



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN
VOTERS OF BERRIEN
AND CASS COUNTIES**
P. O. Box 1032, Niles, MI 49120 www.lwvbcc.org

**Annual Report 2025
Dinner and General Meeting
Tuesday, June 10, 2025
The Box Factory – St. Joseph, MI**

League of Women Voters BCC Board Members 2025
Faith Schoon – President/Membership/Environment
Woodie Bennett – Secretary/Education
Beverly Gray – Vice President/Voter Service
John Ripley – Treasurer and Communications
Carla Ripley – Co-treasurer/ChapterSpot
Mike Schnable – Communications/ChapterSpot/Social Media
MaryBeth Mullenholz – at large
Dorothy Parker – at large
Charmae Sanders – at large
Kyra Walsh – at large
Barbara Starke – at large
Sarah Warner – at large



League of Women Voters Berrien/Cass Counties

Annual Report 2024

I am happy to report that our membership stands at 112. Thank you for your continued support. Throughout the year I have received many expressions of encouragement and appreciation for the work LWVBCC has been doing. New members have been welcomed and encouraged to find their niche in the League. The board is working on plans to let members know more about what each committee does and how they can get involved at a level that works for them.

Mike Schnable joined the board last March as our tech consultant overseeing the website (It's wonderful!) and working with John Ripley on Vote411 and the newsletter. Mike is our point person on the new ChapterSpot platform from LWVUS for managing membership payments and roster updates. We are so fortunate to have Mike who firmly believes in the mission of the LWV and is willing to share his expertise in tech so freely. The new members – Woody Bennet from New Buffalo Township, Barbara Starke from Coloma, Beverly Gray and Kyra Walsh from Bridgman have a year under their belts and I thank them for all they have been doing for LWVBCC. Two of our long-time board members – Audrey Lester and Amy Scrima officially retired. I want to thank them for their service and appreciate their willingness to continue to serve as consultants. Current board members, Barbara Starke, Beverly Grey, Carla Ripley, Charmae Sanders, Dorothy Parker, John Ripley, Mike Schnable, Mary Beth Mullenholz and Woodie Bennett are remaining on the board. I am planning on stepping down as president but will continue to chair the Environment and Book Club committees.

The board continues to look for new members and is encouraging members to become involved on an ad hoc or OTT – One Time Task- basis by serving on committees or ad hoc teams to plan a special meeting or support committee chairs. There is a member survey for you to choose how you can get involved.

If you have visited our website recently, and I urge you to do so, you will see that it is up to date and has not only news of our League chapter but also other important items – notices from LWVUS, LWVMI and most importantly Action Alerts from the League. The links in these notices make it very easy for you to contact elected officials and express your support for League positions. We have a button called Contact Elected Officials that gives you all the information you need to get in touch with federal, state and local representatives. Technology and social media have become important pieces of LWVBCC work. We continue to use Zoom for board meetings and some town halls. We rely on our website and Face Book to communicate with members and potential members. John Ripley and Mike Schnable have updated our Facebook Page and YouTube channel. Thanks to the work of John and Carla Ripley and Mike Schnable the transition to the LWVUS membership platform, ChapterSpot, has successfully been completed with the exception of a few glitches that all chapters are experiencing. LWVUS is working out the bugs. Some of our tech equipment has been updated and the board is continuing to work on that project.

Nominating Committee

– Woodie Bennett, Kate Bensen and Jane Raymond

The committee is nominating two new members - Sarah Warner and Val Schnable for the LWVBCC board. See the following:

- 1) Sarah has nearly 20 years of service on various NGO boards including The State Board of the League of Women Voters of Ohio, The League of Women Voters of Cincinnati, the Junior Leagues of Ann Arbor, Kalamazoo, Cincinnati, the AJLI SPAC for Ohio, The Lee Honors College, The American Constitution Society, and the Cincinnati Anti-Human Trafficking Coalition. She has served in leadership positions focused on advocacy, civil rights, policymaking, legislative affairs, community building, and coalition/partnership management, in addition to training, education, and public affairs.

She has also served multiple years as a delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women as a delegate for the League of Women Voters of the US. In her professional life, she has spent 15 years in the anti-trafficking and gender-based violence space serving as legislative, legal, and policy leadership and as a subject matter expert at the local, state, federal, and international levels.

S. Warner J.D, M.P.A

- 2) Val Schnable was born and raised in the Battle Creek / Marshall, Michigan area. After graduating from Michigan State University, she married Mike Schnable. They have two children - Josh and Sarah, and five grandchildren. Val also has an MSA from Central Michigan University. Retirement brought Val (law school administrator) and Mike to “the Lake” in 2019, where Val has generational history.

Val Schnable

The following is a summary of LWVBCC activities June 2024- June 2025

Voter Service

Last June, a Voter Service team provided 1500 post cards for the membership to write and send urging the citizens of Berrien County to vote in the 2024 election. Our 1500 postcards joined the thousands of cards being mailed from Leagues around the country participating in the Get Out the Vote campaign. Prior to the 2024 election, Leagues around the country added voter registration events to their usual fall line-up. We were no exception and under the leadership of our Voter Service chair, Beverly Gray, LWVBCC registered voters at four libraries, three colleges, three high schools and the Boys and Girls Club of Benton Harbor. Our efforts were part of a county-wide registration drive that involved quite a few other non-profit groups. This spring teams went out to Niles High School, Lakeshore High School, and St. Joseph High School. Technology has changed the voter registration process, and our team is working to adapt to those changes. Many young people are able to register when they get a

driver's license, and they complete their registration online. Our goal is to develop ways to provide information on why it is important for them to vote, how to vote and how to find accurate information about candidates and issues.

Submitted by Beverly Gray

Education

Education Committee events and activities varied throughout the year:

August 2024 - Local elected official and League member Bill Hurst talked about how and why we are so divided at this time. The New Buffalo Public Library meeting room was packed!

September 2024 - Bill Gerstein and Woodie Bennett taught 2 civics classes at River Valley High School, addressing the question Why Vote?

October 2024 - LWV and the Interfaith Action Committee co-sponsored a lively session on Christian Nationalism at the Bridgman Library to a lively crowd that more than filled the room.

November 2024 - Former Ambassador and Andrews University lecturer John Nay discussed what impacts the presidential election might have on foreign relations. People did not want to leave the meeting at Bridgman Public Library.

January 2025 - Back at Bridgman Public Library for 2 sessions - one in the afternoon and another in the evening - LWVBCC sponsored 2 strategic planning sessions to update our goals and implementation of them.

February 2025 - A lunch meeting at Papa Vino's restaurant in St. Joseph focused on wellness for ourselves and families, led by health care professionals LVWBCC members Kyra Walsh and Barbara Starke.

March 2025 - In a noon meeting at Lincoln Township Public Library, the Federal Judiciary Study Committee presented the status of the judiciary and issues that might diminish effectiveness. We reached consensus on a set of LWVUS questions.

April 2025 - Lincoln Township Public Library was again the site of a lively meeting, this time in the evening and featuring Guy Miller, MPH and Director of the Berrien County Health Department. Attendees learned much about the health status of our county residents and clearly wanted to know more.

*Gene Schoon provided AV/Tech support for these sessions

Submitted by Woodie



Environment

The chair position of the Environment Committee has transitioned from the excellent leadership of Christiana Zilke to Faith Schoon. Many thanks to Chris for her years of service on this committee and as representative to the League of Women Voters Lake Michigan Region board. We will miss Chris' unique take on environmental issues in the newsletter. Currently Faith is the process of forming a standing committee of members who share a passion for all things environmental. Please contact her if you would like to join and help wade through the challenges our environment faces in this current political climate – fschoon@mac.com. Another goal of the committee will be to reestablish ties with LWVLM.

Book Club

Many of the League of Women Voters chapters across the state sponsor book clubs for members to gather and discuss important books relating to voting, politics, history, and other topics that help members understand the issues that face contemporary society. The LWVBCC is no exception. Our book club brings members together to share generational knowledge and to explore new ideas. Good friendships have been formed and the League has benefited from a wonderful source of ideas and enthusiasm for the work of LWVBCC. This fall the book club introduced a new structure to meet the needs of growing attendance. Some recent book selections drew larger crowds than private homes could accommodate comfortably so it was decided to offer a larger public space for books with political or historical themes and continue with private home settings for books with a narrower focus. At the beginning of each book selection cycle a schedule of selections and locations is published for members to use in planning attendance. The system is working and book club attendees can enjoy both private and public settings for our meetings. Since July of 2024 the book club titles ranged from library themes (a favorite) - **What You are Looking for is in the Library** by Michiko Aoyama, **That Librarian** by Amanda Jones to political and racial themes – **Prequel** by Rachel Maddow and **James** by Percival Everett. The final book in the current cycle is **John Lewis: A Life** by David Greenberg. Book club attendees are already thinking about suggestions for the next cycle of meetings. Thank you to all the members who have attended book club meetings, who have hosted meetings and who have made some wonderful suggestions. We look forward to another year of spirited and enjoyable discussions.

Treasurer's Report – See separate copy.

Respectfully Submitted,

Faith Schoon – LWVBCC President

LWVBCC – Annual Meeting Agenda June 10, 2025

Welcome – 5:30 - 6:15

Beverages & Appetizers

Box Factory Self Tour/Visit with Judy Sokolowski/Artisan Store

Business Meeting – 6:15 - 6:40

- **Call to Order**
- **Confirm Quorum** (at least 20% of membership) – Dorothy Parker
Member at Large reports on number of members present (president declares quorum present)
- **Report on the Year's Activities** – Faith Schoon
- **Treasurer's Report – (Carla Ripley) Vote for Proposed Budget** as presented in the annual report– motion to accept report and approve budget, vote, declare result
- **Election of New Board Members (Beverly Gray)** – Woodie Bennett, Kate Benson and Jane Raymond (nominating committee) – Motion to approve Sarah Warner and Val Schnable as new board members
- **Continuing Board Members**
 - Faith Schoon – retiring as president, continuing on the Board
 - Beverly Gray – vice-president, Woodie Bennett – secretary, John & Carla Ripley – co-treasurers, John Ripley & Mike Schnable – co-communications, Mike Schnable – social media/technology
 - At large –MaryBeth Mullenholz, Dorothy Parker, Barbara Starke, Kyra Walsh, Sarah Warner
 - Audrey Lester & Amy Scrima- retiring from the Board
- **How to Get Involved** – Watch your inbox for information on involvement opportunities.
- **Thanks to Board and New President Announcement**
- **Questions/other business**
- **Adjournment**

Speaker – 6:40 - 7:10

Former Ambassador John Nay

Dessert & Goodbyes – 7:10 - 7:45