

# Update

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF THE COOPERSTOWN AREA

October 2023

From Your Co-Presidents

## In the News, But Not Good News!

Normally, we would be ecstatic to see a League-related story on the front page of the local paper. On October 2, however, the news was not good. The subject of the *Oneonta Daily Star's* front page story that day was the difficulty that the League had had in getting candidates to participate in public debates for the upcoming elections. It's a situation that has happened all too often in the recent past. (You can read the story here: [https://www.thedailystar.com/three-candidates-in-otsego-county-decline-to-debate/article\\_f3a33b4c-66d5-11ee-a614-c3a9cde34f9a.html](https://www.thedailystar.com/three-candidates-in-otsego-county-decline-to-debate/article_f3a33b4c-66d5-11ee-a614-c3a9cde34f9a.html)).

This election season, we focused on two areas for debate. The Otsego County Clerk contest, important to the whole county (and an event that we would have organized with the League of Women Voters of the Oneonta Area) was one and the other was the two contests in the Town of Hartwick—Town Supervisor and members of the Town Council. (Elections in other towns in the area were uncontested.)

After making phone calls to set up venues and sending emails to the eight individuals, and following up these emails to ask for responses to the first email, and then additional emails hoping to persuade the debate-decliners that the League debate forums were good places to say what they wanted to say to citizens who might vote for them, we made the hard and disappointing decision that we could go forward only with the debate for Hartwick Town Council—and then only three of the four candidates agreed to debate!

This “declining to debate” experience has become more common recently and many other Leagues mirror our experience. With the consent of the full Board, we made the courageous decision to call out the debate decliners in the local press. Surely, we would have preferred that the front-page story

gave the dates and times of local debates!

Reading about our work defending democracy these past two months will, we hope, inspire you to renew your membership. Deb Dalton, our super membership chair, makes a plea in this issue about renewing.

Read what she has to say and use the form you will find in this issue. And when you do renew, perhaps you can add a little extra to your dues. Our League has a pay-what-you-can policy for members. We don't want anyone who wants to be part of our work to be stopped by the cost of membership. If you can add even a few dollars to your membership renewal, it will help us support the pay-what-you-can policy.

Finally, speaking of supporting the League, thank you to all the individuals who participated in Mohawk Valley Gives. More than \$2.4 million was raised for over 250 non-profits throughout the Mohawk Valley region. LWVCA raised \$735 from 13 donors (see page 4). These funds were deposited in our account in the LWVNY Educational Fund and will be used to support our voter education and get out the vote activities. We are sincerely grateful – not just for the financial donation, but for all the time and talent all of you contribute to our League.



Maureen Murray (left) and Kristin Pullyblank (right).

MAUREEN MURRAY & KRISTIN PULLYBLANK,

## In the News, Part II

Our League's letter to the editor of the *Freeman's Journal* in support of the efforts of the Otsego Land Trust was published on September 21. Greg Farmer, Executive Director of OLT, sent a letter of thanks to the League for its support.

*I'm very grateful to the League of Women Voters for endorsing our efforts to conserve the former Boy Scout camp on Crumhorn Lake and Crumhorn Mountain. The letter to the editor from Christina Bourgeois and Stephanie Bauer in last week's Freeman's Journal (in print and online) was a strong defense of natural resources and a very effective call to action. Thank you for joining us in advocating for a healthy and sustainable future.*

### Coming Up

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Oct. 28       | Last Day to Register to vote.  |
| Oct. 28-Nov.5 | Early Voting Days  |
| Nov. 2        | Reducing Polarization Conversation Circle Session 3, 6-8 pm First Presbyterian Church, 381 Main Street, Oneonta. |
| Nov. 7        | Election Day   |
| <b>Nov. 8</b> | <b>RENEW Your League Membership!!!</b>   |
| Nov. 9        | New member meeting Stagecoach Cafe, 31 Pioneer St., Cooperstown. 10 a.m.,  |
| Nov. 16       | Reducing Polarization Conversation Circle Session 4, 6-8 pm First Presbyterian Church, 381 Main Street, Oneonta. |

# Be Part of the Best: Renew Your Membership Today

DEB DALTON, MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

The LWVUS recently reposted on its website a column by the *Washington Post's* Danielle Allen, a political theorist at Harvard University. Allen explained the she "...was eager to learn more about what democracy issues matter most to you and how you allocate time and energies in advancing the cause of democracy."

In particular, I wanted to share with you one of the responses Allen received:

"When I worked with the League of Women Voters and other organizations to end gerrymandering in [Michigan], I was involved 3-10 hours a week. Now I probably have less time, but contribute more money to organizations who are helping with democracy renovation."

Allen added, "...Robert Putnam [author of *Bowling Alone*] taught us three decades ago, many traditional associational opportunities fell away throughout the late 20th century. But I can tell you that one organization shines through in these results: Seven respondents named the League of Women Voters as the forum for their civic participation. No other organization showed up more than once."

This statement reminded me of the amount of support there is for our League in this community. As of today, we are

110 members strong and we want to continue that growth.

At this moment however, I want to focus on our current members. I am counting on your continued support as we enter the 2024 membership renewal period. As you know, our membership term runs from January to December. I must report an accurate count of our membership by January 31, 2024, and it's much easier to do so if we receive your renewal by November 8. In this issue of *Update* you will find a membership renewal form. Please return it along with your check at your earliest convenience to LWVCA, PO Box 426, Cooperstown, NY 13326.

Each year, many of you contribute to the League by making an additional donation when you renew. As you know, last year, the board approved, adding a "pay-what-you-can" option to our membership categories because we didn't want cost to be a deterrent to joining the League. Any additional donation you make will go toward these memberships. (Please note: Members joining after the end of the first quarter, March 31, do not need to renew their membership at this time.)

And you can read Danielle Allen's full column here: <https://www.lwv.org/newsroom/news-clips/opinion-how-readers-are-working-renovate-our-democracy>.



## League a Hit on Oneonta Campuses!

The LWV Oneonta held two on-campus registration events this fall. LWVO members Stephanie Bauer, Janet Sutta, Nancy Mathisen, Sarah Paterson, and David Hutchison registered voters on the SUNY Oneonta campus on September 19, National Voter Registration Day. The League was helped that day with volunteers from SUNY Oneonta's Cooperstown Graduate Program in Museum Studies. Student volunteers Dan Matheon, Calen Cavallaro, Can Carter, Madeline Olesky, Shaina Gormley, and Kara Jones helped with registration and produced a sign advertising the event. It was the first collaboration between the League and CGP. Volunteers registered eight voters, but also handed out Make a Plan to Vote sheets and other election materials.



Next door at the Hartwick College campus, LWVO member Zach McKinney and his students registered voters on National Voter Registration Day and throughout

the month. All told, 118 voters were registered.

NVRD also marked the opening of the Institute of Public Service at Hartwick College. The Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, regional political institute dedicated to state and local government, civic engagement, and legal studies. Its goal is to inspire the next generation of public servants; create avenues for meaningful public service careers in state and local governments, nonprofit organizations, and legal services; and to serve as a hub of innovation and collaboration between New York communities to strengthen our democracy.



LWVO member Zach McKinney and students from Hartwick College registering voters on National Voter Registration Day.

## Dues Are Due

A friendly reminder that the LWVO's membership renewal campaign is underway now. A copy of the dues notice is enclosed. Please return it as soon as possible.

As you can read from these stories, the League in Oneonta is once again an important force in the community. Its strength is in its members. Renew today and be an important part of this vital community organization. Let's not lose our momentum!

## League Hosts Debate in Hartwick for Town Board Members

The League of Women Voters of the Cooperstown Area held a debate for candidates for Town of Hartwick Council. Twenty people attended the debate on October 19 at Creek Side Station in Hartwick. Sharon and Mike Chase allowed us to use their attractive venue without a fee. The town of Hartwick would not allow the League to use a town building for the event.

Three of the four candidates running for the two open seats on Hartwick's Town Council, Jason Blaske (REP), Thomas J. Murphy (REP), and Pat Ryan (PRY) agreed to attend, but Mr. Blaske dropped out at the last minute following unanticipated oral surgery. Candidate Bryan LoRusso (CON) was invited to participate but declined. At the polls, voters from Hartwick will vote for up to two candidates for Town Council.

The League also invited both candidates for Town of Hartwick Supervisor to attend the debate. Dylan Arnot, (VPO) was willing to debate, and Robert O'Brien (REP) declined to participate. The League

only conducts a debate when there are at least two candidates from opposing parties for each race. Since only one candidate for town supervisor agreed to attend the debate, there was no debate for Town Supervisor. Mr. Arnot was present in the audience and met Hartwick voters after the debate was concluded.

New members Deb Taylor and Aviva Schneider did the meet and greet and handed out voting information and blank papers for questions from the floor. Hudi Podolsky and Elva Manee reviewed the questions. Kristin Pullyblank was timekeeper.

Co-president Maureen Murray, who served as moderator, commented, "Despite the challenges in advance, the debate brought Hartwick citizens together where the questions were interesting and varied. Both candidates were cordial and collaborative. League members who helped made for a professional and graceful event"



Thomas Murphy and Patricia Ryan, candidates for Town of Hartwick Board at the League's candidates' debate on October 19.

Photo: Dr. Carolyn McKeon

## League Releases Study of Inmate Ballot Access in NY

The LWVNYS recently conducted a survey of the ability of those incarcerated in county jails to exercise their right to vote. The results were quite disturbing, as only 11 of the state's 57 counties outside of New York City, (the counties that were surveyed,) had meaningful and effective programs. LWVCA member David Strogatz, was invited to participate in this study and served as the liaison from our League between Ann Curatolo, an extern working with the New York State League on the Voting in Jails Survey, and the Otsego County Sheriff's Department.

Following the release of the survey, Hudi Podolsky, Voter Service Chair, visited the Otsego County Jail on September 19 as part of our National Voter Registration Day outreach. She met with an officer who took registration forms and absentee ballot applications which he said he would make available to the inmates. They discussed the importance of civic engagement for incarcerated citizens and Hudi offered to return to explain registration and absentee voting to anyone who had questions or needed assistance with the forms.

Under New York law, individuals detained in jail are entitled to vote unless they have been convicted of a felony. Yet, the survey revealed that few counties make a serious attempt to enable those within their facilities to exercise this right. Most county sheriffs, who administer the jails, and their staffs do little to encourage participation in the electoral process. Of the 45 counties that responded to the survey, 16 had no voting program whatsoever, while 18 took only

minimal steps toward encouraging those for whom they are responsible to vote.

Hazel Weiser, an attorney and member of the League's Criminal Justice Committee, who conducted the survey said: "The people who are detained in our county jails are perhaps our most vulnerable residents and, as a result of over-policing, disproportionately Black and Brown. We need to invest in helping these people rise out of their cycle of helplessness by assisting them in understanding that they have something to contribute to our society."

Given the results of the survey, recommendations to enhance voting among this population were offered, including:

- Having the League of Women Voters design and distribute voting guides to each county Sheriff and, where possible, coordinate civics classes and voter registration drives;
- Having the State Board of Elections develop informational materials to encourage registration and participation in all elections;
- Having each sheriff appoint a staff member to be responsible for assisting those detained in their facilities in exercising their right to vote.
- Having each jail offer a safe and private space where individuals could complete registration and other voting procedures, including the casting of an absentee ballot.

The survey was considered and approved by the League's state board in early June, thereby making its recommendations policies of the League. The original press release and full report are available the LWVNYS.org web page (<https://lwvny.org/access-to-voting-in-nys-jails-is-limited-or-non-existent/>).

*"The people who are detained in our county jails are perhaps our most vulnerable residents and, as a result of over-policing, disproportionately Black and Brown."*

## Thank You Mohawk Valley Gives Donors

Thanks to the generosity of friends and members, our League received \$735 during the Mohawk Valley Gives event on September 20. Thanks also to the Community Foundation of Otsego County for its efforts in organizing this event in Otsego County and encouraging our participation. The generous donors to our League were: Leah Carpenter, The Community Foundation of Otsego County, Deb & Jim Dalton, Melinda Hardin & Lou Allstadt, Jeff & Karen Katz, Celeste Johns & Chris Kjolhede, Patty MacLeish, Maureen Fitzgerald Murray, Susan Newman, Hudi Podolsky, Paul & September Schecter, and Cynthia Walton-Leavitt.

## Are You Ready to Vote?

Early voting begins October 28 and Election Day is Tuesday, November 7. Are you ready to vote? Visit our Website (LWVCooperstownArea.org) to download a copy of "Make a Plan to Vote." On our page you will also find links to the LWVNY's Voter's Guide Part II and two "explainers" about

the issues that are on the ballot. Please share this information with your family, friends and neighbors.

See you at the polls!

## New Members

Welcome to our new members: Kelly Bolam, Bonnie McGuire Jones Shelby MacLeish, Lisa Roberts, Tracy Roberts, and Deb Taylor.

## Want to learn a new skill or share a skill?

- Help maintain our website. Some computer skills are necessary, but it's easy to learn. Contact Patty MacLeish, pmacleish@verizon.net.
- Do you like photography? Are you an expert in environmental issues? Can you design flyers and pamphlets? If you have a talent you would like to share, let us know. Contact membership chair Deb Dalton (ddalton@stny.rr.com) and she will put you in touch with the right person to get you started.

### Officers & Board of Directors 2023-2024

#### Board Members

**Treasurer:** Susan Newman, suchashn@gmail.com

**Secretary:** Laura Wetzel, ltanswetz@gmail.com, 847-650-9235

**Voters Service:** Hudi Podolsky, hudi.podolsky@gmail.com

**Membership:** Deb Dalton: ddalton@stny.rr.com, 607-437-5761

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**Co-presidents:** Maureen Murray, 607-547-2853; coopmurray@msn.com and Kristin Pullyblank, 607-437-7526; kpullyblank@gmail.com

#### Off-Board:

**Students Inside Albany:** Maria Kaltenbach: 315-525-5410; margirlic@yahoo.com

#### Reducing Polarization Project:

Tom Pullyblank, 607-282-2183; tompullyblank@gmail.com

**LWV Oneonta Team Leader:** Stephanie Bauer; stephanie.bauer93@gmail.com



**Renew Today**  
Your 2023 renewal form is included in this issue. Please  
return by November 1, 2023!  
**New to the League?** If you recently joined or already  
renewed, your name is highlighted in yellow and you  
do not need to renew until September 2024.

Cooperstown, NY 13326  
PO Box 426

**LWV**  
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
OF THE COOPERSTOWN AREA