**HISTORY OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF DELAWARE**

The history of the League goes back to 1920, the year that women won the right to vote. Ms. Mabel Lloyd Ridgely was President of both the Delaware Equal Rights Association and the Suffrage Committee of Delaware. From these groups the League of Women Voters of Delaware was founded. The organization of this first League in 1921 with members from Dover, Middletown, Milford, Smyrna, Delmar, Georgetown, Newark and Wilmington led to the first annual convention in Wilmington at the Hotel DuPont in 1923 with Mrs. A.D. Wagner of Wilmington as president.

Some activities of this early League included voters service activities, work toward abolition of child labor and support of school construction in the state. There is also mention of a tour of new highways. In 1926 there were League directors from all three counties, but there is little more mention of the League later in the decade. There is some indication that the group lacked the organization needed to continue.

The League reappeared in Delaware in 1953 with the formation of the Newark League. Among charter members who organized Newark’s League was Norma Handloff, who also served as the first president of the newly reformed state League in 1958, and later as Mayor of Newark.

The Greater Wilmington League was also founded in 1953 with Evelyn Lord as first president. She was the second LWVDE president, and later became a state senator. The Laurel League was formed in 1957 and reorganized as the Sussex County League in 1976. The Dover League was recognized in 1966. The Wilmington and Newark Leagues merged in 1994 to form the League of Women Voters of New Castle County.

The League of Women Voters of Delaware (LWVDE) was established at a convention in Dover on March 29, 1958, with recognition given by the League of Women Voters of the United States. In preparation for becoming a state League intensive studies of local governments as well as one on state government were undertaken. The municipal studies were published. The first study was “An Evaluation of the Financial System of the State of Delaware.” After study the following position was announced in April 1961: “Support of measures which promote the needs of a growing state.”

The fiscal aspects of education became a separate study in 1961, and by 1963 LWVDE reached a position favoring equalization of school support and increased funding for state schools. In the summer of 1964 members of the LWVDE education committee worked hard in support of a school equalization bill. This was their first experience at successful lobbying with the General Assembly. The bill passed in the fall of 1964 and was signed by Governor Carvel with a line item veto of a section dealing with funds for school construction. Unfortunately, the state Supreme Court later declared the bill unconstitutional because of the veto. However, Elise Grossman, LWVDE education chairman, went on to serve for many years on the state Board of Education and helped to implement many reforms favored by the League.

In 1960 LWVDE instituted two enduring programs. The first was the *Voter's Guide*, a statewide candidate information supplement published for many years in cooperation with *The News Journal*. This was discontinued in 1998 when the *The News Journal* decided to publish its own *Voters Guide*. However, the League continues to provide election information via VOTE 411.ORG, which includes an online voter’s guide. The second is League Day in Dover, an annual event for League members and guests which includes a program on timely issues and a luncheon to which state legislators are invited.

In the 1960s and 1970s League studies on government structure and function included studies of election laws, the state constitution and the state legislature. Interest in the environment led to studies on water and solid waste management. The League also studied the state correction system. During this period the LWVDE had a busy action program, with mixed success. A "sunshine" law to open up government functioning was passed with LWVDE support. A revision of the constitution came very close but failed to pass. After several years of hard work a limited bottle bill was passed by a coalition headed by LWVDE.

In 1976 LWVDE celebrated the national bicentennial by publishing *Delaware Government: All You Wanted to Know and Didn’t Know Where to Ask*, under the editorial guidance of Liz Ryan. The book proved very useful and was revised and reprinted as needed. For this and other contributions Liz was named to the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame. In 1999 a completely revised *Delaware Government* fourth edition was printed for us by Mellon Bank (now called Citizens Bank). In 2002 *Delaware Government* went on line and has again gone through a complete revision and can be accessed on the LWVDE webpage.

In 1977, the Delaware League began dispensing information about voting and government to all newly naturalized citizens of the state. To fund this and other citizen education projects the Delaware League of Women Voters Education Fund was established in 1985 under the leadership of Terry Dannemann.

1995 marked the 75th anniversary of women’s right to vote. During this year the LWVDE received several awards: a House Concurrent Resolution from the state legislature, recognizing the League for its continuing commitment to voters service and citizen education; the Volunteer of the Year award from the Governor’s office; and an award for leadership in the cause of civil liberties in Delaware from the American Civil Liberties Union.

During 1997-98 campaign financing became a target for reform by both LWVDE and the three local Leagues. We cosponsored, with the Pew Charitable Trusts, the LWV Education Fund and a coalition of other state organizations (including the YWCA, NAACP, and *The News Journal*), a statewide citizen caucus on campaign finance reform. This event took advantage of the interactive distance learning facilities at the University of Delaware. Also, prior to the 1998 elections the Delaware League of Women Voters Education Fund for the first time modified its policy governing the invitation of candidates to participate in forums originating in a television studio.

Several LWVDE presidents besides Norma Handloff held positions in local and state government. These include Marcie Bierlein, June MacArtor and Jane Tripp in the executive branch, Ada Leigh Soles, Myrna Bair and Jane Maroney in the legislature, and Phyllis Laffey in the judicial branch. Among members currently holding positions in the state government are Barbara Crowell, Family Court Judge; and Bethany Hall-Long Deborah Hudson, and Earl G. Jaques, Jr., legislators. The League of Women Voters maintains its status as an important citizen group in Delaware, active in informing voters of their rights and responsibilities. The LWVDE continues to lobby the state legislature on many vital issues .(Update 2017: Bethany Hall-Long was elected Lieutenant Governor in 2016.)

For the League of Women Voters 95th anniversary the state League received a resolution from both houses of the General Assembly that recognized and honored the work that the League has done.  The LWV of Delaware and New Castle County provided a workshop on Climate Change at the LWVUS Convention 2014.  
  
  LWVDE PRESIDENTS

1958 - 61 Norma Handloff 1984 - 86 Terry Dannemann

1961 - 62 Evelyn Lord 4/86 - 12/86 Joann Hasse

1962 - 63 Lorraine Olson 1/87 - 9/87 Rita Smith

1963 - 65 Grace Stirba 9/87 - 4/88 Liz Ryan

1965 - 67 June MacArtor 1988 -1993 Joann Hasse

4/67 - 9/67 Doris Johnson 1993 -1995 Carole Walsh

9/67 - 71 Phyl Laffey 1995 -1997 Cathy DeBovis

1971 - 72 Mary Field 1997 -1999 Jackie Harris

1972 - 74 Liz Ryan 1999-2001 Anita Puglisi

4/74 - 12/74 Jane Tripp 2001- 2003 Letty Diswood and Nadyne Rosin

1/75 - 4/75 Liz Ryan 2003-2005 Joyce Johnson and Sue Soltys

1975 - 76 Marcie Bierlein 2005-2007 Christine Stillson and Letty Diswood

1976 - 78 Kit Kallal 2007-2009 Rashmi Rangan

1978 - 80 Ada Leigh Soles 2009-2011 Sandy Spence

1980 - 82 Ruth Helm 2011-2013 Carol Jones

1982 - 84 Joyce Johnson 2013-2015 Charlotte F. King

2015-2017 Jill Fuchs

2017-2019 Joann Hasse