

Hingham Voter

Serving the Towns of Hingham, Hull, Cohasset and Norwell

November 2008

LWV of Hingham Board 2008—2009

President: Julie Strehle

Secretary: Victoria Milano

Treasurer: Marisa Costello

Membership:
Christine Dietterich

Publicity: Jerry Elsdon

Web Site & Newsletter:
Lynn Cotter

Town Meeting Study:
Kate Boland

Events Coordinator: Dina O'Neil

Advisor: Cindy Coe

Upcoming Events

Monthly Board Meeting
Wed, Nov 12 @ 7:30 p.m.
43 Woodlock Rd, Hingham

**Know Your Town
Publication Meeting**
Mon, Nov 17 @ 7:30 p.m.
231 Leavitt St, Hingham

**Christmas in the Square &
Festival of Trees**
Downtown Hingham
December 5 - 6

"Iron Jawed Angels" Party
Thur, Jan 8 @ TBD
231 Leavitt St, Hingham

President's Letter

Dear Members,

Sorry for the delay in putting out our first newsletter of the 2008-2009 year of LWV of Hingham! (Thanks for your patience during our computer glitches and adjustment to a new school year.) The Board has kept in touch with members through periodic emails, and we will continue to do this as necessary.

We kicked off the new year with a Fall Social, open to all members and those interested in learning more about our League. For the September Primary election, League volunteers handed out our "I Voted Today" stickers to voters, and will do so again at the November election. Also in September, I had the wonderful opportunity to visit with students at Hingham's Notre Dame Academy, and gave them information about how these young women can get involved in their communities and local governments.

LWV of Hingham has more upcoming events in which you can get involved and make a difference:

Observer Corps
Ongoing effort to attend town board meetings. Contact Marisa Costello at 781-875-1282 for more information and to participate.

Know Your Town
Guide to Hingham's town gov-

ernment and information about all aspects of town life for newcomers and residents. Contact Megan Buhr at 781-749-4016 for more information and to participate in the final stages (publication set for this spring).



Marisa Costello gives gift of a LWV bag to LWV MA President Diane Jefferey

Town Meeting Study
Explore Town Meeting in Hingham and compare its format to other "peer" towns, in order to find ways to boost attendance. Contact Kate Boland at 781-749-5946 for more information and to participate.

Christmas in the Square & Festival of Trees
December 5 & 6 - Gingerbread House contribution. Do you like to bake or deco-

rate? Contact Megan Buhr at 781-749-4016 to help with our submission to this annual Hingham event.

"Iron Jawed Angels" Party
Thursday, January 8 - Come to this All Member event to watch the inspirational movie about the suffragette movement.

Annual "State of the State" All Member Meeting
February - Meet with our State Representative and State Senator to get an update on state affairs and lobby them on issues. (Date TBD)

Annual Organic Lawncare Workshop
Sunday, March 2, at Hingham Public Library.

Annual Candidates Night Forum - Sunday, April 5, at Hingham Public Library

Annual Meeting
May - All Member Meeting to wrap up the year. (Date TBD)

The LWV of Hingham Board meets on the 2nd Wednesday each month, rotating to different members' homes. Any League member who wishes to attend is welcome! The next meeting is November 12, 7:30 pm, at Marisa Costello's house.

Thanks for your help,
Julie Strehle, President

LWV of Hingham Conducting Hingham Town Meeting Study

In the interest in increasing attendance and voter participation at Hingham's Town Meetings, the League of Women Voters of Hingham is interested in researching, compiling and possibly submitting a proposal to the Selectmen for consideration.

To conduct the study, the LWV of Hingham will research 20 other Towns that Hingham Administration utilizes for benchmark purposes.

Questions possibly considered include:

1. What day and time of the week are your Town Meetings held?
2. What is your town's population and what is considered a quorum?
3. How many articles are usually covered in your Warrant?
4. How many days does your Town Meeting last?
5. Are articles pulled randomly or are they adhered to as listed in the Warrant?

There has already been some headway in starting the process. Two of the three Selectmen from Hingham have been contacted and are very enthusiastic. The third Selectman and the Town Moderator will be contacted as well for initial input.

The committee is looking for volunteers and hopes the time commitment is limited to a couple of meetings/email and phone calls on their own time.

If you are interested in participating or helping out, please contact Kate Boland by email at kateboland@comcast.net or phone 781-749-5946.

BE A PART OF OBSERVER CORPS!

Thanks to the wonderful turnout of our members, the reinstated Observer Corps has had great success these past 2 years. LWV of Hingham was able to cover various town boards and committees.

Our goal this year is to continue to grow the Observer Corps with more participants and coverage of additional boards.

All are welcome and urged to view the Observer Corps Training video to find out more about this great service. The training is led by Pat Facey, a former Massachusetts LWV Vice-President and Jane Malme, a past LWV of Hingham President.

If you are interested in be-

coming part of the Observer Corps, please contact Marisa Costello at tmbac@comcast.net.

About Observer Corps

One of the most valuable services a local League can offer its members, and often the community, is to observe municipal boards and committees. For many years there was a LWV of Hingham Observer Corps and at our Annual Meeting, members expressed an interest in organizing one again.

Participation in the Observer Corps is an excellent way for members to learn about local issues and share this information with League members through Bulletin articles and League meetings. Observers' reports are factual and non-

judgmental, present various sides of an issue and are intended to help members to be well-informed before making any decisions concerning possible League or individual action.

Those interested in participating will determine how many Hingham boards and committees will be covered. The LWV of Hingham Board writes a letter to those town committees, introducing the League Observers, explaining that the League, a non-partisan, citizen education organization that encourages informed participation of citizens, will have representatives attending their meetings only to observe and take notes.

Among the town committees that are of greatest interest usually are the Board of Select-

man, School Committee, Planning Board, Advisory Committee and others may be added, based on member interest. If there is sufficient interest among LWV of Hingham members from other towns, other Observer Corps may be established in the future.

Representing the League as a member of the Observer Corps does involve a certain level of commitment to regularly attend board/committee meetings and to take careful notes, but it can be a very rewarding and worthwhile experience. Observer Corps participants also have the option to work as a team to share coverage of a committee if time constraints are limiting yet would like to be involved.

All Member Fall Social with Diane Jefferey, LWV of Massachusetts President

The LWV of Hingham kicked off the 2008—2009 year with an All Member Fall Social on Sunday, September 21. Big thanks to Marisa Costello, who hosted the event at her house.

LWV of Massachusetts President, Diane Jefferey, came to speak to our group about a few of the initiatives that the Massachusetts State League has to been involved in, upcoming events, as well as areas and topics where we can be involved. These included the LWV of Massachusetts opposition to Ballot Question I for the November 4th election, the Vote 2008 Campaign, past advocacy against casino gambling in Massachusetts, the upcoming Student Essay Contest, and also the upcoming Guardian of Democracy Award Dinner on March 12.

We appreciated her taking the time to come and meet with LWV of Hingham members and invited guests, and felt inspired by her words of encouragement.



LWVH members, Cindy Coe and Jane Malmé converse with Diane Jefferey.



LWVH members Deb Courteau, Kathleen Nugent and Marisa Costello.



Julie Strehle, Dina O'Neil and Deb Courteau speak with prospects and members.



LWV MA President, Diane Jefferey addresses the group.



Speech to Notre Dame Honor Students

By Julie Strehle, LWV of Hingham President

Good afternoon, my name is Julie Strehle, and I am the President of the League of Women Voters of Hingham. I am also a resident of Hingham, and mother of two children who attend Plymouth River Elementary School. Congratulations to all of you for being selected to be part of the Scholars Program at Notre Dame. I am happy to be here to speak with you about the LWV organization, and how it is possible for you to get involved in your government and make a difference here on a local level and beyond.

First I want to touch briefly on some historical facts, to put some things in perspective. It has been 88 years since women in the United States have had the right to vote. When my grandmother was a little girl, her dad had the right to vote, but her mom did not. The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution secured that right, after a long struggle by women known as the "Suffragettes". When this right was established, these women went on to found an organization called the League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, which has fought since 1920 to improve our systems of government and impact public policies through citizen education and advocacy. When we say nonpartisan, it means that it neither supports nor opposes candidates for office at any level of government. At the same time, the League is wholeheartedly political and works to influence policy through advocacy. I'll touch more on that advocacy later.

So then after that right to vote was established it was a struggle over the years to get women elected to offices around the country, but it has happened, steadily, but we could do better. Just as an example of the progress that women have made:

- In early 1991, around the time all of you here were probably born, a record of 4 women held the position of state governor. Currently there are 8 women serving as state governors.
- In 1992, there were 47 women serving in the United States House of Representatives (about 11% of its total), and today there are 74 women in the House (17%), including the first female Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, who as Speaker, is second in the line of succession to the Presidency after the Vice President.
- In 1992 there were 7 women serving as United States Senators, and today there are 16, the highest number in history.

And you would be hard pressed to find anybody who didn't know that we came very close to having a woman on the Democratic ticket for the Presidential election this fall, and we do have a woman on the Republican ticket for Vice President. So now that I have my own daughter, women compete on the national ticket, hold the Speaker of the House position, 8 governorships, and there are 90 congresswomen. Also, there have been two women who have served as United States Secretary of State.

So this is obviously an exciting time for women to be in positions of power and responsibility in our government; we have come a long way, although we do have more ground to cover. Yet, to think of being involved at such a high level as state-wide or on a national level, it can be pretty overwhelming. And there are so many ways to be involved and effect change without even holding public office. So let's bring this discussion a little bit down to a level that we can really wrap our arms around. How can we, as citizens who vote, or will soon vote, get involved. There are 3 areas which I will cover here today: Participation in programs; voting; and opportunities for activism.

First, I brought with me today a directory published by the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts. The LWV is organized to parallel the three levels of government: local, state and national. Our state league, through its Citizen Education Fund, produced a directory of Civic Engagement and Leadership Development Programs for Massachusetts Youth. The directory lists 46 programs in which Massachusetts teens can get involved.

Another simple way that you can get involved in your community and make a difference is to not only register to vote, but to get out to vote in all the elections, even the local ones. I brought with me today some voter registration forms for any students who have turned 18 and have not yet registered. We have until October 15 to get registered in time to vote in the Presidential Election on November 4. So please take one and fill it out if it applies to you. Or when you turn 18, you can go to Town Hall and register. Or you can now do it online. Also, if you go out of town in the future to study in college, it is quite easy to absentee vote. Just go to either your town's website or the state of Massachusetts' website and fill out an absentee ballot request, and it will get sent to you. It's as simple as that.

So, we have the upcoming Presidential Election, and it is the big news of today. But it's also the local elections which matter a lot, and where you can make a big difference by voting. Many local elections in the past have been decided by only a handful of votes. And why do these local elections matter so much? Well, these decisions you are making about leaders and the directions in which your town is going, and you are going to feel these impacts in the quickest and most hands-on manner. For example, Hingham schools, at the elementary and middle school levels, have been overcrowded in recent years, and studies show that this upward trend in school-age population will continue for some more years. So voters in town were asked last spring to come to a special Town Meeting to approve the rebuilding of the East Elementary School and then a couple of days later, following rules that require another vote at the polls, voters were asked to vote again to rebuild this school. And for some voters, it was a hard decision, because they knew that if they voted Yes for the new school, the taxes that they pay the town would rise, and it's become challenging for many to pay these taxes. On the other hand, the voters had to remember the argument that with good schools come good property values on their homes, and also consider the condition of the schools in which their children or grandchildren were attending.

With that important question on our ballot that late winter Saturday, any guesses as to how many voters came out to vote at the polls? What would be your guess—let's come up with a number here, what about 80% of eligible voters? Well, it was a Saturday, people were out doing errands or sports, so maybe it wasn't that high; maybe it was more like 50% of eligible voters who came out to make this decision. Or would you have guessed 50%? Unfortunately, those guesses are a bit high. In the end, the percentage of eligible voters who came out to decide whether Hingham would pay 60% of the \$26.6 million dollars to build a new school in town, deciding to raise taxes to pay for it, was a record 23%. And that was a huge turnout for a local election. Only 23%. The school project passed, and the town is on track to open it in September 2009, in one year.

Later in May, for the regularly scheduled local election, can you guess how many voters in Hingham participated then? Now that you've heard of the big turnout at 23% for the school vote, what would be your guess now? After all, this was an election which included people running for Board of Selectmen (who are the group of 3 people whose role is somewhat like a town mayor, managing local affairs), and people were running for the Recreation Commission and Sewer Commission. People who are making decisions every day about programs and services which impact our everyday lives. The turnout for that election was just 16%. Elections about who is going to run the town, and how we spend our money, such as a new school project, are big decisions. There have been many big decisions in the past, and we have others coming in the future, and people need to exercise their right to have a say in how the town makes these big decisions.

Many people argue that the reason that they don't vote is that they don't know the candidates, or don't know the issues, so therefore they can't make an informed decision. But there are many ways, simple ways, that voters can gather the information that they need to make a vote at the polls. First of all, you can learn all about a town's government from its own website. In Hingham, for example, its website, www.hingham-ma.com, is an award winner, 2 years straight, from Massachusetts Common Cause, in its campaign for Open Government. All the town meetings are posted, all the names of the town boards, what they do, what information you need to know, it's all on the website. Then we have a local newspaper, which does reporting on local issues and local candidates. Always consider your sources, though, when reading media online or in print; make sure you get a couple of different viewpoints from different sources, because sometimes they have biases which aren't easily apparent. But in general, you can stay in touch with the issues through the media. And then you have organizations like the League of Women Voters, which have informational forums on issues, such as a discussion we had last winter about the proposed elementary school in Hingham, which we held at Linden Ponds Retirement Community. LWV of Hingham also hosts a Candidates Night every spring, for candidates for local office to speak about their platform, and what they will accomplish if elected. In the past we have rebroadcast these Candidates Night forums on cable TV, so if you couldn't make the event in person, you could catch up on the candidates and issues on TV. Starting this year, though, we are going to take it one step further, and offer this forum for rebroadcast on our website, so you can easily get acquainted with the candidates who will be on the ballot, on your own time. So it's never been easier to get the information that you need to make an informed decision at local elections. And finally, if you are out of town that election day, then all you need to do is mail in an absentee ballot ahead of time.

Voting alone, however, does not solve any problems. It has to be paired with other forms of action. As we learned from the Suffragette movement, without activism, there would be no women voting. Voting and activism are equally important to being an engaged citizen of this country. The League of Women Voters has a long history of studying issues at the national, state and local levels, looking at these issues from all sides and then coming to a consensus, a position on the issue and then advocating that position with governments and citizens. For example, at the national level, the League of Women Voters is currently lobbying the United States Congress to pass legislation that supports incentives to produce clean energy versus drilling for more oil. That is the position that they come to after studies and research across the United States from State and Local Leagues on the issue of global warming.

At the State Level, the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has lobbied for over twenty years against bringing casino gambling to Massachusetts. Back in the 1980s, the Hingham League joined in this fight as well, especially when there was a proposed plan to put a casino in Hull. Just think of it, a casino right here in our back yard. Why wouldn't we want one? The League studied the issues relating to casino gambling. Right this moment, this fall, for the November election, the Massachusetts League of Women Voters is tackling another issue, which is Ballot Question 1. Some voters mobilized to put a Question on our ballot for November which repeals the State Income Tax. The League is fighting against this tax repeal, because of the devastating consequences it will have for our state. This binding referendum will take \$12.7 billion - nearly 40 percent - out of the state budget as of January 2009. This would drive up property taxes that homeowners have to pay. Also it would lead to drastic cuts in local and state services. The League considers Question 1 to be a reckless proposal that could increase local property taxes, cause sweeping cuts in education, cripple our fire and police departments, and speed the deterioration of our infrastructure, such as bridges and roads.

Finally, activism at the local level can take on so many different forms. Years ago, the Hingham League was instrumental in bringing recycling to Hingham. Yes, it's true, there hasn't always been recycling, especially of such big items as car tires, and volunteers here in Hingham spent many hours over many years lobbying and volunteering their time at the town dump, to bring in recycling.

Here is an example of a teenager who has been an activist recently. Her name is Natalia Thompson of Madison, Wisconsin. She decided to create a place for girls to make their voices heard, so last year, she founded Madison SOS (*Speak Out, Sister!*), an entirely youth-led organization that unites teen girls across the city in action on the social justice issues that most matter to them. Last fall, they organized The Young Women's Leadership Forum, a workshop series that gave girls the tools to work for change on a variety of local and global issues. Teens learned about traditional forms of advocacy, like letter-writing and meeting with elected officials, as well as grassroots activism, like creating YouTube videos and staging protests. This summer, they painted a mural that celebrates girls' dreams for our community, and created a documentary on issues like safety, relationships, and teen pregnancy. Or another teen, Chanelle Adams, who lives in Hartford, CT, who decided to help spread the word about what young people can do to help make this world a better and cleaner place to live. She formed the organization called Hartford is Beautiful Let's Keep it That Way! She organizes community clean ups and gives out flyers about the importance of recycling and reusing products. In 2006, Chanelle received Action for Nature's International Eco-Hero Award, which is given to children and teenagers who help out to save the environment in any special way.

So as you can see, there are so many different opportunities for you to get involved and be aware of issues that face you and other citizens. As you near the end of your high school years and go off into the world of higher education and the workforce, you are going to encounter new people, with totally different backgrounds and opinions. You will need to educate yourselves about new ideas, about differing causes and solutions to problems, and then you can come to an educated opinion and then chart your course from there. Find something that really interests you, something that you can become passionate about, and remember that every little bit of your time and energies can help add up to making a difference.

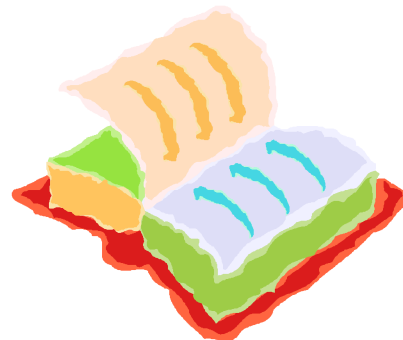
Know Your Town Publication Update

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts has a time honored tradition of producing publications at the local level entitled “**Know Your Town**”, the purpose of which is to inform residents, and newcomers to their communities, about available resources, the history of the community and how to navigate town government. It has been a number of years since our local Hingham League last produced this publication. So we are excited to be bringing the tradition back to Hingham with a revised and updated version, slated for delivery in April of 2009.

The Know Your Town Publication

Committee members have been working hard to meet this target date. Leading the committee is Chairwoman Megan Buhr with committee members comprised of Cindy Coe, Lynn Cotter, Christine Dietterich, Kathleen Nugent, Dina O’Neil and Julie Strehle.

The production and printing of this book represents a substantial investment that has been underwritten in the past by our local financial institutions. For the 2009 version we are seeking donations from each institution once again in order to cover our costs. We also hope to provide these invaluable guides to local realtors and businesses for a small fee.



Christmas in the Square & Festival of Trees

The LWV of Hingham will once again be participating in the Annual Christmas in the Square, Festival of Trees by creating and submitting a festive gingerbread house. If you are interested in helping us out or donating items for the gingerbread house, please contact Megan Buhr at mbuhr@comcast.net or phone 781-749-4016.



LWV of Hingham VOTER Newsletter is Going Green!

In the interest of our continuing efforts to be environmentally conscious and green, and to save costs, LWV of Hingham VOTER Newsletter will now be distributed electronically via email. All copies will also be available on our website at www.hingham.ma.lwvnet.org.

If you have any questions or need help, please contact Lynn Cotter at lynncotter@comcast.net or phone 781-749-8378.

LWV of Hingham Membership Form

May 2008 – May 2009

Please mail to:
Marisa Costello
43 Woodlock Road, Hingham, MA 02043

*******Membership dues deadline for the 2008/2009 year is December 31, 2008*******

Name _____

2nd Member _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email* _____

* Please provide email address to receive the VOTER Newsletter and other membership announcements

Individual	\$50.
Household	\$75. (\$50, first member; \$25 second)
Full time student	\$25.
CONTRIBUTION	\$ _____
PAYMENT ENCLOSED	\$ _____

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization encouraging the informed and active participation of citizens in government. It influences public policy through education and advocacy. We never support or oppose any political party or candidate. We are delighted to get help from our Members. Below is a list of activities in need of your help. Please check or circle any items with which you can assist:

_____ **Voter Education**

- * Help run Candidates Night
- * Register voters
- * Pass out "I Voted Today" stickers at the polls

_____ **Advocacy**

- * Town Meeting Study
- * Report on Town Boards with Observer Corps
- * "Know Your Town" Publication

_____ **Social Event Planning**

- * Plan All-Member meetings, including Annual Meeting