

The VOTER  
September/October 2019

LWVNPC OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS 2020

**Officers**

President	2018-2020	Karen Karinja
1st Vice-President	2019-2021	Position Vacant
2nd Vice President	2018-2020	Beth Hovind
Treasurer	2018-2020	Gayla Larson
Secretary	2019-2021	Stephanie Bolden

**Elected Board Member**

Miriam Benitez-Nixon	2019-2020
Nikki Fleming	2019-2020
Doris Reeves-Lipscomb	2019-2020

**Appointed Directors 2018-2020**

Marti Folwell

LWV North Pinellas County  
PO Box 3623 Seminole, FL 33775  
727-447-1564

[www.lwvnorthpinellas.org](http://www.lwvnorthpinellas.org)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/LWVNPC/](https://www.facebook.com/LWVNPC/)

**National Popular  Vote!**

Making Every Vote Count September 11, 2019

A new poll released by Making Every Vote Count today finds nearly two of every three likely voters (62%) support their state joining the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. See more at their website: <https://www.nationalpopularvote.com/state/fl>

## ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION GROUP



**GOOD NEWS** The Florida Department of Environmental Protection this week released its final Beneficiary Mitigation Plan, detailing how they plan to spend the Volkswagen Settlement funds. Florida's share of which is about \$166 million. 70% of funds - \$116 million - will be allocated to school, transit, and shuttle bus upgrades. DEP also announced the first phase of an Electric School Bus Project that will offer 100% cost-reimbursement for diesel-to-electric school bus upgrades. This is a big deal, since everyday diesel school buses expose 2.7 million Florida students to toxins and known carcinogens. The Department received 1,307 comments advocating for electric school buses. This initial project is a testament to the power of your voice! This is a big victory for clean energy, climate action, and most importantly our children's health.

You may recall that our LWWNPC recently supported the nomination of the Florida Gulf Coast for a MISSION BLUE HOPE SPOT. Great news – the location was accepted, and our fantastic coast is now on the list of "special places that are critical to the health of the ocean." Find more information about the Hope Spot Project here: <https://mission-blue.org/hope-spots/>

Thanks, and remember that your LWWNP Environmental Action Group needs you! Give us an hour per month to help make our group as vibrant as it can be. Contact [Dave Sillman](#) or [Stef Bolden](#) to get involved.

## Happenings

Friday, October 25 and Saturday, Oct 26

Gulf Coast Mission Blue Hope Spot celebration weekend (numerous events to celebrate our designation as a Mission Blue Hope Spot)

On Friday October there will be an Evening Gala at the Historic Fenway Hotel featuring food from local eateries and prominent speakers, including world renowned ocean researcher, *Time Magazine's* Hero of the Planet, and Dunedin native, Dr. Sylvia Earle, to discuss the importance of the oceans; the Florida Gulf Coast; and the many on-going efforts to keep it healthy for generations to come. Reservations are required and tickets are going fast!! Tickets can be purchased at [Florida Gulf Coast Hope Spot Launch Gala](#).

## Saturday's October 26 schedule of events:

- 10:00am - Education About Our Hope Spot followed by films related to our Hope Spot - Dunedin Library
- 1:00pm - City Ceremony - Pioneer Park
- 1:30pm - Science Madness- Scottish Hall & Pioneer Park
- 1:30pm - Think and Drink Scientific Pub Crawl and Poker Run - Downtown Breweries
- 5:30pm - Prizes! - HOB Brewing Co. Patio

## Saturday October 26, 2019 – 9am to 4pm

2019 Florida Solar Congress

USF/Tampa, Phyllis P. Marshall Student Center: 4103 Cedar Circle, Tampa, FL 33620

Come to learn about and discuss the state of solar in Florida. This free public conference brings together solar supporters from across the state to learn and discuss the current solar landscape and future for solar energy in Florida. The day will include a series of presentations about solar technology and policy topics as well as ways to get involved with helping to grow solar in Florida. Topics will include solar 101 information session, community solar, emerging Florida solar policy initiatives, ways to get involved, and much more! The event will conclude with a participatory open forum discussion for all attendees to discuss priorities and opportunities that solar supporters in Florida should focus on in the coming year. Breakfast and lunch will be provided for all attendees! This event is FREE and open to the public. Everyone is welcome to attend! Whether you are a solar homeowner, completely new to solar, or somewhere in between – this event is for you!

## **“Would you like to take the next step to citizenship and register to vote?”**



Thrilling VR Event. A highlight of our voter registration activities for September was greeting newly naturalized citizens as they exited the auditorium at St. Petersburg College with the above question. With Ellen Siegman and Mary Sanders encouraging (read: steering) new American citizens towards our table, we registered 56 new voters on September 20 in about 75 minutes! Our team consisted of Anne Decker, Barbara Letvin, Karen Owen, Mary Sanders, Ellen Siegman, Becki Snyder, and me – Doris Reeves-Lipscomb. We left inspired, energized, and wishing for more VR opportunities like

this one. Our registrations that day and others gathered at events around National Voter Registration Day (September 24) boosted our total to about 70 new registered voters for the month.

Ramping up Voter Registration, Planning Get-Out-The-Vote (GOTV), and 411 Voters Guide – More Activists Needed.

Although Voter Service does not have an official chair at present (Interested?), we meet on the first Tuesday of each month, alternating afternoon with evening meetings to accommodate working members. The next meeting is November 5, 6:30 PM – 8:00 PM, Safety Harbor Library. The last meeting this year will be December 3 at 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM, also at the Library. We are planning a concentrated voter registration drive in the 45-60 days preceding the February 18 voter registration deadline for the Presidential Preference Primary in March. Barbara Letvin and Anne Decker are reaching out to management of apartment complexes to schedule events. We are looking for other ready-made adult congregation points in January and early February. We are also exploring how to make it easier for voters to vote with more and well-advertised drop off locations for mail-in ballots and early voting sites. Maybe some well-placed billboards advertising the importance of voting could be attempted in partnership with the Hillsborough and St. Pete Leagues. More to come...

Finally, the jewel in the crown of League Voter Education efforts is the VTE411 Voters Guide. Three of us – Becki Snyder, Steph Bolden, and I – have stepped forward to partner with the St. Petersburg League on guide production. We would welcome a couple more to bolster our assets to work on issue/question construction, outreach to candidates, issue analysis and write-up, loading content onto the website, etc. Volunteers can pick their involvement based on their interests/strengths. I've been told that the work is intense for about 6 weeks in January and early February with another cycle in the Fall prior to the General Election. The VOTE411 Guide reaches hundreds of thousands of voters nationally. Please join us to inform more voters in Florida



## COMMITTEE CHAIR JOB POSTINGS

Below are links to open chair jobs for which your talent may be needed. Click on the link to view the job descriptions for each position. Your skills and drive are needed!

- [CENSUS CHAIR](#)
- [COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR](#)
  - [SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER](#)
  - [WEBMASTER](#)
- [GRANT WRITER](#)
- [NOMINATING COMMITTEE CHAIR](#)
- [VOTER SERVICE CHAIR](#)

Contact LWVNPC president: [karen.karina@gmail.com](mailto:karen.karina@gmail.com)

If you haven't visited our North Pinellas League website recently, check it out at <https://my.lwv.org/florida/north-pinellas-county> and our Facebook page. They are both updated, and the website is easier to navigate. Lots of information for members and anyone interested in voting rights and our democracy.



"We have realized that race relations will not substantially improve unless a critical mass of concerned citizens from all racial and economic backgrounds decides to place race amity and equity as the priority value in their everyday lives, not one invoked only in a periodic racial crisis. This means we must position amity as a key to building a multiracial society, one built on justice, interracial unity, harmony and love. To this end we propel our collective movement towards E Pluribus Unum, one of our nation's original motto – out of many, one." (Race Amity, America's Other Tradition: A Primer, by William H. Smith, ED.D. and Richard W. Thomas, PH.D., 2019)

"The Other Tradition is those actions that have taken place during the course of our national history that are based on the moral principles of the organic oneness and unity of humankind. This Other Tradition has been a constant parallel to the social construction of racism in our country. A key element in this Other Tradition and the propellant for its success has been amity – more familiarity and friendship as a central ingredient. There are 2 types of loving; for family and for friends. When amity exists, there is a genuine commitment and support that includes willingness to take risks and engage in personal sacrifice."

Our first meeting at the Dunedin Public Library on Sunday, October 6, was a good beginning. The video was well received, and all agreed that that it should be viewed by more people. More meetings are planned.



**Event Date:** November 4, 2:00pm  
**Event Location:** Barbara S. Ponce Public Library of Pinellas Park  
**Topic:** Cyber Conflict and Geopolitics

**Event Date:** Monday, December 2, 2019  
**Event Location:** Barbara S. Ponce Public Library of Pinellas Park  
**Topic:** Nuclear Negotiations





## **The Launch of the Poverty Action Team of LWVFL: Its Humble Beginnings in North Pinellas County, 2016–June 2019 Prepared by Barbara Letvin, Co-chair**

In 2016 a new member of the North Pinellas Chapter of the League of Women Voters, Beth Hovind, a retired social worker with management experience, received the green light from the chapter president, Karen Karinja, to invite other League members to address poverty issues in Pinellas County, Florida.

### **IN THE BEGINNING**

Five League members started first meeting in a small office . Shortly, Barbara Letvin agreed to co-chair the committee. Meetings were called on a monthly basis for members to learn more about the needs and struggles of the county's low-income residents. Beth shared information including books, web research, the United Way's ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) report and other studies to increase knowledge of relevant issues. Several members brought their own experience working with those affected by poverty: a retired nurse, an attorney, and community organizer among them. Some were affiliated with local community organizations who also worked on poverty. The early committee chose five areas of focus: affordable housing, increasing support for safety net programs, expanded mass transportation, expanded Medicaid, and juvenile justice.

### **INVITING THE COMMUNITY TO THE MEETINGS**

Within a few months, the group invited community members to join them to discuss their work with those in poverty. These included a local faith minister, a college professor, and an agency director among others. Former guests were kept informed as more chapter members attended monthly meetings. Notable were two guests: A longtime volunteer nicknamed "Mother Goose" advocating for the importance of early childhood education such as Head Start, and Pastor Kathy Walter of St. John's Episcopal Church in Clearwater, one of 40 churches involved in a social justice ministry. When asked how we can help, she said, "Do what the league does best.... organize the providers." And so, we did!

### **HOT TOPIC MEETINGS**

The committee selected two 'hot topics' for chapter meetings. The first focused on the critical need for more affordable housing in the county. A representative of the county Housing Authority, the United Way ALICE Report, and a non-profit housing provider were highlighted. The second focused on the Kids Count poverty statistics and Medicaid gaps in coverage.

## **LWV FLORIDA PROVIDES STATE-WIDE SUPPORT**

To expand their influence, the committee contacted the LWV Florida see if it would support a poverty initiative at the state convention in 2017. Although the packet of information did not make it into the program, Karen Karinja, President of the LWV North Pinellas and Norin Dollard, director of Kids Count, presented a workshop at the convention. With Karen's leadership, the LWV Florida Board approved the formation of a statewide Poverty Action Team.

This team connected through state-wide conference calls on specific poverty issues. These included a university professor and author, Susan Greenbaum, who shared her expertise in poverty-related issues. Legal Service attorneys provided up-to-date information on TANF, SNAP, and Medicaid including the need for reform in Florida's participation in these programs. A recent program highlighted the problems in the VPK pre-school program as 49% of children statewide do not participate. State health councils were also featured.

Thus, the Poverty Action Team began to widen the involvement of more LWV members across the state with experts in issues related to poverty and legislation.

## **GATHERING THE COMMUNITY**

Following meetings and several state-wide conference calls, the local committee decided to hold a poverty summit with representatives of local and statewide organizations who work with those affected by poverty. The theme: Legislative changes necessary to improve the lives of low-income residents of the state. Given non-profits and other organizations struggle to combat poverty as individual entities, the committee chose a collaborative approach to encourage other groups. The committee of the LWV North Pinellas chose to lead this effort and to become a partner with the state Poverty Action Team. This decision was made with more than six months to plan for conference. The date: Friday, January 25, 2019, was chosen as a Friday during the work week so people would be able to participate without giving up their personal time.

- **VENUE**

The first venue considered was one offered by a large church with an active ministry in challenging poverty. Wanting to facilitate focused discussion in small groups, one member suggested we consider Collaborate Labs of St. Petersburg College which offered training programs for businesses, government and non-profit organizations. Four committee members met with CL staff and, after reporting to the Poverty Committee, most members chose to seek funding to support this as a conference site for a six-hour day. The site was centrally located mid-county in a modern university building with the latest technology and trained facilitators. We believed the venue, Collaborative Labs, elevated the conference to a professional level and showcased the League's leadership. Organizing such an event fostered community collaboration to strategize ways to combat poverty but required funds, tapping community resources, and the ensuring strong support from the chapter's board of directors.

- **BUDGET and FUNDING**

The initial budget required expansion. Collaborate Labs had funds available to subsidize part of their fee, thanks to a charitable foundation which provided \$1,500 of the fee of \$6,000. The chapter contributed \$2,500. Individual members began soliciting donors to support this effort

from faith communities, The Pinellas Community Foundation, Junior League of Dunedin / Clearwater, The Church of the Good Shepherd, Allegany Franciscan Ministries Foundation, and others. The budget of \$9,500 would support an outside speaker, an expert in poverty, airline flight, room, supplies, a continental breakfast and light lunch for conference guests.

- **GUESTS**

Committee members submitted names of community leaders/organizations for consideration and an electronic spread sheet was developed with contact information. The group brainstormed ideas to ensure a cross section of large and small agencies, government and non-government organizations. The focus was to involve the Tampa Bay area and statewide agencies in Florida. There were efforts to include those who might be homeless or deeply affected by poverty, though this was a challenge. No politicians were invited. Beth prepared an invitation to prospective guests and, using email addresses from the spread sheet, the chapter treasurer sent an Evite invitation. When this elicited only a few responses, three committee members divided the list and made personal phone calls to each of those who did not respond. Several reported not seeing the email invite. New names were added by referral and recommendation. The guest list was a moving target with a goal of 75, the limit of the contract with Collaborative Labs.

- **CONFERENCE DAY, JANUARY 25, 2019**

A continental breakfast/meet & greet began at 8 AM followed by a welcome and introduction by Beth Hovind. She offered a brief history and the goal of the conference, Reducing Poverty in Florida: Legislative Solutions and introduced Dr. Smeeding. His PowerPoint presentation included national research citing childhood poverty that he believed could be cut in half with a small children's allowance of \$2,000 per year per child, expanding the Earned Income Credit (EIC) which rewards working, expanding SNAP (food stamps), expanding public health insurance programs and expanding housing assistance programs especially for families with children. Competent early childhood education programs would also aid in future school performance.

Panel members each spoke briefly, followed by Q & A from many of the 72 representing 50 community organizations. Following the speakers, guests moved to break out groups tackling action plans using the collaborative process to address poverty. The participants, including League members from our chapter and others, ranked items to prioritize the six most pressing issues. The results were:

- 1) Increasing affordable housing;
- 2) Expanding social welfare benefits;
- 3) Increasing subsidized childcare and access to quality early learning for all children;
- 4) Reforming biased and unfair sentencing codes and practices;
- 5) Increasing access to public transportation; and
- 6) Reforming Florida's tax loopholes.

The groups were again randomly assigned to discuss advocacy strategies for the best ways to work with lawmakers. The four top strategies were:

1. Put faces and personal stories with the problems encountered by those in poverty,
2. Seek specifics for each legislator's district from United Way and ALICE reports,
3. Speak with one voice...finding others who have similar goals,



## LEAGUE JOINS FORCES WITH STETSON: VIDEO PROJECT ENCOURAGES RETURNING CITIZENS TO REGISTER TO VOTE

Prepared by Karen Owen

LWVNPC is part of a filming team working to break the barriers that Senate Bill 7066 created when it included the full payment of fines, fees and restitution in connection with one’s felony as a pre-requisite to voting. Karen Owen, the League’s Amendment 4 Advocacy Lead, is working with Cecille Scoon (LWV-FL 1<sup>st</sup> VP), Christine Cerniglia (Law Professor at Stetson), Juanita Carroll (attorney for the nonprofit Community Law Program), Caitlin Constantine, a Director of LWVSPA, and some returning citizens from People Empowering and Restoring Communities (PERC). The group plans to create several short videos using the PERC participants’ lived experience and enthusiasm for voter registration after the passage of Amendment 4 in Florida last November. LWVNPC works monthly at a re-entry job training program run by PERC called “S.T.A.R.S.” at the Homeless Empowerment Program in Clearwater. S.T.A.R.S. is a four-week class where ex-offenders and those who’ve lived on the streets or suffered serious trauma can re-orient themselves toward housing, jobs, and success in life and walk away from their past. The League educates the participants on the importance of voting and registers those who are eligible.

The filming team plans to create a few short videos encouraging returning citizens to register to vote. At the urging of Professor Cerniglia, Stetson Law School’s Media Services will generously donate their staff & studio and will also create other videos as training for attorneys needing Continuing Legal Education (CLE) training to properly counsel returning citizens on their fines, fees, and restitution. Our league approved the funds to transport a small group of returning citizens to the Stetson studio and pay for their lunch. The STARS students will be encouraged to tell their stories in the hopes of empowering and encouraging others like them to register to vote. The filming is planned for early December.

The delicate subject of bringing people who have been beaten down & traumatized must be handled with respect and not spectacle. The filming team shares the same goal in producing the videos to empower voters. Links for the respective organizations are: <https://lawprogram.org>; <https://exoffender.org/programs/programs-ex-offenders/stars/>; and the social justice advocacy program at Stetson is <https://www.stetson.edu/law/academics/advocacy/home/social-justice-advocacy-concentration.php>

Contact: [karen@owenta.com](mailto:karen@owenta.com) for more information from League of Women Voters of North Pinellas, and [caitlin.constantine@gmail.com](mailto:caitlin.constantine@gmail.com) for more information from League of Women Voters of the St. Pete Area.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON LWV ISSUES  
& CURRENT UPDATES ON LEGISLATIVE  
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