

**EMPOWERING VOTERS
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE
CAPITOL
VOTER**

**APRIL
2022**

IN THE APRIL CAPITOL VOTER

- **President: Connecting to Something Larger Than Ourselves**
- **Upcoming Programs**
- **Observer Corps Discussion with Galesburg Mayor**
- **Learn About Climate Actions Being Used in Communities**
- **Planting an Ecosystem in Your Own Backyard**
- **New Student Member on Advisory Task Force**
- **March 2022 Observer Corps Reports**
- **Invite a Friend to the LWVLA 2022 Annual Meeting**

LWVLA CALENDAR

Tuesday, April 26, 6:30pm. "Climate Action, Community-Driven," a hybrid presentation and discussion at University United Methodist Church and via Facebook. See below.

Wednesday, April 27, noon. All LWVLA members invited to Observer Corps discussion with Galesburg Mayor, Lori West. See article below for more info.

Tuesday, May 10, 10 am. Book Discussion Group: *Borderland: A Journey Through the*

Tuesday, May 10, 5:30 pm. LWVLA 2022 Annual Meeting, Dinner and Presentation at Urban Beat, with speaker Antoniese (Tony) Gant, Policy Analyst and Mid-Michigan Coordinator for Nation Outside. See Programs Notes below.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT Donna Mullins

We humans have a desire to be connected to something larger than ourselves. That's why family is a value to many, why we root for our team, why some identify with their ethnicity or race, why we vote straight tickets, why we join a religion, why some wear MAGA hats and why we join organizations like the League of Women Voters. At the root of all this is that we are happier when we are connected. Being connected diminishes the anguish of our loneliness.



Democracy is the political effort to connect us and to give us agency over our lives. It's relatively new and it has been imperfectly achieved through great sacrifice. Citizens are free to assemble, free to speak and free to vote in a democracy. Aspiring tyrants find ways to divide us because when we are together, we cannot be ruled by tyrants. Let me tell you about two ways to involve yourself in our democracy.

Democracy is always at risk. In Michigan the Promote the Vote ballot initiative will make voting a fundamental right in Michigan. We now have petitions available for circulation. It's not too late to [volunteer](#). For more information [email me](#). We have enough petitions to gather 2000 signatures of the needed 425,059 by the end of June to be submitted in mid-July. Little would please me more than being forced to restock petitions. Will you be attending an event or meeting where there might be people who would sign the petition? Let me know and we'll get some to you. A [recorded training](#) for circulators is available.

On May 10 we will have our first in-person annual meeting in years. The organizing committee has been working hard to create an event that would be something worth waiting for! Our featured speaker is Antoniese (Tony) Gant, the Policy Analyst and Mid-Michigan Regional Coordinator for Nation Outside, an organization that advocates for people who have been involved in the criminal justice system. The name of the organization illustrates that the incarcerated and formerly incarcerated are *outside*, or not connected with the rest of society. Ends up that one way of creating a connection for them is through voter registration and voting. Tony will tell us about his work in connecting this "nation outside" to the larger society.

So, all you reading this have an opportunity to be connected to something larger than yourselves by participating in these two activities. The level of participation is up to you, and there are more ways than these to achieve the peace and joy that only comes when we stretch beyond the vessels that contain us. Still, these are two good ones, bigger than the League, bigger than county, state, or country. They are doors that open us to understanding and connection and helping others to experience the same. The best part?

We can do it

Together,
Donna

PROGRAM NOTES

Susan R. Chalgian, Programs VP



Mark your calendar for the **LWVLA's 2022 Annual Meeting, Dinner & Presentation on Tuesday, May 10** (5:30-8:30 pm). Special speaker of the evening is Antoniese (Tony) Gant, Policy Analyst and Mid-Michigan Regional Coordinator for Nation Outside, an organization that advocates for people who have been involved in the criminal justice system. This is also a great opportunity to renew your connections with other members and to vote on officers, bylaws and the budget. The evening will include a tasty meal prepared by Morton's Catering, a longtime local business. The event location is at Urban Beat, 1213 Turner St. in Lansing (Old Town). The venue is handicap accessible and there is plenty of parking. You can find out more on the LWVLA [website](#) or [email](#) me directly. Please purchase **your ticket before April 22**.

Before that exciting event, don't forget the LWVLA Book Discussion Group on Tuesday, May 10, 10-11:30 am. The book is *Borderland: A Journey Through the History of Ukraine*, by Anna Reid. Reid's book takes readers back centuries, including to the Mongol invasion in 1240 and the Nazi occupation in the 1900s, leading up to the country's independence in 1991 when the Soviet Union fell. The book chronicles historical research and Reid's experiences as a reporter in Kyiv, as well as the voices of peasants and politicians, rabbis and racketeers, dissidents and paramilitaries, survivors of Stalin's famine and Nazi labor camps. Check our [website](#) or contact Donna Mullins if you need more information.

And on Tuesday, April 26 (6:30-8:30 pm) there is a "hybrid" (in person or online via Facebook) presentation and discussion, "Climate Action, Community-Driven," described elsewhere in this issue of the *Voter*. It will be held at the University United Methodist Church in East Lansing or live on Facebook (register [here](#)). Of course, for more information go to www.lwvlansing.org/calendar.

In-person activities are becoming more of a reality. And we now have a way to allow "hybrid" technology so someone can decide if they want to attend in person or electronically (online). So, stay tuned for more lunch or evening programs in the near future. I also strongly encourage you to consider volunteering your time with Programs. If interested, please contact me.

[Susan R. Chalgian](#)

V.P. - Programs

"A well-informed citizenry is the best defense against tyranny." - Thomas Jefferson



This month the Observer Corps (OC) is inviting all LWVLA Members to join them for their monthly meeting on Wednesday, April 27 at noon for a one-hour discussion with special guest Lori West, Galesburg Mayor now finishing her second term. What is it like running for elective office for the first time, especially as a woman in a small town (Galesburg has a population of 2,000+)? Wikipedia reminds us that the state is divided into 83 counties, which are divided into 1,240 townships, 276 cities, and 257 villages, besides the 553 school districts, 57 intermediate school districts, 14 planning and development regions, and over 300 special districts and authorities. Each operates at least slightly differently, but all are meant to represent ourselves/our families/our neighbors, etc. The Observer Corps monitors several of our own local units of government, all of which have a huge effect on our quality of life in so many ways. Please join us!

[Register here](#) in advance for this meeting:

When: Apr 27, 2022, 12:00 to 1:00 pm

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

See below to read some Observer Corps reports from March.

CLIMATE ACTION, COMMUNITY-DRIVEN **Terry Link, LWVLA and GLUNA Member**

What can communities do to address climate change? How can citizens move local governments to take action?

"Climate Action, Community-Driven", a [program](#) focused on community-level responses to the threatening climate crisis, will be held on April 26, 6:30-8:30 pm, at the University United Methodist Church in East Lansing. It will also be available live on Facebook (register [here](#)). Sponsored by the Greater Lansing United Nations Association ([GLUNA](#)), the program will feature three climate leaders working in Michigan: Dr. Missy Stults, Sustainability Director for Ann Arbor; Kate Madigan, Executive Director of the Michigan Climate Action Network; and Annabelle Wilkinson, Environmental and Climate Justice Specialist with the City of Grand Rapids. Join the discussion to learn about the realm of possible actions already being used in other communities.

PLANTING AN ECOSYSTEM IN YOUR OWN BACKYARD **Betty Seagull, EAG Member**

League members know that the best way to effect major change is through collective action to influence public policy. But while we are doing our bit for that, there is



something more concrete we can do right now about the climate crisis: Remove turfgrass and replace it with native trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses.

Ordinary people now know this because of the tireless efforts of Doug Tallamy, Professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware. He is the guru who galvanized the native plant movement in 2007 with his book *Bringing Nature Home*. His second book, *Natures' Best Hope* (2019), can be thought of as a sequel to his earlier book, updating the information with more studies and addressing criticism of his earlier work.

From Tallamy we learned that not all plants are of equal value ecologically. Due to evolutionary pressures, insects are fussy eaters. Most species of insects can eat only one or just a few plant lineages. Because “[i]nsects are the primary means by which the food created by plants is delivered to animals,” (p. 126) it really matters what we plant. To sustain the food web, we need the plants with which insects coevolved--which, as a shorthand, we refer to as “native plants.” This turns on its head the idea that most of us grew up with--that insects are bad, and that we want to keep them out of our gardens. Caterpillars are the major food source nesting birds feed to their young--that’s why birds migrate north each spring. Those caterpillars that aren’t eaten grow up to become moths and butterflies.

By now we all know how dependent we are on the services of insect pollinators, primarily bees, but also wasps, moths, beetles and butterflies. Insects provide natural pest control services and help rapidly decompose dead plants. There’s more, but you get the idea. We need insects because “they sustain the earth’s ecosystems by sustaining the plants and animals that run those ecosystems” (p.126).

So plant a tree. If you are a homeowner, plant it in your own yard. If not, volunteer to help plant trees on public property. But make sure it is a tree native to your locale. Colorado blue spruce is a great tree in Colorado, but it’s a terrible choice in Michigan, where it is frequently planted because it looks pretty. Plant your native tree (oak, birch, cherry, willow) with a generous space underneath where caterpillars can drop down and pupate. Remove the lawn and make a nice big garden bed with a native groundcover and maybe a log or two. And DON’T USE INSECTICIDES!

There’s a plaque in my kitchen with a quote attributed to Gandhi: “Nothing that we do as individuals matters, but it is vitally important that we do it anyway.” Gandhi’s wisdom gives me inspiration daily. I must do things that I believe will make a difference. I can plant a tree now. It will sequester carbon and improve water quality, hold soil against erosion, cool the air, shade my house and provide food and housing for birds and insects. And every time I look out my window, it will bring me joy and hope.

ONE THING

Go for a walk on Earth Day (which is every day, really) armed with gloves and a bag, picking up trash as you go. Enjoy the fresh air and the time to contemplate what else you

GREAT NEWS FOR A STUDENT MEMBER

Donna Mullins

Hannah Richardson, an MSU student who has been active in both our redistricting work and the creation of the Spartan LWV, was appointed by Jocelyn Benson to the 2022-2023 Michigan Collegiate Student Advisory Task Force! As a member of the Task Force, she will serve as a liaison between MSU students, school administration, local community, and the Michigan Department of State. She will also advise on the unique experiences of student voters, combat misinformation, and enact voter engagement and education initiatives on the campus to ensure student voices are represented. And, although the appointment letter doesn't mention it, she will bring awareness of the League to campuses across the state. Congratulations to Hannah!



MARCH 2022 OBSERVER CORPS REPORTS

Clinton County - The meeting was mostly concerned with routine business such as rezoning several parcels of land and a comprehensive report from the County Drain Commission. The District Health Officer also reported on the improved COVID infection rate (44 new cases this month) and on classes being offered by her department on food safety and septic systems. The meeting was efficient and friendly, as usual.

Ingham County - The consent agenda included approval of funding for a data collection app that is part of the project to interrupt gun violence. A contract with Advance Peace had been awarded previously. This was apparently approved, however, see concern below. It seemed a little rushed this time, which made one wonder about transparency. When the agenda was approved, several items were taken off/changed, but this was spoken very quickly by the chair and difficult to hear. A check will be made of the minutes once they are released. Quite a few resolutions were related to recreation, maybe due to preparing for warm weather and increased park use. On a roll call vote for a resolution, URGING STATE LEGISLATURE TO AMEND THE MICHIGAN NO-FAULT AUTO INSURANCE REFORM ACT TO ADDRESS A REIMBURSEMENT CAP FOR AUTO ACCIDENT VICTIMS, two commissioners abstained from voting as they were involved in related issues in their work, and one commissioner disclosed a potential conflict of interest. It was good to see conflicts of interest brought out in the open.

Meridian Township - The Environmental Commission (EC) 2022 goals were briefly discussed, being green grants, protecting wetlands, energy, environmental justice, food to composting along with food gleaning, and recycling. A main goal will be updating the 5-year Climate Sustainability Plan, which will need to add a food section. It was agreed that it will be discussed at the April 2022 meeting. Also, it is hoped that the Climate Sustainability Plan can be incorporated into the 2022 Meridian Township Master Plan.

As all environmental commissions were originally Wetland Boards, it is part of EC's duties to educate the community on protecting wetlands. Wetlands help filter and clean water, reduce flooding, and provide refuge for wildlife habitat. The Wetland Education Team is educating the community via wetland walks, native plant classes and sales (as native plants can help reduce flooding, improve the environment and beautify yards), vernal pools, educational experiences, and invasive species removal. The theme of the wetland education is "Build Back the Buffer," which encourages residents to make their wetland buffer larger to help address issues of flooding. Also, it is part of the township ordinance to maintain a 20-foot natural vegetation buffer. \$10,000 in Green Grants were awarded to 4 applicants who agreed to provide eco-friendly landscaping along with community educational opportunities.

A Solarize Meridian initiative was announced by the Meridian Energy Team. It is an educational program to help Meridian Township residents learn about solar electric systems and purchase solar panels at a discounted price. Meridian homeowners who have purchased a solar system will share their experiences with neighbors, family and friends during educational meetings. The homeowner's solar installer will also be there to talk about and answer questions about solar equipment, installation, and costs. An Energy Team member will be there to talk about solar basics, federal tax credits and financing.

Meridian Township Land Preservation Committee - It is the Land Preservation Advisory Board's duties to help protect and provide advice for purchasing and managing township preservation areas, all of which have wetlands. Thus, the Wetland Education Team is working with the Advisory Board, along with interagency communication with the Parks Commission, Harris Nature Center, and many township departments, to protect and educate the community about wetlands. Also, the Land Coordinator is creating a Meridian Native Plant Guide for the community.

Williamston Township - Michigan Homeowner Assistance Fund (MIHAF) grant information was mailed to all residents who were delinquent in paying their taxes and others who are known to struggle with tax payments. The speakers were easier to hear than before, the improved sound perhaps being in response to previous comments about how difficult it was to hear what was being said. Based on 2020 Census population numbers, the board voted to remain a Charter Township vs. a General Law Township. The board also approved adoption of the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) policy to make masking optional in township buildings.

A resident who is a manager with the nonprofit Sting Softball organization asked for free use of the township fields for their young girls' softball teams in exchange for helping to maintain the fields. He explained how their use of the fields would benefit the township and allow organizers to keep costs down so that more girls can participate. The board will look into what might be done to accommodate their request without showing partiality, since other teams are paying fees for use of the fields. Girls' and boys' groups, including Scouts and others, will be invited to help plant a new forest and acorns at the Township Park in April and May.

Grand Ledge Public Schools - There was an explanation of the Michigan Integrated Continuous Improvement Process (MICIP). Staff showed a PowerPoint to explain the very

involved process. They have five goals and many on the board had an understanding of the process. They also spent time reviewing the budget amendment that detailed an increase in the current year's budget as a result of increased expenditures and a reduction of student count. They are planning on an increase in school of choice numbers. They have a strategy for promoting Grand Ledge. They are hopeful that the number of school of choice students will offset the decline in district students. The fact that the board packet contained details for these subjects as well as the PowerPoints made it easier to follow the presentation and discussion.

There has been significant improvement in the sound system and the audiovisual equipment. One board member felt that the Zoom presentation of the board meetings should be continued to improve transparency and democracy. The atmosphere was much more pleasant. The number of negative public comments was fewer than what has been the pattern and there were even a few positive, supportive comments. There have been some public complaints that the response time for staff answering questions has been too long. The Superintendent recognized two students for heroic acts and one school described a number of innovative programs in place. The reports, presentations and consent agenda took about an hour before public comment. In addition, the board president repeated that the expectation for public comments was for civil and polite language to be used. It seemed to help.

Michigan Independent Citizens Redistricting Commission (MICRC) - The MICRC is winding up its term in office. They need to figure out how to address any lawsuits or questions after they officially stop work. They are also losing two key staff, the general counsel and the executive director. The responsibilities of these two people have been shared among Michigan Department of State (MDOS) staff and existing staff. The hope is that this will suffice to respond to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and other issues. At this point there is only one lawsuit pending, brought by members of the Michigan Republicans, claiming that the maps violate federal law because the number of residents in each congressional district is not exactly equal. The other lawsuits brought against the commission have all been dismissed, including one brought by LWVMI.

One item has been debated over the course of the March meetings (10th and 24th): pay for commission members. They voted themselves a pay raise of 7 percent in February, then revisited this on March 10 and again on March 24, when they reversed the pay raise. They got a lot of criticism for the action (which was entirely predictable) but originally they stuck by their decision. Tempers began to fray when this was discussed for a third time on the 24th. This is unusual for this group. They usually manage to disagree amicably, with the exception of Commissioner Lange, who is often personal in her attacks.

MEMBERSHIP

Camilla Davis, Membership Director

Invite a friend to the annual meeting. Do you have a friend who might be interested in joining the League of Women Voters? Our Annual Meeting is an event that will display what the League has to offer. Advocacy groups, Voter Service, the Observer Corps, and the book discussion group will have information tables. Plus, there will be

a social time to meet League members. Be sure to make your reservation and one for a friend (or two or three).

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Vicki Bennett, Okemos

OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK

All committees would welcome new members. Contact the chairs for more information.

VOTER SERVICE: Contact [Joanne Winkelman](#).

K-12 EDUCATION COMMITTEE: Contact [Bettie Menchik](#).

ENVIRONMENT ADVOCACY GROUP: Contact [Ellen Link](#) or [Elaine Fischhoff](#).
