

## History of the League of Voters of the Bozeman Area

With the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, granting women the right to vote, the League of Women Voters of the United States was organized. Mary Wessel, a suffragette living in Bozeman, organized and became the first president of the Bozeman League of Women Voters in June of 1920. Unfortunately, the Bozeman League, like many other Leagues, died out by the 1930s.

In June 1958, Linda Skaar of Bozeman asked the League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) to consider the re-establishment of the Bozeman League. LWVUS passed this request to the Montana League, which voted to recognize and help organize the Bozeman Provisional League. Its first meeting was held on October 20, 1958. In February 1959, LWVMT accepted the Bozeman League and removed its provisional status, and LWVUS recognized the Bozeman League in April 1960.

The Bozeman League promptly went to work, holding candidate forums and publishing candidates' bulletins for elections for Montana, Gallatin County, City of Bozeman and school board offices. Studies of Bozeman's zoning ordinances, parking and traffic problems, open streams and culverts, and a major study of the Gallatin County Rest Home were conducted in the early 1960s.

In November of 1970, Montana voters approved a proposal for a convention to revise the 1889 constitution. Bozeman League members Dorothy Eck and Grace Bates were selected as delegates to the "Con Con." Dorothy in particular was instrumental in both writing the revision and advocating for its adoption.

Dorothy and her friend and League colleague, Daphne Bugbee of Missoula, were the first citizen lobbyists at the Legislature, and Dorothy served in the state Senate from 1980-2000.

In 1977, the Bozeman League changed its name to League of Women Voters of the Bozeman Area to include residents outside the city.

Notable events of the 1980s include a project on energy developed by Jenny Younger: a hand puppet show for elementary children to understand what energy is, how it is produced, and how to conserve it. The project was adopted by LWVMT and LWVUS, and the Bozeman League helped assemble thousands of puppet kits

League member Judy Mathre was elected in 1979 as Bozeman's first woman mayor, and her inaugural gala raised \$3,000 for the Bozeman Public Library.

Ongoing studies and interests of the Bozeman League include land use planning, childcare, health services, including mental health, voter registration, and city and county government. The League has conducted candidate forums, published several

editions of "A Guide to Government for the Bozeman Area Voter," as well as voters' guides for elections in conjunction with the Bozeman Daily Chronicle. A recently established observer corps sends members to observe meetings of the City and County Commissions, planning boards, the school board, and other organizations and to report their observations to League members.