

A Brief History of the League of Women Voters of Volusia County

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May, 2020

The League of Women Voters has a long and prestigious history. Shortly before ratification of the 19th amendment in 1920, the League of Women Voters was founded - during the convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in Chicago. Excitement must have been in the air as suffragists anticipated the end to their decades-long struggle. As they turned their attention to the future, however, convention leaders, led by Carrie Chapman Catt, realized their work was not over. Few women had been involved in the civic dialogue of the day and were unfamiliar with the issues confronting their communities. The League of Women Voters was founded specifically to register and to educate women so they would be prepared to cast an informed ballot.

In 1921, the League of Women Voters of Florida was established. From the Daytona Beach Palmetto Club archives we learn that "in 1921, the Citizenship Department (of the Palmetto Club) was organized for the study of municipal government and to prepare the women of Daytona Beach for the coming city elections...getting the poll tax applications filled out, with the \$1.00 attached, ready to be taken to the County Seat, thus assuring that all women voters in Daytona Beach paid their poll tax and were registered" It was this Palmetto Club department that was later absorbed into the LWV in the spring of 1922 with Mrs. George Chamberlin named as temporary chair.

The depression put great stress on many Leagues around the country and the relationship between the Florida League and national League was stormy. Ultimately, this tense relationship led to the state's disbarment in 1937. An excerpt from Recollections: A History of the League of Women Voters of Florida 1939-1989 states in its prologue: "In 1921 a Florida State League of Women Voters was organized, but after a stormy history was disaffiliated by the National League in 1937." Prior to the disaffiliation, historical records give us some idea of the activities the local League pursued.

- From the Palmetto Club history we know that "on September 23, 1931, Katherine Boyles, legislature chair, writes on League letterhead to then Sheriff Stone asking that he please see that the owner of dairy cattle obey the law and not allow cattle to graze by the side of the road. The owner was advised to keep his stock up by the Sheriff and he said he would. This was done in a follow up on September 25th."
- In 1932, Ronald Williamson, a feature writer for the News Journal VOLUSIAN, wrote, "In 1932, the League of Women Voters celebrated the George Washington

Bicentennial by giving the county two Washingtonian palms. The plaques dedicating the palms were embedded atop small concrete pilings which were stuck beside the trees. The palms disappeared decades ago (This was written in 1988), but not the plaques. For years they've been on display under a cooling unit near Supervisor of Elections Katherine Odham's parking spot."

The state league reformed in 1939 thanks to women from Winter Haven, Winter Park and St. Petersburg. Daytona Beach moved forward on its own to become a recognized chapter in 1949. An organizational meeting was called by Margaret Zeberdee on September 6th at the Colonial Hotel in Daytona. In September of 1949, Daytona Beach Evening News Editorial writer, Fred Booth, following a tentative League organizational meeting wrote the following:

"A strong League in Daytona Beach....would be a fine tonic for its not-so-healthy political life"

The newly formed League went under the name of the League of Women Voters of Daytona Beach with Miss Marian Boros as its president.

In 1950, Volusia county was rural with a population of 74,229 and Daytona was the largest city in Volusia and for many years, League meetings were held at the Palmetto Club on South Beach Street in Daytona Beach. Today, Volusia's population is over 500,000 and Deltona is the largest Volusia County city. To accommodate our members who come from all across the county, we now hold our meetings and hot topics throughout the county.

LWVVC Archives give us a glimpse of what was occurring during the 1950s.

- In 1950, Mrs. Malcolm Cummings of the United States LWV addressed the first directors meeting of the Daytona Beach Provisional League.
- In 1951, Mrs. Winston Keith was elected president. She died in office and Dr. Ruth Rogers completed her term and served for another three years through 1954.
- An article from the Daytona Beach Morning Journal, dated Monday, February 5, 1951 and entitled, "Powerful Women's Groups Influence Legislators" talks about a number of women's groups. The article included the following quote: "At home it has supported higher taxes and stricter credit controls to fight inflation. (Why didn't we listen!!!!!!) It opposes the Equal Rights Amendment for women. There are 100,000 members in 750 local leagues."
- According to a League scrapbook that covered 1949-1951, the League spent its time registering voters, educating voters, studying issues of local government, and

encouraging people to vote. They even offered rides to people so they could get to the polls.

In 1964, the League adopted the County's name in its title, but President Mrs. Edward Smith pointed out that back in 1926 the organization received a gavel at the State Convention recognizing the LWVVC. In 1974, the League began admitting men to its membership. There was exhaustive discussion about changing the name of the League to acknowledge its broader membership, but decided to keep its original name because some other group could take on its name and confuse the public and issue statements contrary to our positions. Today, the League of Women Voters is open to any person 16 years of age or older and offers free membership to all students.

Since 1949, LWVVC has had 38 different presidents, included one male. Originally, presidents served one year terms but in 2000, terms were increased to two years. Throughout its history, the League of Women Voters has been strong advocates for good government and has supported policies and practices that promote democracy and enhance the quality of life for our citizens. A review of the League's archives and a 2019 survey of past presidents provide insight into its focus over several decades.

- The LWV has long supported strong local government and home rule. In 1968, the League supported the home rule amendment which was passed by Florida voters and gave local government the ability to establish its form of government through a locally approved charter. In 1970, Volusia County residents approved a county charter that serves as the foundation for Volusia's County's Council/Manager form of government. Throughout its existence, the LWVVC has supported the district's Charter. During the 1985 Charter Review Process member Carol Lawrence chaired the Growth Management Committee and the LWVVC voted to support all 85 county charter amendments. In 2016, past president (1984 -85) and long-time league member, Pat Drago, served on the county's charter review commission.
- During Drago's term, the League supported the Unification of the 7 Halifax Area municipalities/sections of unincorporated area. That proposal, however, never came to fruition.
- Equal rights under the law has always been central to the organization's mission and in 1978, the League spearheaded the Coalition Amendment II in support of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The fight to enact the ERA still goes on today and remains a League position.
- Environmental issues have also been an ongoing focus of LWVVC. During past president, Chris Moseley's term in 1991-92, LWVC received a grant from the

LWVUS to study and advocate for conservation of Indian River Lagoon and actively monitored the work of the St. John's River Management District in Palatka.

- For 10 years beginning in 1990, the family of past LWVVC president (1978-79) and environmental activist, Tmima Littner Cohn, provided an award to recognize an individual or group who was active in the fight to save our environment. In memory of Tmima, the Cohn family donated a \$1,000 award in her name each year for ten years. The League coordinated the award program and chose the winner. A notice placed by LWVVC in the February 13, 2000 Orlando Sentinel stated:

"The award is a memorial to Tmima Littner Cohn, a dedicated community activist who promoted sound land use planning that furthered preservation of Volusia County's natural resources. Individuals or organizations may nominate a person or group who has contributed significantly to the quality of life in Volusia County by serving as a leader in educating the public about the sound management of natural resources and innovative land use planning."

- In 1994, League member Meg Johnson received the award for her ongoing efforts to support environmental preservation in Volusia County. Meg was the main driver of the state acquisition of DeLeon Springs. Along with members Pat Drago, Celie McInnis, and Helen Johnson, Meg pushed and won county council takeover of Ponce de Leon Port Authority.
- During President Bob Coleman's term (1995-96), the focus was on criminal justice reform.
- In the mid-1990's LWVVC was experiencing a funding shortfall. Under President Lynn Lempel's leadership the League held its first Politicos on Parade fundraiser: a fashion show with elected officials serving as fashion models. The event became a biennial event and continues to be our major fundraiser with proceeds going to our voter service activities.
- According to Ann Smith (President, 2000-2003) LWVVC forums during the early 2000s were major community events similar to "an old-Fashioned Political Rally & Barbecue." Held at Mainland High School, the forum included county government and Florida legislative candidates. Partnering with the Daytona News Journal, the event was supported by organizations such as AAUW, Links, Inc., Constituency of Children & Youth of Volusia/Flagler Co., Delta Kappa Gamma, Delta Sigma Theta, West Volusia Audubon Society, Sierra Club, and the Women's Network.

- Later in the decade, during Sandy Horikami's presidency (2007 – 2011), LWVV worked with WMFE to televise candidate forums for statewide races and televised candidate forums with WDSC for Volusia Countywide races.
- In 2007, our Voter Guide expanded to an online format, and during the 2018 election the League's new Vote411.org site provided a one stop shopping center for voter information including the Voter Guide.
- During Claudia Roth's presidency (2013 - 2017), LWVVC members participated in consensus studies on Charter Schools, Transportation, Money in Politics, and Open Primaries which resulted in new League program positions. During this time, the League moved into the world of social media with its own FaceBook page.
- In 2017, the natural resources team undertook a county-wide solar co-operative in partnership with Solar United Neighbors of Florida. The co-op helped homeowners learn about and access affordable solar via volume purchasing and competitive bidding to achieve major discounts. Over 30 Volusia homeowners took advantage of the program.
- LWVVC members have been actively involved in collecting signatures for citizen initiatives to place constitutional amendments on the ballot. Initiatives included the 2014 Florida Water and Land Conservation Amendment initiative which provided a dedicated fund source for the purchase of environmentally sensitive land and the 2018 amendment initiative to restore voting rights to ex-felons. Florida voters passed both amendments. In 2019, members collected signatures to ban assault weapons and to expand Medicaid. To date, those amendment initiatives remain "in progress."
- Most recently, during President Nicki Junkins' term (2017 – 2021), LWVVC expanded its presence in the community. The initiative recognized the importance of reaching out to diverse groups that have traditionally not been involved with the League. In 2019, the League secured a contract with the Daytona Beach Housing Authority to manage five low-income residential resident council elections. Through this initiative, LWVVC connected with a new group of citizens and were able to register voters, some of whom had not voted in years. Other initiatives included a new group of student members from Stetson University, an expanded Speakers Bureau and a continuation of our partnership with the school district social studies office and the Supervisor of Elections to inform and register/pre-register high school students to vote.
- On September 18, 2019, LWVVC celebrated its 70th anniversary with a gala luncheon at the Halifax River Yacht Club. The celebration included recognition of past presidents and a short presentation of our League's history that included

key activities through the years. In honor of LWVVC's anniversary, Mark Lane, journalist for the Daytona Beach News Journal, wrote the following about the League's 70 year history:

"A fine tonic, indeed, and a group that has aided the cause of good government for seven decades." August 30, 2019

A list of past presidents from 1949 – 2019 was included in the program and is shown below.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF VOLUSIA COUNTY PRESIDENTS
1949 TO PRESENT

1949	Marian Boros	1980	Mrs. Cecilia McGinnis
1951	Mrs. Winston Keith	1981-1982	Mrs. Helen Hodges
1951-1954	Dr. Ruth Rogers	1983	Mrs. Mary Lou Huhta
1955	Mrs. Walter Dobbins	1984-1985	Mrs. Patricia Drago
1956	Mrs. Roy H. Millen	1986-1987	Mrs. Gloria Bush
1957-1960	Mrs. Ruth Kerman	1988-1989	Mrs. Rosemary Hutchins
1961-1962	Mrs. Pierre Miles	1990-1991	Judy Moore
1963-1965	Mrs. Edward Smith	1991-1992	Chris Moseley
1965	Mrs. E. C. Luthy	1993-1994	Gwen Azama-Edwards
1966-1968	Mrs. Lyman Biwer	1995	Bob Coleman
1969-1970	Mrs. Ruth Kerman	1996-1997	Lynn Lempel
1971	Mrs. Arthur Davidson	1998-1999	Jean Snyder
1972	Mrs. Leon Birdsell	2000-2003	Ann Smith
1973-1974	Mrs. G. T. Housholder	2004-2007	Judy Moore
1975	Jeanne Perkins	2007-2011	Sandra Horikami

1976-1977	Mrs. Cecilia McGinnis	2011-2013	Pat Gadbaw
1978	Mrs. Tmima Cohn	2013-2017	Claudia Roth
1979	Mrs. Louise Marcell	2017-	Dr. Nicki Junkins

Below is a more extensive list of issues and activities supported by the League of Women Voters of Volusia County include:

Good Government

- A Council/Manager form of government
- The Home Rule Amendment (1968)
- County takeover of the Ponce De Leon Port Authority and abandonment of the Port/Marina project
- Implementation of the county charter in 1971
- KNOW VOLUSIA COUNTY, a comprehensive study of Volusia County government and its municipalities published in 1984
- The 1986 and the 2006 Charter Review Amendments
- Fair Immigration Laws-Immigration Consensus Study (2007 - 2008)
- Fair Districts Amendment (2010)
- Money in Politics, Transportation, Charter Schools, Open Primaries Consensus Studies
- Amendment 4: Restoration of Ex-Felon's Rights (2018)
- The 2019 half-cent county sales tax (2019)

Natural Resources and Environmental Protection

- Purchase of Canaveral State Park, DeLeon Springs, and Tomoka State Park
- Funding of Volusia County's Land Acquisition Plan
- Adoption of a Comprehensive Land Use Plan and Map
- Wetlands Protection Ordinance
- Protection of the environment, a buffer zone to protect the water recharge area
- Public acquisition of environmentally sensitive areas
- Water Authority of Volusia
- Preservation of Tiger Bay State Forest (opposed off-road vehicle recreational driving)
- Florida Water and Land Conservation Initiative, Amendment 1 (2014)
- Solar Co-op initiative in Volusia County (2017)
- The Water Festival and Water Symposium in Deland

Voter Service

- Ongoing voter registration events including registrations at high school and college campuses
- Hundreds of candidates forums several of which have been videotaped and made available on our social media sites
- Education of voters on constitutional amendments
- A VOTERS GUIDE made available in hard copy and electronically
- Vote411.org: a one-stop voter information site
- Housing Authority Residence Council Elections

Other

- Quality pre-school for all children
- Adequate funding for public schools
- Elimination of state funding for private schools and greater oversight of Charter Schools
- Exemplary home child care facilities and personnel for our children
- Expanded use of Civil Citations for Youth
- The 2019 Ban Assault Weapons Citizens Initiative Amendment petition drive
- The 2019 Medicaid Expansion Citizens Initiative Amendment petition drive