

Message from the President

Annual Meeting, June 14, 2020

As we gather for our annual meeting, for the first time 'virtually,' it is difficult to comprehend how so many things have changed in so short a time. One thing seems to pile upon another: as we struggle to learn how to deal with the coronavirus, we are hit with the tragedy of George Floyd and once again, have come face-to-face with the long-term effects of racial injustice. Watching thousands speaking out against fear and inhumanity is, on one hand, inspiring for the commitment it represents and, on the other, heartbreaking for what is behind it. The LWVN, should now be asking what is next and not letting this ground swell of energy die away without rallying our efforts to help carry it forward.

But before we move forward, I believe that it is important to reflect and celebrate what we have accomplished that also could help us in our planning for next year. I am pleased to say that through the leadership of the Board of Directors and outstanding LWVN members we accomplished a great deal, all of which can be found on pages 9-17 of your workbook. I will take a moment to highlight a few of these innovative accomplishments:

- We created a Marketing & Communications team that integrated multiple communication tools more fully, to reach a broader audience and inform the community of our topic meetings, events, and voter service information. With this newly established capability, we have increased participation and we are now well positioned for the future.
- One of the most important things that the League can do now and in the future is to educate voters. Working with NewTV, the voter service team organized 10 candidates' forums. They also created an on-line candidates' guide. They took an innovative approach and held our first ever Saturday Night at the Races, a 'candidating' type of event for all city council candidates, opposed and unopposed. It gave voters a unique opportunity to have conversations with all candidates on topics that were important to them – the voter.
- The League celebrated its 100th Anniversary on February 14th at City Hall. We had over 40 people in attendance, the mayor declared February 14th as the LWV day in Newton. Councilors Bowman, Crossley, Downs, Kelley and Leary on behalf of the entire city council recognized the League with a commendation.

- One of the LWVN's greatest achievements this year was to hold a civics challenge. The leadership team of Jen Abbot, Frieda Dweck, and Karen Manning worked tirelessly to overcome hurdles in order to hold its *inaugural* Civics Challenge. This event brought together civic, community, and school department leaders. Nine teams of students and community groups, in a trivia quiz format, answered questions on topics including: the constitution; federal, state, and local government, history and current events.
- Ellen Grody and myself, on behalf of the League, working with the Mayor's office started the *Women's Right-to-Vote Coalition of Newton*. As things begin to open up, we will resume bringing together Newton groups to celebrate the tremendous milestone of women's suffrage.

Now I would like to take a few moments to recognize contributions made by board members:

- Bonnie Carter, like no other board member, knows the League at multiple levels inside and out. When I was confused, which was frequently, she helped me to understand the what, why, and how. She was very patient! She also was very diligent in helping us to edit critical communication materials.
- Linda Morrison who was a Civics Challenge judge, coordinator of our newsletters, and a member of the bylaw committee is our board historian on whom we all heavily rely. She also during 19th amendment conversations had interesting things to say about our former mayor Senator John Weeks.
- Lois Levin takes a lead on transportation and environmental issues before the city and state. She is also one to ask questions and challenge thinking of the board as we work through issues.
- Sharyn Roberts – She is fearless and goes everywhere to register voters, connecting with new and prospective members. She is a real ambassador and champion for the League.
- Lisa Mirabile, our technical subject matter expert with the patience of a saint. She educated us on our technology of Slack and Zoom. She was there for us all when we needed technical assistance. And on a personal note, I would be lost without her.
- Ellen Grody as the Vice President was my sounding board and helped me to think through items before the board. I can always count on her to give constructive and objective feedback. In meetings, she would challenge our thinking by asking provocative questions.

- Theresa Fitzpatrick had the challenging task of keeping meeting notes, typing them up and then getting feedback from 13 other board members. A daunting task that she did with a smile. Theresa regularly shared her event planning expertise to make our events very special and welcoming.
- As our treasurer, Andrea Kozinetz kept us on track financially as she knows our budget inside and out. As we worked on the 2020-21 budget, she was very helpful in providing historical practices where we can/may want to do things differently. As another long-time League member, she was a wealth of information. As the treasurer for the LWVMA, she was a great source of “in-the-know” information.
- I want to give special recognition to a truly talented team of Jen Abbot, Frieda Dweck, and Karen Manning. As a true team they were able to leverage individual and unique capabilities to deliver outstanding and innovative results for our League.

There are two remaining board members who unfortunately will be leaving and I now want to recognize their contributions:

- Though not mentioned in our workbook, there is a special position on the board entitled Legislative Liaison. Alice Donisi-Feehan, with her interest in gun control & safety and the important legislation surrounding this topic, volunteered to be our liaison with our state delegation. She developed strong relationships with our delegation and their support staff. She regularly kept us updated on what was happening at the state house. ***Please join me to thank Alice with a round of applause. We hope Alice will remain active in the LWVN.***

It will be very hard to say good-bye to this person. Sue Flicop has moved to Wayland. She has been a League member for 14 years and LWVN Board president for 8. When she handed the gavel to me last year, the Board created a remembrance booklet for her...I want to share a compilation of thoughts from the team that she led for so many years...these statements will reflect her leadership and commitment to the League & Newton:

- As a natural born leader, her dedication, hard work, thoughtfulness, determination, and willingness to challenge when needed, is a true inspiration. The LWVN, and Newton as a whole, were lucky to have her as she worked tirelessly to improve the City by infusing the League's values and goals
- We have grown to admire her unique combination of wisdom, integrity, and kindness. She always knows what to do in a pinch!



- She is a wealth of knowledge, integrity, and grace. We continue to learn and be inspired by an amazing group of strong and intelligent women - who continue to move forward because of her leadership.

So let's raise our virtual glass of champagne as we say goodbye and THANK YOU to Sue for

- A decade plus of caring, thoughtful, intelligent leadership.
- Her fair and generous leadership
- Keeping us engaged and on track
- Her sage advice and mentoring
- Her enthusiasm for the League of Women Voters.

On a personal note, Sue when I needed it most you reached out to connect and asked me to join the Board. Without that invitation, I am not sure what I would be doing...I owe so much to you. Thank you...we have enjoyed following you! We wish you well as you join the state board. Our loss is their gain.

Please join me to thank Sue with a round of applause.

Before closing my acknowledgments, I would like to share two League memorials.

We would like to remember two longstanding League members who died in February.

Carol Beard died, leaving her beloved sons Forrest and Lincoln. Carol served on the Board of the LWVNewton as treasurer many years ago. And she was the recipient of the Jane Leighton Award in 1981, one year after the award was established.

Bonnie Carter collected emails and here are a few thoughts that League members shared about Carol:

Carol got the Jane Leighton award, but what she achieved touched a much larger community than the League. Her deep voice was always advocating for the needs of disabled people and she pursued the school department to teach a curriculum, which was called "understanding our differences." Through this the lives of our children were enriched.



Carol was such a force in the most positive ways. Energy, positive spirit, genuine, friendly, effective, all in that little compact and able body! She is one of League members that came before me, inspired me, that I looked to for balance and ballast.

She valued the League for the “smart women” she met and worked with. She was the second recipient of the LWVN Jane Leighton Volunteer of the Year Award and truly embodied the spirit of it.

Carol is a hero of our time -- bold in action, selfless in pursuit of fairness and equality, and always pure of heart.

Fiora Houghteling died at the age of 99. One of her many contributions was to visit prison inmates. Normand LeBlanc was in the group with her and has these memories.

“In regards to visiting prisoners for over 25 years, Fiora met with Devens Federal Medical prison inmates as part of the Prison Visitation and Support program, the only interfaith, volunteer visitation organization authorized to visit all the federal and military prisons. Her devotion to visiting these men each month was reflected in their appreciation for her as if she were their own grandmother.

Margaret LeBlanc contributed these memories of Fiora:

“Fiora was a model of love, compassion, and understanding. It was such a warm and comforting experience to be with her. I will always remember her caring smile and gentle voice. You knew that her focus on you was genuine.

As we look to answer the question “What’s next?” We must remember that the League has a long and distinguished history fighting for the most fundamental rights in a democracy: suffrage, the right for every citizen to vote. Those were not easy battles.

Our task now must be to find a way to re-connect to our roots, to carry forward our core values and preserve and extend those gains that our sisters fought so hard to win. We will have to find ways to bring all these values into focus here in Newton. As an independent, non-partisan political organization, that is good at educating, mobilizing, bringing public attention to important questions and issues.... What do we need to do?

Two areas that we were not able to accomplish in 2019-20 on which we must focus are:

- Working with city and civic leaders to articulate and implement our core values while increasing transparency and accountability in all facets of local government.



- Working with the *Women's Right-to-Vote Coalition of Newton and Suffrage100MA* we need to celebrate and educate in order to honor the struggle suffragists endured to gain this first step in voting rights and acknowledge that the journey continues.

At the end of today's agenda, you the members will give direction to the board. Therefore I call upon your creativity, dedication, and abundant energy to craft a role for LWVN to join with city leaders and the wider Newton community to step forward on a path to bring about real, enduring change that ensures that what we do daily is in alignment with our core values and that all persons, regardless of race, age, gender, faith, ability, sexual orientation, economic circumstances or national origin are able to live, work, and play in Newton.

In closing, I want to thank the Board of Directors and all LWVN members for what you do for the League and Newton as a whole. Please stay healthy and safe!