

League of Women Voters of the LaGrange Area

League Member Accomplishments Through the Decades

1920's

The founding president of the League of Women Voters of the LaGrange League was Frances Kidston (1924-1927). She was instrumental in establishing the LaGrange Library, chairing the fundraising committee.

The founding president of the Western Springs League was Mrs. A. A. Mertsy (1925)

1930's

1940's

1950's

Margaret Craig, Western Springs, initiated a monthly foreign policy discussion group. The group continued for over 20 years.

1960's

Grace Wise, president 63-65, campaigned for fair housing. She was a spokesperson for Common Cause.

Doris Doren, president 69-71, advocated for fair and affordable housing in LaGrange.

Anne Mudd was president of the Western Spring League She led a study of quality day care and worked for the implementation of day care centers in Western Springs.

Members Velaine and Bill Carnall, Lorna and Bob Neuneker, Mary Klonowski, Barb and Bill Caruso worked with the Metropolitan Planning Council to pressure LaGrange realtors to abide by the Fair Housing Act of 1968 and stop directing minorities to certain neighborhoods. Velaine and Mary created a booklet on Fair Housing.

Elizabeth Lewis President 87-89 and 99-00 She was the first woman president of the board of the LaGrange School District 102. She received the Illinois Association of School Boards "Award of Merit" for her work on the board from 1967-76.

Elizabeth Lewis and Mary Klonowski taught an evening course at Lyons Township High school on government and voting.

Dale Kalina and Suzanne Peika did a study about the importance of safer playground equipment. The League advocated for the better equipment at village meetings which resulted in LaGrange and LaGrange Park installing the improved equipment in the parks.

1970's

Georgia Modderson advocated for the creation of the Head Start program in District 102. She recruited and organized volunteers to act as aides for the program and she served on the board.

Grace Shouba with her husband Jack, initiated the movement to save the Wolf Road Prairie. Grace identified the prairie remnant and researched what needed to be done to preserve it. They started the Save the Prairie Society in May 1974. She and Sherry Zoars worked to make the public aware of the importance of maintaining the prairie and lobbied legislators for needed regulations. They recruited other League members in the efforts. Jack and his high school students raised plants to sell for the first fund raiser to purchase the first parcel of land.

Velaine Carnall was a founding member of the local Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights in 1974 to safeguard the newly won constitutional right to privacy in abortion decisions. The organization works to unify people of different faiths, races, and ethnicities to advocate on reproductive issues. She and her husband developed the local escort service program.

Annette Allen was instrumental in the establishment of the Constance Morris House in 1979.

1980's

Diana Nelson, Western Springs League, successfully ran for the Illinois Legislature in 1980. She served two terms as Representative.

Nancy Kenny was on the LaGrange Village Board from 1986-91. She is a local historian.

Pam Elsner was instrumental in promoting the Court Appointed Special Advocate program for children in the judicial system.

Pam Elsner and Jane Gralen put together a booklet listing the agencies in the area that served parents and children.

1990's

Barbara Zehnder, executive director of the Illinois Council Against Handgun Violence, led the LaGrange League study for gun control. She then spearheaded the efforts to get LWVIL and LWVUS to adopt the position. She lobbied for a gun control bill in Illinois that was passed. In 1997 she became the director of the LaGrange Area Transitional Housing Corporation.

2000's

Krista Grimm mounted a write in candidacy for Congress in 2004 to offer voters a choice in the race. The incumbent congressman withdrew his candidacy after the primary and his son was appointed the candidate by the Democratic Party.

Vera Fina was Executive Director and Founder of Housing Helpers Inc. a non-profit housing rehabilitation and advocacy organization for the recovery and stabilization of the single-family housing stock in Maywood.

***How Green is your Village?*, on April 19, 2008 at LTHS' Reber Center, provided climate change data and mitigation strategies to residents and village officials of the communities served by our LWV. The initiative featured a resource fair and presentations by Environment Illinois, Center for Neighborhood Technology, Sierra Club, and officials from the Villages of Northbrook and Evanston on sources of environmental emissions, data gathering, the Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, and the Greenest Region Compact, which many of our villages eventually joined in order to work together to limit the impact of global warming. The initiative was chaired by Linda Christianson, Mary Klonowski, and Patty Rocco.**

2010s

Christine Radagno was elected to the Illinois Senate, 1997-2019. She served as the Minority Leader in the Senate, the first female leader of a political party in the Illinois Legislature. She also served on the LaGrange Village Board

Emily Friel created our first web site. Rick Blackwell propelled the League into the digital age by expanding the site, updating it with announcements and advocacy alerts, and allowing for online payments. He has also led the Great Discussions Group for over 10 years.

Krista Grimm served as officer in the Lake Michigan League of Women Voters and led in education of stormwater problems in the area.

Patty Rocco was elected to the LaGrange Park Village Board.

Jean Klotter organized the Westchester Village Board Citizens Observer Corp in 2016. She has also served on the Environment Sustainability Commission.

Mary Klonowski and Cynthia Schilsky initiated the Walk to School program in the area. The goal was to encourage physical activity for children and reduce gas usage. Volunteers ensured that the routes were safe.

Marion Honel-Wilson received an award for leadership in diversity matters Sept. 30, 2015 from Diversity, Inc. for her work in the south suburbs, as well as volunteer activities in La Grange and Hinsdale. She served as fair housing division manager at the Illinois Department of Human Rights. In her position, she conducted trainings in 2014-15 for several south suburbs and community groups to further fair housing in jurisdictions receiving HUD funds.

Mary Lou Lowry organized the Person of Impact award events from 2014-2017. The awards were given to residents who demonstrated leadership and significant action in advancing awareness of public issues and for encouragement of citizen participation in the democratic process.

Lorna Neuneker and Velaine Carnall received the Diversity Award at the annual gathering by the CommUNITY Diversity Group in 2017 for their ongoing work in race relations. Mary Klonowski received it in 2019.

Mary Klonowski president 00-03 served as the LWWIL issue specialist for gun violence prevention, organizing lobbying efforts for reasonable gun control. She organized the program to explain the Illinois Firearms Restraining Order Act.

Jeanine Jasica was honored by U.S. Rep. Daniel Lipinski with one of his 2019 Senior Citizen of the Year awards in 2019. Jeanine was a Western Springs Library Trustee and Village Trustee. She was the longest serving Village Clerk until her retirement in 2017. She has been active for more than 50 years with the League of Women Voters and has been involved with various local charities.

Cynthia Schilsky served as the president of the Cook County League. She reconstituted its leadership and advocacy efforts. The Cook County League has had a significant impact on making Cook County government more transparent.

2020's

Joyce Williams led the LWWIL caucus to get the elimination of the electoral college on the LWWUS national agenda.