dues are not tax deductible.*)

Mail to: LWVNC&SMC 444 Peninsula Avenue, Suite 1, San Mateo, CA 94401

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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