

## Guest commentary: League of Women Voters' new president outlines vision for her term

By SANDY PARKER / Naples

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I became president of the League of Women Voters of Collier County because I have a passion for inspiring people to become informed and active participants in civic life. During my term as president, I plan to broaden and deepen the league's exposure in the community and increase our focus on developing and training future league leaders.

One of the first challenges we face is to increase awareness of who we are and what we do. Many people know we host candidate forums at election time, and some have seen us working the polls or registering voters. But most people don't know that the league is involved in much more.

Quite simply, we are a group of aware and engaged citizens. Our mission is to encourage informed and active participation in government and influence public policy through education and advocacy. We do this through committees focused on state and local issues in education, government, justice, social policy and voter services; other areas are addressed as needed.

We are a nonpartisan organization, neither supporting nor opposing candidates for office. We are also a political organization, studying and then taking positions on issues and advocating for them in the community and with our elected officials.

Despite our name, we are not just women. In fact, 11 percent of our members are male, including one man who recently served on our board. We'd like to have more.

At our recent annual meeting, our members adopted specific plans for the 2009-10 year. In carrying out those plans, we hope to include in our activities people in segments we don't typically reach — the business community; the visually impaired; the Hispanic, African-American and other minority communities; young professionals; and the educational community. We hope that our programming will engage and inspire their informed and active participation in government.

We want to continue to participate in events with the business community such as the Greater Naples Chamber of Commerce's recent Campaign for Leadership. In this well-attended workshop on the how-tos of civic engagement, we presented a program on candidate forums.

We will continue as an endorser of the Economic Development Council's Project Innovation, because to be successful, visioning projects require input from all segments of the community.

In partnership with the Lighthouse of Collier, we will facilitate registration and voting for the visually impaired. We will develop a plan to increase voter registration and turnout in the county's minority communities, and we will use our new Facebook group to engage young professionals about civic issues that directly affect their future.

In addition to broadening our reach in the community, I am committed to deepening our league's focus on public education in Collier County. Whether we have children in Collier's schools or not, today's young people are our future, and each of us should have a personal interest in their success.

The Collier County Education Foundation's Connect Now statement encourages the community to "start or become part of an effort to identify and strengthen effective parental and community involvement." We will organize programs to teach league members and the community how things work in our schools and continue to invite the superintendent and School Board members to participate. And we will continue our involvement with the school district and the Collier County 4-H in the Know Your County Government Teen Citizenship Program.

Finally, I plan to increase our focus on succession planning and developing future league leaders to ensure the work we do continues. I will encourage league members — especially those newest to league — to become involved in the planning, operation and governance of our organization.

As I look ahead to my term as league president, I hope that our leadership and our programming will inspire the men and women of Collier County to become more informed and active participants in government. New members and public participation in our programs are always welcome.

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*For more information, visit our Web site at [www.lwvcolliercounty.org](http://www.lwvcolliercounty.org), call 263-4656, e-mail [president@lwvcolliercounty.org](mailto:president@lwvcolliercounty.org), or become a Facebook fan of the League of Women Voters of Collier County.*

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