



VOTER July 2020

CHEERS TO 100 YEARS! 7/29 5PM!

New Member Orientation for LWNVP Members (Virtual) 🎉 🎉

Join your fellow North Pinellas County League members for our Virtual New Member Orientation next Wednesday 7/29 5-6PM, email: krmh1@yahoo.com for details!



Meet Our Board Members

BOARD OFFICERS



President: Bill Johnson

Bill is a 25 year member of the League of Women Voters of North Pinellas and was treasurer in 2008. For 14 years he served as a Clearwater City Council member starting 2001-2007 and again from 2010 – 2014. He represented Clearwater on the Pinellas Suncoast Transit Authority (PSTA) where he is past chair of the board and

was previously the city's representative to the Tampa Bay Estuary Program. The Florida League of Cities (FLC) elected him to their Board of Directors. He is also a member and chair of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Tampa Bay Regional Transit Authority (TBARTA).

In 1998 Bill was the founder and president of Citizens for a Better Clearwater which successfully petitioned the Clearwater City Commission to phase out billboard clutter on a portion of Gulf-to-Bay Boulevard in Clearwater. He is founder and chair of the Courtney Campbell Scenic Highway Advocacy Group which achieved designation as a Florida Scenic Byway resulting in the multi-use trail across the causeway today.

Prior to his retirement from Honeywell Inc. in Clearwater in 1999, Bill oversaw project management activities with the Department of Information Systems. During his 29 year career with the company he performed other duties including internal auditing and systems analysis.

1st Vice President: Karen Owen

Karen has served the North Pinellas League for the past three years developing voter outreach events in diverse locations where unregistered voters might be found, including low-income neighborhood centers, alternative high schools, Habitat for Humanity events, back to school backpack events, bus depots, and at training programs for the Pinellas Ex-Offender Re-entry Coalition. She is the LWV North Pinellas lead on voting rights for returning citizens, and feels strongly that a previous incarceration or felony conviction should not preclude voting rights. Karen also organized the League's first Party at the Polls at a local polling place. Karen holds a PhD in Geographic Science. She manages several non-profit web sites and is Outreach Co-Chair for her church. She moved to Florida in 2015 and resides in Safety Harbor with her husband. She has jumped feet first (wearing flip flops most of the time) into the nonprofit world where she is active in the LWV FL Poverty Action team working to reduce poverty and improve equity in Florida.



She hopes to build a collaborative team of League members interested in learning new software and other digital media. In post-Covid-19, she believes this will strengthen communication with our elected representatives and the community. In her spare time, Karen enjoys playing her saxophone for anyone who will listen without earplugs.

2nd Vice President: Kathryn (Kathy) Smith



Kathy moved to Florida via the United States Air Force from her birth state of Ohio. The Emerald Coast Region of Northwest Florida soon became home after she completed her military service. A move south to Palm Harbor made the Suncoast her new home, and she found time to join the North Pinellas League of Women Voters, where she is now the Membership Director. When not busy with League work, Kathy owns and operates Emerald Coast Dance with her husband. Her dance business is on hiatus due to COVID 19, but a return to normal life will bring a return to partner dancing, dance lessons, dinner dances, and regular monthly dances.

Meanwhile Kathy hopes to expand membership, get to know members and their interests, and work with board members to support League goals. Another priority is Voters Services, and especially registering voters. Kathy added two new voter registration this year, and she is actively seeking out more opportunities to ensure eligible voters are registered to vote. Kathy's

previous career in service to individuals with disabilities as a support coordinator, special instruction teacher, and a quality assurance consultant brought her into contact with diverse populations, and she hopes to expand the diversity of our local League.

Treasurer: Sabrina Smith

A native Floridian, Sabrina was born and raised in Miami and has lived in Dunedin with her family for over 20 years. She joined the North Pinellas League two years ago and has been involved with the Voter Service committee registering voters.

Sabrina brings her expertise in finances to the League as Treasurer having honed her skills as the bookkeeper for her husband's medical practice for the past 20 years.

While skilled in managing office income and expenses, Sabrina's previous career was in nursing. She received both her bachelor's and master's in nursing from the University of Florida and practiced in Florida and Texas before moving to Dunedin with her husband. She was an adjunct professor in the LPN transition program for eight years at St. Petersburg College and is a graduate of Leadership Pinellas. During the time her children were in school, she volunteered for numerous activities, committees and functions.

Sabrina is passionate about protecting the environment, particularly as an advocate for the bears of Florida and the gopher tortoise. She enjoys tennis, travelling, gardening and playing Mah Jong.



Secretary: Stephania (Stephanie) Bolden

Co-Chair, Environmental Action Committee

A marine biology class during her Junior year at Ohio Northern University led Stephanie south from Ohio to study marine fishes. Her migration to Florida included a stopover in the mid-Atlantic (UNCW) before ending up in Miami where she finished her schooling and started her career. A move to Dunedin to support her husbands' career, led to many years juggling the duties of raising a family and her work to conserve endangered species.

The kids grew and "TeamMom" duties shrunk, allowing Stephanie time to join the LWVNPC in 2017. She became an appointed Director in 2017, and then Secretary in 2019; her sense of community led her to volunteer for note taking so the Board could function and support the important local Programs. She is co-chair of the Environmental Action Committee that organized the first ever "Dunedin Hands Across the Sand", and finds registering new voters fulfilling. In addition to the LWVNPC, she volunteers for other conservation organizations, laughs at bad puns, and gets outdoors whenever possible.

BOARD DIRECTORS

Martha (Marti) Folwell

Marti first joined the Monroe County League of Women Voters in Rochester, New York when babysitting was provided for general meetings. Since moving to Clearwater in 1975, she has held several leadership positions in the North Pinellas League. She was elected president three times: 1983-1984, 2008-2010 and 2013-2015. She served as secretary, chair of the education committee, treasurer and parliamentarian. She particularly likes moderating candidate forums for local municipalities.



Growing up in a small town in Michigan, Marti was awarded a scholarship to the University of Michigan where she also played flute in the university's symphony band. In Rochester she taught English and U.S. history for the City School District. Following her family's move to Clearwater, her children attended local schools where she was active in Cub Scouts, Girl Scouts, president of the Clearwater High School PTSA, an officer in the Pinellas County Council of PTA's, and member of many county-wide education related committees. She has been active in her church taking a variety of leadership roles. She still occasionally plays the flute at services.

Over the years she has enjoyed snow skiing, tennis, sailing, and family vacations in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. As one of the League's longest serving members, Marti values integrity and intellectual honesty.

Doris Reeves-Lipscomb

A fascination with state policy development benefiting older Americans, women, and consumers led Doris to work in the Florida Legislature, AARP State Legislation in Washington, DC, and for Governor Chiles and Lt. Governor MacKay.

She later honed her entrepreneurial skills with Groups-That-Work LLC and The Women's Learning Studio LLC. Her consulting skills in strategic planning, meeting facilitation and project management helped nonprofit/public organizations produce results. Doris also designed and facilitated online learning communities. The WLS experience assured her that geography matters little in our internet-connected world. All learners—whether they pursue a credential or are curious DIY learners, with certain digital literacies in hand—can satisfy almost any learning need they have online.

Doris looks to the LWVNPC for learning and making a difference through voter engagement, social advocacy, and stopping voter suppression. Her 18-month membership has included volunteering on the Poverty Committee, facilitating voter service activities, and serving on the Board.

Her husband Bentley, their three greyhounds, and Doris' extended family honor her LWV commitments. However, they would like more interactions, walks, shared experimental cooking, trips and couch time with her. They gave her a poster. The message: "Stop me before I volunteer again."

Miriam Benitez-Nixon

Miriam moved to Dunedin in 2010 from the Bronx, New York, then joined the League of Women Voters in 2016, bringing her talents in publication and media presentations. She created the multi-page program for the League's 70th anniversary program featuring ads and citations from local businesses and partners. She also developed the program for the Poverty Summit, the local League brochure and Hot Topic flyers. She is a member of the Poverty Action Task Force and enjoys

registering voters for Voter Services, and speaking Spanish with those who feel more comfortable using their native language. She was elected a director of the League in 2019.

A graduate of the City University of New York, she worked in Legal Administration managing office procedures to simplify time and save money. She is secretary on the board of Episcopal Church Women of the Diocese of Southwest Florida and serves on the Advisory Board of the Area Agency of Pasco Pinellas County. She manages The Little Thrift Shop for her church, is a SHINE Medicare counselor and ushers at Ruth Eckerd Hall and the Capitol Theatre.

Miriam and Joe love to travel and spend time with their three children, 10 grandchildren and two great-granddaughters.

Ellen Siegman



Ellen has been an adjunct instructor in Business Law at St. Petersburg College/Tarpon Springs for over 20 years. She is a certified arbitrator/mediator and has worked for the State of Florida court system, Better Business Bureau, and the securities industry. A graduate of Cornell University and the University of Miami School of Law, Ellen has also worked as a compliance officer for a major Wall Street firm and as corporate counsel for a fortune 500 company. She serves on several professional and community boards locally and is currently Vice President for Advocacy and Education for Hadassah Florida Central Region.

Ellen joined the League in 2016 and worked with Voter Services in registering voters, especially on college campuses, where her passion is making sure students understand their vote counts. She participated in the Open Primaries Study Committee where she spearheaded the Millennium Survey at St. Petersburg College. Ellen has served as timekeeper, greeter, and moderator for the League's Candidate Forums in various municipalities and is now the group's coordinator. She currently serves on the Florida Steering Committee for the National Popular Vote and is the North Pinellas League's local liaison.

Ellen lives in Palm Harbor with her husband and has two college-aged sons. In her free time Ellen and her family love travelling, the beach, and biking.

Nicole (Nikki) Fleming

Before becoming a member of the League of Women Voters of North Pinellas County in 2017, Nikki worked in many roles throughout her career. After graduating from Texas A & M University at Galveston with a degree in Marine Biology, she spent several years in environmental research and development labs in Houston, Texas. Later, with three small children she stepped away from her career to raise her family. During this time Nikki volunteered in schools, founded a neighborhood women's group and mentored middle and high school students. She served several years on PTA and SAC boards for two Pinellas County schools and became a substitute teacher for the district. Nikki obtained her Florida Teaching Certification in 2004 and taught middle grade science the last 10 years of her career.



Since joining the LWVNPC, Nikki has participated in several voter service events including registering voters, assisting with candidate forums and serving on the speakers bureau. She is a member of the Environmental Action Committee and has served on the Nominating Committee the past two years. Currently Nikki chairs the Education Action Committee and is in her second year on the Board of Directors. In her free time she enjoys being outdoors, traveling to new places and finding ways to stay creative. She and her family have called Tarpon Springs their home for over 20 years.

COMMITTEE UPDATES

EDUCATION ACTION GROUP



The Education Action Group is taking a sabbatical from monthly meetings through the rest of this year as we focus our efforts on the crucial upcoming November election. During this unprecedented time, we will continue to monitor the important issues facing Florida's teachers and students and pass along any events or issues coming up.

One of the more important items that we will be advocating for is for voters to continue to support the one-half mil ad valorem tax referendum which will be back on the ballot this November for a 4 year renewal. Since 2004 voters have overwhelmingly supported this referendum with 80% of these funds supplementing Pinellas County teacher salaries (\$4,724 per teacher last year) and the other 20% going directly to classroom resources including visual arts, performing arts, reading and technology which helped make the transition to digital learning more manageable. A loss of these funds would be detrimental to Pinellas Counties teachers and students.

Other issues to keep an eye on in Education include plans for reopening Florida's schools, the fate of Florida's high stakes testing after testing was suspended this year, the impact on Florida's students after several months of "distance learning", and whether our legislators remain committed to the 500 million budgeted for teacher and support staff pay raises.

Looking forward to seeing everyone in person again and please let me know if there is an Education issue I should be sharing with the team.

Stay safe and Healthy!

Submitted by – Nikki Fleming, Education Action Group Chair

Update on Florida's Returning Citizens – The Amendment 4 Roller Coaster

By Karen Owen, PhD, 1st Vice President

Amendment 4 to the Florida Constitution passed by nearly 66% of voters in 2018. It stated that persons who were convicted of a felony can now vote as long as they've completed the terms of their sentence and have not been convicted of murder or a sex crime. During the 6 month period following its passage, Leagues across Florida, including ours, worked diligently to conduct voter registration, outreach, and education in populations where unregistered voters might be found.

Then, in the Spring 2019 FL State legislative session, the legislature passed Senate Bill 7066, adding the requirement that all fines and fees, such as court costs, be paid first before former felons (returning citizens) would be eligible to register to vote. SB 7066 also expanded the definition of sex

crimes and added a long list of felony convictions that would preclude many from ever voting again. This bill became effective July 1st 2019, and it had a chilling effect on returning citizens. Many were scared to register to vote, unable to determine if their fees had been paid, and worried they would violate this new law at a time when they just wanted to get their lives back on track. In 2019 and early 2020, our League led numerous voter registrations and education sessions at High Point Family Neighborhood Center, the Pinellas Ex-Offender Re-Entry training classes, several Pinellas alternative high schools, Habitat for Humanity new homeowner sessions, and even at public bus terminals.

Our State League was very busy too. Cecile Scoon, LWV FL 1st VP spent countless hours working with the State Bar Association, the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition, Stetson Law School in St. Pete, and many other organizations to put together lawyer training to help attorneys understand how to research whether a returning citizen's fines, fees, and restitution (if owed) had been fully paid so they could register to vote. Enormous resources continue to be diverted trying to figure out how SB 7066 works in practice for hundreds of league members and pro bono attorneys and the over 700,000 FL citizens impacted by this bill, the majority of which are caucasian.

On May 23rd 2020 the 11th Circuit Court ruled that the requirement to repay fees and court costs per SB 7066 was unconstitutional, and that the state did not provide sufficient means to determine if a sentence had been completed. Court costs and fees disproportionately impact people of color, having the effect of a poll tax. In that ruling, the Judge stated the FL Governor, FL Div. of Elections, and Supervisors of Elections were enjoined from preventing anyone from registering to vote if the person has a present inability to pay. If the amount of what is said to be owed cannot be determined after a diligent effort, that would be the basis for a returning citizen to be able to register and then vote. The Governor's office requested a full-court review set for August, and this effectively puts the 11th Circuit's decision stating parts of SB 7066 are unconstitutional - on hold. So essentially we are back to where we were at the beginning of the year, with SB 7066 standing as-is. We continue to hope for a positive outcome in August, and we hope the will of the Florida voters who passed Amendment 4 will be adhered to.

With COVID-19 in our midst, it is very difficult to disseminate information about voting rights to returning citizens, or to anyone who is not well-versed in voting laws in Florida. For timely updates on Amendment 4 litigation, please follow the State League's web site:

<https://www.lwvfl.org/amendment-4-voter-restoration-resources/> and their Facebook Page at: facebook.com/LWVFlorida. Our League is committed to the voting rights of all citizens, and we will continue to stand with the League of Women Voters of Florida to ensure the spirit of Amendment 4 in Florida is followed. Contact karen@owenta-dot-com to join our efforts!