



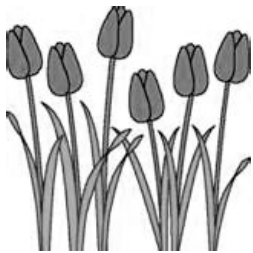
# THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

of SCHENECTADY  
COUNTY, NEW YORK

**BULLETIN**

APRIL 2010

[www.lwvschenectady.org](http://www.lwvschenectady.org)



## **Health in Schenectady:**

Where Do We Stand & Where Do We Go From Here?

Wednesday, April 7<sup>th</sup> from 7-9pm

*in the McChesney Room of the Schenectady County Library*

Speakers:

Dr. David Pratt, *Commissioner of Public Health Services, Schenectady County*

James Connolly, *President & CEO, Ellis Hospital,*

Joseph Gambino, *CEO, Hometown Health Centers of Schenectady.*

*In 2009 all three organizations conducted studies of community health needs. Our speakers will share their results, progress, and goals. There will be a question and answer session after the presentation.*

## **PROMISE: A Mentoring Program in Schenectady City Schools**

Tuesday, April 27 from 12-1 pm

Craig Street Boys and Girls Club

400 Craig Street, 1st floor

*The Promise staff will be joined by members of AAUW (American Association of University Women) and the Retired Teachers unit. This provides us with another window into the City Schools and an opportunity for interested people to serve.*

***Save the date!***

*for the*

**Consensus Meeting on Consolidation  
of Governmental Units and Shared Services**

Tuesday, May 25 from 7-9 pm

1st Reformed Church on Union & Church Streets

*This study is focused on areas to be included in the consolidation process.*

Message from the Health Committee  
Submitted by Carol Furman, Health Chair

The Health Committee hopes to gain a better understanding of the gaps in health care and to make this a part of our advocacy agenda on a state and local level. The following information is taken from a publication by the Healthy Capital District Initiative "2009 Community Health Profile," which can be viewed at [www.hcdiny.org](http://www.hcdiny.org).

Data reported in 2009 indicate that the greatest number of people are affected in the most significant ways by two factors: a person's access to health care and the presence of chronic illnesses.

Factors that contribute to lack of access to health care include a shortage of primary care physicians, difficult paperwork needed to apply for public insurance, cost, jobs lacking health care benefits, non-covered care, long waits, inability to take time off from work, overuse of emergency rooms, a lack of preventive services, and a lack of culturally sensitive care.

- *An estimated 10.6% of adults in Schenectady are uninsured and 8.1% of children are uninsured.*
- Most hospitalizations in Schenectady are caused by heart disease, chronic obstructive lung disease, and stroke. Diabetes plays a major role in causing those problems, and obesity is a major factor in diabetes, as well as in the other illnesses. *22.9% of adults in Schenectady are considered obese.*
- Schenectady has the highest rate of low birth weights (*less than 5.5 Lbs.*) in the Capital District and although teen pregnancy rates have declined overall, some low-income zip codes have a rate *3.5 times the county rate.*
- Employed persons age 16 years and older in Schenectady County have a rate of elevated lead levels in the blood that is five times higher than the same rate in Albany and twice as high as in Rensselaer County.
- According to 2007 data Schenectady's rate of gonorrhea exceeds the state rate by almost three times.
- Deaths by suicide in Schenectady are higher than Albany and Rensselaer counties, and exceed the New York state rate.

These are just an indication of unmet health needs in our county. We hope that our upcoming program, **"Health in Schenectady: Where Do We Stand and Where Are We Going?" on April 7th, 7-9pm in the McChesney Room at the main Library**, will generate interest in taking action to improve health care outcomes in our community. Please be sure and put the program on your calendar!

#### The Passing of Phyllis Bornt & Helen Cioffi

Our organization and our community regret the loss of two vibrant women. Phyllis Bornt was a dedicated librarian who worked for the Schenectady County Public Library for 35 years and continued to volunteer for the library after her retirement. She was a native of Scotia and she enjoyed traveling all over the globe. She was a sweet, humble person who was always modest about her own gifts and accomplishments.

Helen Cioffi was a woman who was committed to her family and to her community. She was a life-long organizer and enjoyed participating in activities even into retirement. She very much enjoyed doing outdoor activities like hiking, playing tennis and spending time at her camp with her children and grandchildren.

They will both be missed.

## SCHENECTADY COUNTY LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS COMMENTS TO METROPLEX ON THE ALCO REDEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The League of Women Voters of Schenectady County supports efforts to redevelop the former ALCO site. It will give a boost to the revitalization of the City and benefit the County as well. By providing an inviting urban, waterfront, mixed use living environment unique in the region, the City and County will be seen as an exciting place to relocate. It will provide a vibrant living environment, which will attract new residents, especially young professionals and empty nesters.

The League urges that affordable housing be part of the housing mix in this development. Rather than making it a high-end ghetto, a percentage of the housing should be kept within economic reach of the people who might teach the neighborhood children, or work in the shops, offices or other commercial enterprises that are planned as part of the mix.

The League notes the positive environmental aspects of the proposed development. Remediation of the brownfield will allow the land to be used for development, thus saving greenfields elsewhere and reducing sprawl. It will pose fewer risks to the environment and to public health. The compact, walkable, mixed use design proposed for the development will reduce automobile dependence and help reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions. (Every little bit helps.) Using existing infrastructure by utilizing existing roads, sewers and water lines, will save resources.

Cleanup will also reduce the threat of contamination of ground water and storm water runoff. Since the site is adjacent to the Mohawk River and above the Great Flats Aquifer, two of the county's greatest natural resources, this is a significant benefit. The League underscores the need for strict adherence to all regulations governing discharges to the Mohawk River and activities within the Aquifer zone III during cleanup so as not to contaminate surface or ground water. In addition, to minimize the impact of redevelopment on water quality, we support the use of low impact development methods such as rain gardens, buffer strips, permeable pavers and roof gardens for storm water management to the fullest extent possible.

We strongly support use of this project to showcase green building design as suggested in the DGEIS. The opportunity to use innovative materials and design techniques that simultaneously promote cost efficiency should be pursued. The City is already moving toward becoming a leader in innovative green design with the building of the first LEED certified affordable housing. Green technology is an area that the Schenectady County Community College will specialize in.. Showcasing innovative green design in the ALCO project could put Schenectady on the map as a leader in this area.

The League of Women Voters commends the Schenectady Metroplex Development Authority for its forward thinking vision for redevelopment of the ALCO site. Mixed use development, with residential, retail, commercial and retention of existing light industry will transform this corner of the City into a vibrant, attractive area. We look forward to moving ahead with this project and encourage an ongoing process of communication with the community to inform the public as well as to obtain and incorporate input about its vision for the area as the redevelopment process proceeds.

**Mission Statement:** The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government. We work to increase the understanding of major public policy issues and influence public policy through education and advocacy.

*President:*  
Joanne Tobiessen 393-0477

*Vice-President:*  
Connie Young 393-7061

*Newsletter Editor:*  
Helen MacDonald 346-7006

Submitted by Joan Elliott

Although the Freedom of Information Law is “not perfect,” it does provide the public and press with access to government records, and the advent of electronic records makes much more information available, declared two experts.

Robert Freeman, executive director of the Committee on Open Government in the New York Department of State, and Judy Patrick, managing editor of *The Daily Gazette*, spoke at a March 10th League of Women Voters of Schenectady County presentation to celebrate Sunshine Week that promotes openness in government. The meeting was graciously hosted at the Gazette Building on Maxon Rd. Ext.

Mr. Freeman told his audience that New York was ahead of many states and the federal government because it defined what a government record is under the Freedom of Information Law (FOIL). When records are kept electronically, the agency should have a system that permits retrieval that provides the maximum of public access. Ms. Patrick said newspaper reporters are now requesting records electronically and obtaining them, changing the way information is available and putting a lot more information in the public domain.

Both Mr. Freeman and Ms. Patrick cited cases where meetings are to be open to the public and are improperly closed by government officials who say they are going “into executive session.” There are eight specific grounds allowing executive sessions. Ms. Patrick said *The Daily Gazette* has become a lot more aggressive in informing the public through its news articles when government officials improperly deny public records or close public meetings. She said recently a Gazette reporter insisted to Gloversville officials that they could not remove him from a public meeting to discuss the subject of annexation. When the officials threatened the reporter with arrest, he showed police the section of the law that prohibited an executive discussion for such a reason and he prevailed.

If the public or media focus attention on government actions that violate the open meetings and public access to information law, politicians and bureaucrats often will change their actions, according to Mr. Freeman. The media has challenged government in court.

In response to a question, Mr. Freeman said Mexico has the strongest laws on public access to governmental records.

Information on open government laws in New York State, opinions provided by the Committee on Open Government from 1993 to the present, and other relevant material can be obtained at [www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/](http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/) Mary Maitino is the League of Women Voters of Schenectady County chair of the Observer Corps that promotes openness in government. She can be reached at 377-3248.

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## Health Committee

Submitted by Carol Furman, Health Committee Chair

The Health Committee will meet next on April 19th at 12 o'clock at the Moon and River Cafe. We are sponsoring a program on "Health in Schenectady: Where Do We Stand and Where Are We Going?" on April 7th at 7-9pm at the McChesney Room of the main branch of the Schenectady library. In March and April we plan to complete a survey of organizations in Schenectady to identify their perspectives on health needs in Schenectady, which we will use in advocating with local and State officials. Please join us! Call Carol Furman 346-2746.

Report on the Albany Law School Forum on Wrongful Convictions

“Wrongful Convictions: Understanding and Addressing Criminal Injustice” was the topic of a panel discussion held at the Albany Law School on Thursday, March 4, 2010. Since 2007, the Albany Law Review has held the State Constitutional Commentary Symposium in honor of former Appeals Chief Judge Lawrence Cooke. This year’s symposium was moderated by Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman with five distinguished panelists.

Judge Lippman opened the discussion with a brief overview of the history of wrongful convictions, stating that human error has been the leading cause and that recent access to DNA evidence has resulted in many exonerations. He has established a permanent task force on wrongful convictions. Mr. Lippman introduced each panelist and allowed 15 minutes per presentation.

1) James R. Acker, Distinguished Teaching Professor of the School of Criminal Justice at SUNYA outlined the leading causes of wrongful convictions, such as misidentification, undue influence of law enforcement producing false confessions, incompetent defense, witness lies, prosecutorial misconduct and the poverty of defendants. He said that many reforms can be achieved administratively without waiting for legislation.

2) The Hon. Cyrus R. Vance, Jr., New York County District Attorney, pointed out that prosecutors are active partners in seeking justice and avoiding wrongful convictions. He is establishing a conviction integrity program, headed up by senior staff with an outside panel of advisors, which includes former Appeals Court Associate Judge Howard Levine.

3) Amy Bach, author of “Ordinary Injustice: How America Holds Court,” talked about her observations in various courts where she witnessed “assembly-line justice” and where speed equals success. She called courts the most unexamined institution and she also alluded to the ongoing “race” issue connected with wrongful convictions.

4) Saul M. Kassin, Distinguished Professor of Psychology of John Jay College of Criminal Justice and Professor of Psychology at Williams College, MA, talked about the additional victims of crime, especially the families of both victims and perpetrators. He pointed out the frequency of eyewitness mistakes (between 20 and 25 %) and also the high number of false confessions.

5) The final speaker was Stephen Saloom, Policy Director of the Innocence Project. He commented that if we convict the innocent, the guilty go free and continue to be a danger to society. He also said that there is resistance to change in our legal system and a strong political trend to be perceived as “tough on crime.” In addition, there is a huge crisis in indigents’ defense, and judges, prosecutors, public defenders and police are overwhelmed with caseloads.

***For Your Information:***

*Schenectady County Legislature ....April 13, 7 pm 6<sup>th</sup> floor, County Office Bldg.*

*Schenectady City Council ....April 12 & 26, 7 pm, City Council Chambers, City Hall.*

*Duanesburg Town Board...April 8, 7:30 pm, Town Hall...895-8920*

*Glenville Town Board... April 7 & 21, 7:30 pm, Glenville Municipal Center...688-1200*

*Niskayuna Town Board...Tuesday (date varies)...7 pm, Niskayuna Town Hall...386-4510.*

*Princetown Town Board...April 13...7pm, Princetown Hall...355-3468*

*Rotterdam Town Board....April 14 & 28 ...7 pm, Kirvin Gov’t. Center...355-7575*

## Leesa Perazzo

Leesa recently joined the League because she is very community minded. She is on the Boards of Directors of A Place For Jazz, The Heritage Home for Women, and the Junior League. She is currently the Director of Workforce Development and Public Affairs for the Schenectady County Chamber of Commerce. Prior to this position, Leesa spent 21 years in various management positions for Mazzone Management Group at the Glen Sanders Mansion. She was the owner of Leesa's Restaurant, a dinner and jazz club in the mid 1990's. She also has a part time business, Eat My Words, which specializes in menu design and culinary technology. She is 2008 graduate of Leadership Tech Valley. She received a community service award from the Schenectady chapter of NAACP in 2009.

### Membership Committee Report

Submitted by Lynda Nichols, Membership Chair

The Membership Committee has been discussing ways we can be more inclusive towards new members. Some new members immediately become active on a committee. Some new members support the League, but wish to be inactive. The Membership Committee has observed a third group of people who joined but did not renew one year later. There can be several reasons for this, but we want to be sure that new members do not feel "left out" for any reason.

The Committee is proposing a system of phone mentors who will make phone contact with the new member. During the three month mentoring period, the mentor would call the new member shortly before scheduled League events to see if the new person was aware of the event and planned to attend. The mentor is not expected to attend the events with the new person, though that would be a great thing to do. The mentor's role is to be sure the new member is aware of events and feels included in our League. This step is particularly important when we get a member who has joined through the National League rather than our local process.

Obviously we need volunteers to be phone mentors. Any member can do this, even if you do not go out to events yourself. Lynda Nichols will keep a list of volunteers and will contact a mentor when we get a new member. Please contact Lynda if you have questions or if you can volunteer to be a phone mentor. We need you!

#### MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please send this membership form with your dues to Lynda Nichols, 1038 Maryland Ave. Schenectady, 12308

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Membership choices: Student \$20 Individual \$55 Family \$75 (Needs Adjustments can be made.)  
*These yearly dues are not tax deductible*

*Save the date:* Wednesday, May 12<sup>th</sup> at 7pm in the McChesney Room at the Public Library.

The Schenectady County Working Group on Girls (SCWGG), a community collaboration established by the LWV and AAUW five years ago, will present a community forum on this year's project. The First Annual Girls' Day Out began with 150 City School 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls being bussed to the Glen Sanders Mansion in November for a day's program building relationship skills and expressing themselves through the arts. This was followed by five at-school sessions to build self-awareness and self-esteem in small groups led by volunteer 'Muses,' culminating in a celebration near Mother's Day to share their experiences with each other and a significant woman in their life.

This all happened thanks to the dedication of our Working Group on Girls, our volunteer workshop leaders, our volunteer 'Muses' leading the Girls' Circles, the middle school clinicians, and our funders. Join us to hear from some of those who participated (girls, workshop leaders, Muses, clinicians) about what we did, what we learned, and where we hope to go from here.

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### **Trash Talk: A Look at Solid Waste Planning**

Submitted by Ruth Bonn, Environment Committee Chair

At the January Environment Committee meeting, Jeff Edwards, Schenectady County Planner for Solid Waste and Recycling Coordinator addressed the question of what happens to your trash once it has been collected. Currently the Schenectady County Inter-municipal Planning Unit, which include the towns, villages, the city and the county as lead agency, assigns responsibilities to communities. The planning unit has no budget and little power. It specifies what particular materials must be recycled by businesses and by private residences, but communities make their own regulations about how materials are recycled and collected.

The City of Schenectady is the only place in the County where trash pick up service is provided. The Village of Scotia contracts with the City. In the towns, individuals contract with private haulers. Apartment owners, businesses, and schools must hire their own haulers in the City as well as in the towns. Some municipalities may not require that businesses recycle. The City is not in compliance with its own ordinance, which requires the separation of recyclables. All haulers are not doing it and the city is not enforcing. Jeff suggested that the LWV could get involved in urging the City to enforce the code.

Albany is spearheading a regional approach to waste management because it is facing the closing of its landfill in 8 years. It has three alternatives:

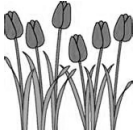
1-export waste, compost food waste, recycle.

2-create a *solid waste planning authority* to write regulations, raise revenues, and have *flow control* (i.e. direct the stream of recyclables and waste to facilities of its choosing).

3-create a *regional waste authority*. A regional authority would have all the above powers but serve a larger population. A population of about 700 thousand would be needed to support such a facility. A waste energy facility could be built where waste is burned, creating useable energy. Any leftover debris (ash) would be exported. So far, Schenectady County has not supported the effort.

The local leagues in the Capital Region studied the issue in 1991 and have a position in support of a regional approach to solid waste planning which was reaffirmed in 2009. The Solid Waste Management Partnership ([www.capitalregionlandfill.com](http://www.capitalregionlandfill.com)) is leading the effort.

## APRIL CALENDAR of Events



Tues, Apr 6... LWV Board, 1400 Keyes Ave., 4-6 pm  
Wed, Apr 7.....Health in Schenectady, McChesney Room, Central Library, 7-9 pm.  
Mon, Apr 12...Environment Committee, Moon & River Café, South Ferry St., Noon  
Mon, Apr 12... Working Group on Girls, YWCA, Washington Ave., 3:30pm

Mon, Apr 19...Health Committee, Moon and River Café, 1:30 pm.  
Thurs, Apr 22...Judicial/AT Committee, 1436 Lowell Rd., 4 pm. Guest Speaker, Family Court Judge JoAnne Assini will discuss juvenile justice issues in the Family Court.  
Tues, Apr 27...Promise: A Mentoring Program, Craig St. Boys' & Girls' Club, Noon.

### **The Board of Elections will hold demonstrations of the new voting machines on the following dates:**

April 7 & 9 ---- Glenville Senior Center 11:00am – Noon	May 1 – Rotterdam Town Hall 9 – Noon
April 12 -- SCCC 9:00 – Noon	May 3 – Duanesburg Senior Center – 11:30 – 1
April 14 – Glenville Municipal Center --- 5-7pm	May 6 – Duanesburg Community Center – 5-7:30pm
April 17 – Glenville Municipal Center 9 – Noon	May 8 – Schenectady County BOE – 10 – 1pm
April 21 – Rotterdam Senior Center – 11am – Noon	May 13 -- Schenectady County BOE – 5-7pm
April 22 – Niskayuna Senior Center – 11am – Noon	
April 22 -- Niskayuna Town Hall – 5-7pm	
April 24 – Niskayuna Town Hall 9 – Noon	
April 27 – Niskayuna Town Board Mtg – 7pm	
April 27 – Rotterdam Town Hall 5-7pm	

**Mark your calendars for “Albany On the Record” on May 5<sup>th</sup> in Albany!  
The state League, in coordination with NYPIRG, Common Cause and Citizens Union, has received funding to organize an educational forum in Albany on government reform issues.**

**The gubernatorial candidates and current legislative leaders will be invited to respond to questions on their support for reform efforts in the area of campaign finance, redistricting, election law (absentee ballot process, voting machines) and ethics. We will be sending you more information  
We need to show the politicians that people want a change in Albany!**