

**EMPOWERING VOTERS  
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY**



**THE  
CAPITOL  
VOTER**

**NOVEMBER  
2023**

**IN THE NOVEMBER CAPITOL VOTER**

- President: Increasing Our Community Connections
- Voter Service Reaching Students, Young Families and Neighborhoods
- Advocating for Equity in Public Education
- Membership Updates
- Education Hosts LSD Superintendent Schuldiner
- January Book Discussion
- EAG: Welcome to CAFE, plus Line 5 Update
- One Thing
- Three New Efforts Interrupt the Cycle of Violence

**LWVLA CALENDAR**

**Thursday, January 21**, 10 am via Zoom. Book Discussion Group, *Reclaiming Your Community: You Don't Have to Move Out of Your Neighborhood to Live in a Better One*, by Majora Carter.

*See article below for more information.*

From our partners' calendars:

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Donna Mullins



It's almost an obligation that this article is about giving thanks. C'mon, it's November. It will be an easy one to write.

Our mission is to promote civic engagement, particularly through voting, and we are lucky to have Joanne Winkelman leading us in that area. (She does not like taking center stage...suck it up, Joanne.) She doesn't do it by herself by any means, as so many of you are involved in all the efforts that she describes in this newsletter. One highlight this election season was the East Lansing City Council Candidate Forum. The room was packed and just over 250 people viewed it on YouTube. The people who came or watched talked to friends about what they learned. Most important is that the League brought a civil discussion of issues into a very rancorous and personalized campaign. That counts. Be proud.

Here's another thing that you all can be proud of: our partnership with the Ingham County Health Department. After they connected with us, we thought that you would be interested in supporting their efforts to encourage parents to read to their children. People were encouraged to bring books to our luncheons to give to families, and we helped get the locally owned bookstore Hooked to get their customers to buy new or give used books to these families. And it turns out that access to books makes a difference. Previous to these efforts, 42% of the families working with the health department were reading to their kids 3 times a week. That's now 86%! Plus, more than half of that 86% read to their kids 4-7 times a week.

Our advocacy groups bring the League to the greater community. Civic engagement is being involved with people and issues. The League takes stands on issues only after studying them, and it is entirely appropriate that our members act on those stands. So, the Environmental Advocacy Group keeps us informed about issues and information. The Education Committee is now involved with a school in Lansing. By using the Allen Neighborhood Center for their last two evening forums, a Lansing neighborhood was introduced to our work. The Public Health and Safety Committee keeps us aware of the progress in and need for gun safety legislation. People vote for a reason, and our advocacy groups remind them of that. (By the way, the members of the advocacy groups are often first in line volunteering for voting efforts.)

We had a luncheon earlier this month to celebrate two members who achieved lifelong membership status. That means that they've been members for 50 uninterrupted years. Pat Donath and Judy Karandjeff have been leaders at both local and state levels; Pat's been on the national board. We spent some time hearing stories about how they got into the League and some of their accomplishments. They were accompanied by our oldest member, Liz Winder. We were all astounded by Liz's warmth and wit, and I'm pretty sure it's because of her League membership. It was a day of low-key but ardent celebration of

the best of us. It is the most humble of us that makes us humble. Ironically, they also make us proud.

We are finding new ways to increase our connection with the community. There isn't a thing we do that isn't built on the work of others, or your support. There is only one way to accomplish anything and that's

Together,  
*Donna*

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## VOTER SERVICES

Joanne Winkelman, V.P. Voter Service

### **What we have been up to:**

The Lansing City Clerk conducted high school registrations and mock elections at Eastern and Everett high schools on October 12 and 18. Susan Chalgian, Judy Andre, Susan Davy and I participated. The mock election was a big draw and around 70 students "voted" during their lunch hour at Everett. Not sure how many participated at Eastern, but I heard they had quite a few, too.

The annual Souls to the Polls/Trunk or Treat was held by the Lansing Clerk's Office on October 28—another success. The following League members worked at directing traffic, helping with the mock election, and passing out candy and new LWVLA bags with voter information inside. Thanks go to Suzanne Hoholik, Kate Lein, Betti Menchik, Jacqueline Stewart, Donna Mullins, Sue Tons, Barb Bidigare, Susan Davy, and Diane Levy.

Barb Bidigare and Joanne Winkelman joined the Lansing City Clerk's office for mock voting at The Village's Trunk or Treat event on Halloween night, as 117 children came inside to vote for their favorite Halloween character and their favorite candy along with a ballot proposal. The League has never participated in this event before and we hope to be asked to assist again.

Donna Mullins has been working with the Ingham County Health Department on reaching out to young families about the importance of voting. On October 26 Donna and Joanne attended the "Diaper Dash" sponsored by the health department and talked about the importance of voting. Vote 411 bookmarks and LWVLA bags and pens were given to all the parents. This is a concerted effort to reach populations that we don't usually have access to.

The League was present at the City of Lansing's Resource Summit on November 9. We were able to pass out many Vote411.org bookmarks and League bags. People were genuinely pleased to hear about Vote411.org and we hope they remember to access it in the coming elections.

### **What's Next:**

The November 2 Proposal 2 Town Hall on the new voting laws was attended by 15 people. The next step is to organize our new Speakers Bureau so we can spread the word before the next election! If you are interested in being a part of this group, [email me](#). Also,

if you know of an organization that would benefit from hearing about the new voting laws, please [email me](#).

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## HOW IS A PROGRAM ABOUT LANSING SCHOOLS RELEVANT TO THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS?

Jacqueline Stewart, V.P. Program

The linked programs on September 19 and October 26, both held at the Allen Neighborhood Center, met their goals of informing interested LWVLA members and the public about research on educational improvement and the progress made by Lansing Schools. The efforts of the Education Committee, led by chair Bettie Menchik, are responsible for these favorable outcomes.



The program on Oct 26, with Superintendent of Lansing Schools Ben Shuldiner, was particularly satisfying. Thanks to advertising at the Allen Neighborhood Center, names of five of those who attended were passed along to Supt. Shuldiner as potential volunteers. This kind of outreach and connection with the community is always one of the goals of those of our programs that are open to the public, but rarely do we get the kind of enthusiastic feedback that we are hearing from the LSD. Ben is planning a study, using the volunteers in two schools and comparing those with control schools.

Some recent data about LSD:

- Standardized test scores for elementary and middle school students in the Lansing School District are some of the lowest in the country, according to the [Educational Opportunity Project](#) at Stanford University, which tracked the test scores of students in third grade through eighth grade from 2009 to 2018. Scores (and graduation and attendance rates) have risen slightly in the past two years.
- Teacher retention is a problem: 32% of the district's teachers left the district within their first four years. Lansing Public Schools and the [Regional Educational Laboratory \(REL\) Midwest](#) requested support in reducing teacher shortages within the district.
- [The average salary](#) is \$44,251, compared to the national average of \$47,474.

Why is this relevant to the mission of LWV? While the main and obvious goals of LWV relate to voting and elections, LWV also takes positions on other issues and advocates for these—locally, statewide and nationally. The position of LWVMI on education begins with the statement, “The LWVMI supports the development of a publicly financed public education system in which there is equal opportunity for an excellent education available to all children in Michigan.” Let me focus for a moment on “equal opportunity.”

Many of the 2023 LWVLA programs have focused on equity in some way: wealth, health, gender, poverty and, now, education. Equity or the lack of it in each of these contexts is a measure of the health of our democracy. The overall mission of LWV is “Defending Democracy.”

Lansing Public Schools are part of *our* community. There are many school districts in our



local community. However, Lansing School District faces challenges unlike other local schools. Superintendent Shuldiner is well aware of the challenges and he is enthusiastically and energetically tackling them. I am so pleased that some members of LWVLA are offering their help. I hope that the collaboration is successful for the students and schools involved. These volunteers are tending the little bit of our democracy that is in our backyard.

As we move into a presidential election year, LWVLA programs will reflect that focus. But I hope to always make it clear that, regardless of who is elected, our shared goal is defending democracy,

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## NOVEMBER MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Camilla Davis, Membership Director

### Welcome New Members!

Susan Hololik, Lansing  
Nicholas Mitchell - Student



### Life Member Recognition Luncheon

The luncheon and program to recognize Life Members (50 years or more of League membership), was held on Wednesday, November 8 at 11:30 am at Coral Gables on Grand River. Thirty-three LWVLA members attended, including Life Member Elizabeth Winder. Our newest Life Members, Pat

Donath and Judy Karandjeff, received letters of recognition from Dr. Deborah Turner, LWVUS president, and certificates certifying 50 years of League membership.

Following the presentations, Donna Mullins interviewed the Life Members, asking them to share League experiences. Donna recorded the interview, and it will be available on YouTube.

### Lucky Winner Selected

LWVLA members who sent in their membership renewal by October 31 were entered in a drawing to receive a refund of \$65, the cost of a Primary membership. The winner was drawn by Life Member Elizabeth Winder at the November 8 luncheon. Congratulations to Deanna Hanieski!

### Have You Renewed Your Membership?

Whether you have the time to be actively involved in the work of the League or just want to be a supporter of its work, your membership in the organization is important, especially during the critical 2024 election year.

There are two easy ways to renew:

1. **Pay online.** Use [this link](#) to take you to the LWV – Lansing Area website *Join* section. Scroll down to the *Join Online* option. Be sure to select *Renewal*.

2. **Pay by check.** Download the [attached form](#), print, and mail it, along with your check, to the address on the form.

Please send your renewal as soon as possible. As the holiday season approaches, it will be one thing off your To Do list. Thanks in advance for your support of LWVLA.

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## EDUCATION COMMITTEE REPORT

### Bettie Menchik, Committee Chair

On October 26, the Education Committee hosted Superintendent Ben Schuldiner of the Lansing School District. We were very pleased that among the approximately 30 people who attended were a number of Lansing residents from the Allen Street area. They asked good questions. Committee members Heidi Thornley, Susan Chalgian, Jacqueline Stewart, Joanne Winkelman and I worked on questions in advance in case there were none from the audience but few were needed. Ben covered his goals for the district and the progress the district has made in increasing enrollment and clearing the special education backlog. He also addressed the tough question as to why, as one person put it, a disproportionate number of administrators of color have retired, not of their own accord. He is an excellent speaker and has asked if he can return in spring. No problem answering that question!! When our very busy president has time, the video will be posted on our website.

Several LWVLA and community members have volunteered to help in the Lansing School District. I hope more of them will contact me to learn about this new opportunity (517-402-3903 or [menchikb@msu.edu](mailto:menchikb@msu.edu)). Together we hope to make an impact. Following is Ben's response to my email offering the names of volunteers:

*Dear Bettie,*

*Thank you so much for your email. I am thrilled to see folks who want to support our schools. I would love to pick two schools to focus on. This way we won't dilute the help. I think we pick two PreK-4<sup>th</sup> grade schools—Lyons and Averill. We can focus on 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade, especially for M-STEP and NWEA. This would be a wonderful way to have a tangible focus and hopefully a trackable positive outcome. And hey, Bettie, if you want to put those number-crunching skills to use, perhaps we can do a "study" on the students. Each school, Lyons and Averill, has two classes each for 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade. We can look at their Fall NWEA scores and then pick one control class and one treatment class per grade per school. Then see how their scores move in relationship to their peers... This would be pretty great. We can certainly create a Data MOU with you to have access to the student information.*

*I have cc'ed Dr. Dori Moore, who helps to support all of our volunteer work. I am also cc'ing Kim Johnson Ray, the Senior Director of Elementary Schools...Hopefully this volunteer program gets off the ground and we can add a few more people to the mix. Thanks again. I am very much looking forward to this project.*

*Ben*

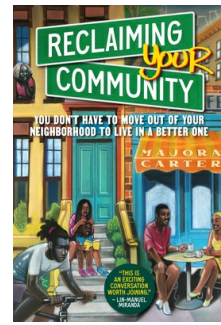
I will be meeting with people from LSD in the near future to plan out the next steps. TBC.

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# BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Donna Mullins

Those who participated in this month's Book Discussion Group had an excellent discussion, inspired by David Grann's *Killers of the Flower Moon*. It reminded me that our book group is a bit more free flowing than most. We tend to talk about our reactions to a book rather than analyze it (although there may be some analysis; no rules really.) If we begin to wander too far, we rein it in, but talking about how the theme or anecdotes in the book relate to current world or personal events is our style. Most people read the book, but participants may also listen to or watch curated links to become familiar with it if they haven't had time to read the book. We meet by Zoom so everyone has an opportunity to attend.



The books we choose tend to be nonfiction, but we occasionally throw in a novel (to be novel). January's book is *Reclaiming Your Community: You Don't Have to Move Out of Your Neighborhood to Live in a Better One* by Majora Carter. The book offers a strategy to solve the problem of persistent poverty in low-status communities.

February's book will be *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, which has been edged out several times before finally being chosen. Matthew Desmond's *Poverty by America* will be discussed in March. You will soon be able to see our choices through August 2024 on the League [website](#).

We meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of the month from 10-11:30 am. If you would like to be added to the group or just attend one of the discussions, contact [Donna Mullins](#).

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## WELCOME TO CAFE

Elaine Fischhoff, EAG Co-chair

CAFE is a new local organization focusing on the environmental and justice issues in the Lansing and mid-Michigan area. Though there are many environmentally related organizations in Michigan, no other nonprofit environmental group exists that is specifically focused on the Tri-County area. CAFE describes its mission as making the Lansing region more sustainable and just by working to protect the natural and built environment and by educating and organizing residents, officials and business leaders.

One of its first projects is helping residents in the vicinity of the Erickson coal plant determine whether their drinking and/or groundwater has been contaminated by the coal ash ponds. Those residents gathered at Woldemar Nature Center on November 9 to hear water quality experts explain the information known to the EPA, EGLE, and LBWL on existing conditions. Residents also heard about the proposal to conduct water testing to achieve a definitive answer on the nature and extent of any contamination.

CAFE will also be calling on the Lansing community to turn out in support of renewable energy, strong climate action, clean water and environmental justice. Information about CAFE can be found on their [website](#), where interested persons can also join as a

member, get on the mailing list, and make a secure donation. Follow CAFE on [Facebook](#) or at 517CAFE on Instagram, Threads, and Twitter.

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## LINE 5 UPDATE

### Ellen Link, EAG Co-chair

A recent online [webinar](#) outlined the current status of the Line 5 pipeline that spans the Mackinac Straits and the ongoing efforts to have it dismantled. The integrity of our Great Lakes, the lifeblood of our state, remains at risk from the pipeline which, built in 1953, has already exceeded its expected lifetime of 50 years.

The pipeline's owner, Canadian oil producer Enbridge, has a history of providing unreliable oversight of its pipelines. In 2010 another of its pipelines ruptured, dumping over 1 million gallons of heavy crude oil into the Kalamazoo River, one of the largest inland oil spills in U.S. history. According to [Oil and Water Don't Mix](#), "This was just one of 1,068 Enbridge spills that dumped 7.4 million gallons of oil between 1999 and 2013—an average of 71 spills and 500,000 gallons leaked per year. That's more than one oil spill every week for the last 15 years."

An excellent fact sheet can be found on FLOW's ([For Love of Water](#)) website, describing the threats posed by Enbridge's plans and refuting its claims that Michigan residents will suffer without their oil. It also outlines actions that Michiganders can take to support the shutdown. Despite Gov. Whitmer's order to shut down Line 5 by May 2021, supported by all twelve tribal nations located in Michigan, the corporation refuses to comply. If you haven't yet lent your voice to this important cause, please do it now.

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## ONE THING

Recycling cannot stop climate change...or can it? When we *mindfully* stop trashing the planet we become ever more aware of the numerous harms that result from our consumer culture and also learn to care about protecting our environment from climate change. Get inspired: watch "[Plastic Wars](#)," an eye-opening video from PBS's *Frontline*.

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## PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Linda Melaragni, Chair



Gun violence in Lansing has increased since the beginning of the pandemic. Three new organizations in Lansing are attempting to interrupt the cycle of violence. The Public Health and Safety Committee has met with representatives of all three organizations this year and continues to monitor their progress.

[Advance Peace](#) employs an intensive program of community mentors to decrease the risk of gun violence. They identify young people likely to be perpetrators or victims of gun violence and, applying almost daily contact, life skills training and more, provide those enrolled in the program with alternative choices that can build pathways to a more



productive future.

[The Mikey 23 Foundation](#) was created by Mike McKissick, whose motto is "Put down the gun, pick up a hammer." The mission of the foundation is "to improve the lives of young people through innovative education and training in the area of skilled trades."

[The Village](#) is a community-building organization, created in response to the tragic deaths of young people due to gun violence, that seeks "[T]o impact lives and change the paths that lead to gun violence." Their programs and services "...focus on youth in middle and high school and young adults ages 18-25 and their families...taking a harm reduction and holistic approach to addressing violence."

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## OPPORTUNITIES TO HELP MAKE DEMOCRACY WORK

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

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

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

**PUBLIC HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE:** Contact [Linda Melaragni](#)

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

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