

### League of Women Voters of Collier County (LWVCC)

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Photo by Natalia I. Harding

(As translated by Asia Rial Elsbree)

Last April 20<sup>th</sup>, when the LWVCC elected its new Board of Directors and officials, Chris Straton, exiting President, symbolically turned the presidential mallet over to the new incumbent, Sandy Parker.

On this occasion, SOMOS interviewed 2 worthy modern day representatives of those who in 1920 became known as Suffragettes. These were valiant women who confronted a fierce struggle during which they were pursued, mistreated, and tortured, but were not defeated. They won respect for women, and achieved the ideal of equality for men and women – notwithstanding race, gender, or cultural or political ideology, but, above all, they obtained women's right to vote. Herein began the movement known as the League.



In the above photo are shown key members and the new Board: Sandy Parker, President; Lydia Galton, First Vice-president; Jen Marquis, Second Vice-president; Kathleen Slebodnik, Secretary; Rose DiBiasi, Director; Anne Lewallen, Director; Patricia Snyder, Director; Chris Straton, immediate past President. Continuing in the second year of their term: Marjorie Joder, Treasurer; Joyce Fletcher, Marilyn Bogen, and Bernice Schmelz, Directors.

The LWV/CC is not affiliated with any political party; its only interest is to promote informed, active participation in the community and in government, so as to achieve understanding about important public political issues and to be able to influence through activism and education.

Straton states: "... by virtue of its impartiality in the world of politics, the League of Women Voters is the only organization that is able to use governmental conference rooms for its meetings, as well as having free access to public television channels, a privilege which few groups have".

A notable example is the day and night broadcasting of the Candidate Forums, during both the local, as well as the national campaigns, wherein the public was able to see and hear our County's candidates from both parties answer questions.

Straton alludes to the importance of the Hispanic community's being well-informed about what is happening, especially during the primaries in early 2010 when candidates for office will be selected, among them, County School Board Chair. She adds that next April will mark the beginning of the decennial Census process, which will determine, among others, the number of people who know English, but are afraid to speak it. It is imperative that the Hispanic community be informed of what is happening in its respective counties, and in this case, Naples, given that it is also the future of its children that is in play.

Education is one of the League's priorities, and the subject to which the last working session before summer was devoted. The Prevention of Absenteeism/Delinquency Prevention was the subject of discussion with attorney Ramiro Manalich, Circuit Court Judge, Sheriff Kevin Rambosk, and Dee Whinnery of Student Services, Collier County School District.

Regarding school absenteeism, Judge Manalich mentioned that there are some very difficult cases of youth who have missed classes many times, in addition to a history of poor grades. Nevertheless, he assured the group that work is on-going in programs to assure that the 67,000 Collier students under age 17 have the opportunity to make better decisions about their behavior.

One student who is a frequent absentee has 15 unexcused absences in a 90-day period. This could warrant a Truancy Court appearance before a judge, imposition of a fine, a community service assignment, loss of driving privileges, and very possibly, having to accept a schooling alternative. Not only does a truant jeopardize him/herself, but s/he puts the parents in a vulnerable situation wherein, if the absenteeism is proven to be habitual and the parents have not taken action, they could face second degree charges and a 60-day prison sentence.

Another preoccupying example is of a sixth grader who was found to be positive for drugs. Furthermore, 80% of the entire youth population have tested positive for drugs. This is the kind of issue and action that the League highlights to reassure itself that the authorities are alert to the problems of the community. The situation looks bad for everyone, but we note that Hispanics are in second place percentage-wise to the population group designated white.

What can the Hispanic community do? First of all, become aware that we not only should, but must, begin to inform ourselves and participate in those matters that concern our children – whether we speak English or not - and affiliate ourselves with advocacy groups to help make available more after-school activities for our children.

Sheriff Rambosk has programmed an activity called Hot Summer Nights during which young people are allowed to gather in public places, for example, to watch movies, participate in games or sports, listen to music in the evenings. In this way, the police have an opportunity to share with and get to know them and one another.

This is the kind of action that the League promotes to create bonds between the community and governmental agencies. This is the type of activity in which we all should involve ourselves for the greater good of our community and the future of our children and youth.

Sandy Parker comments that residents are interested in the business of county decision-making, as well as in matters of elections, educational action, health, and juvenile justice, but they don't know where to go to get objective, non-partisan information. The focus of the League is to address those needs.

The new Board and I are eager to work with our members, with the public, and with community groups so that we will be able to provide opportunities for learning how to participate actively and support those committees which address local and state issues, the justice system, social politics, and, equally, voter education. Parker invites us to join these efforts.

Straton and Parker, along with the entire League membership, invite the Hispanic community to join this group which opens its doors to both women and men. For information, call 239-263-4656 or go to [www.lwvcolliercounty.org](http://www.lwvcolliercounty.org). We at SOMOS Magazine express our solidarity with the League and offer our e-mail address as an on-going link: [info@somosonline.com](mailto:info@somosonline.com).