



# The Midland Voter

## The League of Women Voters of the Midland Area

January 2014 (Vol. 46, Number 3)

[www.lwv-midland.org](http://www.lwv-midland.org)

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*You are invited!*

### Midland LWV Calendar

- Wed. Jan. 22:** National and local program planning, 1 to 3 p.m. Conference Room A at the Grace A. Dow Memorial Library.
- Wed. Feb. 5:** Board Meeting at 1 p.m., Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, Conference Room A. All LWV members welcome.
- Thurs. Feb. 6:** Joint meeting with the Chippewa Nature Center on agriculture at CNC. GMOs (Genetically Modified Organisms) and agricultural subsidies will be discussed. 7 p.m.
- Thurs. Feb. 14:** Happy 94<sup>th</sup> Birthday League of Women Voters of the U.S.A!
- Tues. Feb. 25:** Go to the polls (and take all your friends) to vote to renew millage to support our Midland County public schools!
- Wed. March 5:** Board Meeting at 1 p.m., Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, Conference Room A. All LWV members welcome.
- Mon. March 17:** Radio Days. This is our annual fundraiser; WMPX 1490 AM Radio, Midland.
- Tues. March 18:** Community Conversations with the Center for Michigan; 7 p.m. at the Whiting Forest.
- Mon. March 24:** Presentation and consensus meeting on LWVUS Agricultural Study. 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the Strosacker Center, 220 W. Main. Lunch provided.
- Wed. April 2:** Board Meeting at 1 p.m., Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, Conference Room A. All LWV members welcome.
- Tues. April 8:** Education update meeting, 9:30 a.m. to noon at Terry Townley's, 6112 Siebert.
- Tues. April 15:** Consensus for LWVMI education update. 1 to 4 p.m. Strosacker Center, 220 W. Main.
- Wed. May 7:** Board Meeting at 1 p.m., Grace A. Dow Memorial Library, Conference Room A. All LWV members welcome.
- Wed. May 14:** Annual Meeting and dinner, Midland Holiday Inn, 6 p.m. Speaker: Bridgette Gransden, Midland County Administrator/Controller.

## Greetings From our President

Happy New Year to the Midland Area LWV! As is often the case, the second half of the League year is jammed with a lot of opportunities for participation and learning. Check out our calendar and the related articles; I hope these are of interest to you.

Our two studies for this year are updates of current League positions. The first one on the calendar is an update of the LWVUS (national) position on agriculture. This position was first adopted in 1988 and needs to be updated because of the significant changes in the field of agriculture – for example: **a)** The growth in large commercial operations that produce the bulk of farm commodities raises economic and environmental management questions; **b)** genetically modified crops, which were not used in agriculture until the 1990's, are now widespread and a subject of controversy; **c)** organic farming has become a rapidly growing trend – is it sustainable?

Our second study is an update of the LWVMI positions on public education. Currently there are three State positions on education (Structure, Financing and Goals; Public School Academies; and Teacher Certification). The goal is a single position encompassing these areas plus other aspects of education not addressed in the original positions (e.g., technology).

Advocacy on public policy issues is one of the most important activities of the League of Women Voters, and it requires a League position from which to advocate. That's why it's so important to have relevant positions at the national, state and local levels. Help us support these efforts that are so critical to the League, and learn a lot in the process!

In addition to our studies, we have other activities for League involvement coming up. We'll be doing **national and local program planning on January 22**. We would love to have your input on what you think are the priority issues for League efforts. Next month is our **“Current Issues in Agriculture” program on Feb. 6** -- this requires no homework and will provide some good background information for the Ag study. The **“Community Conversations”** that our League is hosting on **March 18** is an excellent opportunity to tell our public officials what we think. And who among us doesn't like to do that?!

I hope to see you at some of these offerings!

*Sue McCollister*

## GMO's and Ag Subsidies

GMO's (genetically modified organisms) and agricultural subsidies will be highlighted at our joint program with the **Chippewa Nature Center on Feb. 6**. The program will begin at 7 p.m. at the CNC. Julie Cotton, advisor for the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Specialization at Michigan State University will tell us about GMO's and Dave Claerhout, Midland County Executive Director for the USDA Farm Service Agency will present an overview of agricultural subsidies. Both of these topics will be addressed in our national agriculture update so plan to come and bring all your friends.

## Updating League Positions

This spring we will have consensus meetings on Federal Agriculture Policy and Public Education in Michigan, affectionately known by some in our League as **Aggie and Eddie**. These meetings are vital to keeping our positions relevant to changing conditions. The League can take action only if we have an applicable position and while this can be frustrating as events sometimes overtake us, our strength lies in a truly informed membership. Even if you have heard it before, the definition of consensus is worth repeating. Here is the statement from LWVUS.

“What is a consensus? It is easier to say what consensus is not, than what it is. Consensus is not a vote; rather, consensus is mutual agreement of League members arrived at through discussion. During discussion, everyone has an opportunity to express their viewpoints, and the issue is examined from all sides... until it becomes apparent that consensus has/has not been reached on each question. ”

We are not expected to become experts overnight but to share thoughtful opinions as intelligent, informed lay people.

### *LWVUS Agriculture Update:*

The material for the LWVUS agriculture study including the consensus questions has been posted at <<http://www.lwv.org/member-resources/agriculture-update>>. This link is also on the Midland LWV website under Program Resources. The background papers and the consensus questions are divided by topics and if you feel overwhelmed, pick two or three to study in depth rather than skimming through everything. If we spread the work it will be much more manageable.

We are sharing a meeting with the Chippewa Nature Center on February 6th featuring GMO's and Agricultural Subsidies, two of the major topics in this update (see article above). **A consensus meeting is scheduled for March 24, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., at the Strosacker Center, 220 W. Main Street.** A light lunch will be provided. The national deadline for consensus is April 18.

### *LWVMI Education Update:*

Education is a hot topic all across the state and most League members are aware of the need for reform in financing, dealing with publicly funded alternatives to regular schools and managing new forms of learning. Nearly every week new recommendations are put forth and the proposed solutions vary widely. LWVMI is advocating where possible under our existing positions but the need for an update is clear if we are to address current issues. A summary of recent developments and LWVMI's actions may be found at <http://www.lwvmi.org/issues/publicEd>.

The consensus for the Education Update is due May 1. The materials are posted at <[http://lwvmi.org/member/mem\\_studies.html](http://lwvmi.org/member/mem_studies.html)> and the link is also on our website under Program Resources. **A preliminary meeting is planned on April 8 from 9:30 a.m. to noon at Terry Townley's, 6112 Siebert. The consensus meeting will be held on April 15 from 1 to 4 p.m. at the Strosacker Center, 220 W. Main St.**

Please mark your calendars and participate in both of these updates!

### **Vote on Tuesday Feb. 25 to Support our Schools!**

Voters are being asked to approve a **renewal** of 1.5 mills for 5 years to support the Midland, Bullock Creek, Coleman, and Meridian Schools. The funds will be used for operations.

The Midland County Revenue Enhancement Millage will increase funding for each district by more than \$400 per pupil beyond the state foundation. This is a renewal so the 1.5 mills will remain the same as 2013 taxes. *A yes vote is essential at a time when state funding is dropping.* The Midland LWV supports the passage of this request.

Absentee ballots are available if you cannot attend the polls on election day.

### **And Volunteer to be a Poll Watcher**

Board member Carole Swinehart attended the committee for millage renewal and learned that **78 "poll workers" are needed on election day.** LWV members should be among the prime watchers. Be a Poll Watcher on election day and help support the millage. Call Carole: 636-7239 or email her [cmswinehart@charter.net](mailto:cmswinehart@charter.net).

## **Community Conversations – Our Priorities for Michigan**

Our League is hosting a "Community Conversations" session on March 18 at 7 p.m. at the Whiting Forest Center. This is one of over 150 sessions conducted throughout the state by the Center for Michigan. Discussion topics are:

- How you feel about Michigan today
- Education
- Economy & Prosperity
- Quality of Life
- Public Money Priorities

This is a great opportunity to give our input on statewide issues. The Center for Michigan will give the results of these Conversations to the 2014 candidates. Previous Community Conversations have had a positive impact on actions of our state leaders.

## Community Conversations (cont.)

There's a limit of sixty participants in our session and we will be inviting others in the community to participate. **If you are interested in participating, please let Sue McCollister ([suedonmc@aol.com](mailto:suedonmc@aol.com) or 631-4180) know.** We'll begin taking reservations in early February and will hold spots for our League members.

The Center for Michigan is a nonprofit, nonpartisan "think-and-do tank". It publishes the online *Bridge* magazine. More information on the Community Conversations can be found at <http://thecenterformichigan.net/community-conversations/>.

## Radio Days 2014 and 2015

Packets are in the hands of our members who will sell radio ads for Sunshine Week this year. That means it's time to start thinking about **Radio Days 2015**.

For those who are not familiar with the term "Radio Days," it is the name of our League's annual fundraiser. Sunshine Week occurs every March in recognition of the transparency in our government provided by the Freedom of Information and Open Meetings Acts. This year it will be March 16 through 22. Our League provides public service announcements (PSA's) for broadcast during Sunshine Week.

Through the cooperation of WMPX/WMRX, we raise money for our local projects by selling sponsorship for these PSA's to locally owned businesses. WMPX/WMRX airs these PSA's with "tags" naming the businesses that have paid to sponsor them and lets our League keep 100% of the fees we collect. While we are selling PSA "tags", we are also able to offer business ads to those business owners who prefer them. Again, thanks to WMPX/WMRX, our League keeps 100% of the fees we collect for these ads.

Our budget (approved at the annual meeting last May) is based earning \$2,000 with this fundraiser. We use these dollars locally for costs like room rental, mileage for speakers, and refreshments. We also use these funds to print the brochure, "**Your Elected Officials**," and for attendance at state level conferences. We are able to offer great local programs throughout the year with dollars from this single fundraiser because we save money by scheduling meetings where there is no room cost and charge those attending for food that is offered. Also members donate refreshments. Nevertheless, we have program expenses and we depend on money from our Radio Days fundraiser to cover them.

**Here's why we must begin now to think about Radio Days 2015:** We have only 8 members going out as sales representatives this year! Six of them are Board members; two are non-office-holding members. They will visit 31 local businesses and solicit the purchase of ads/PSA's. This lack of representatives and small number of business contacts will make it very difficult to reach our budgeted goal.

Our League is made up of nearly 70 members. Next year we must have more sales persons and more leads for business contacts. Please begin thinking about next year. Will you agree to contact three or four local business owners to ask them to purchase ads or PSA's for Sunshine Week? Will you help us enlarge our list of potential business contacts? Call Karen Sherwood (our treasurer) at 832-3533 or e-mail her at [karsherwood@att.net](mailto:karsherwood@att.net) to volunteer for next year. Let's get started now to assure success next year!

## Dick Dolinski Reports on Midland County Needs Assessment

At our January Board Meeting Dick Dolinski updated us on activities addressing the Midland County Needs Assessment (<http://www.midlandcountydashbord.org/>). Dr. Dolinski is the founder and president emeritus of the Legacy Center for Community Success and has been closely involved with the County Needs Assessment.

An impressive amount of effort is ongoing within our community. Highlights from his presentation:

- **A Shortfall in poverty-related learning and educational achievement** was one of the top 13 areas of need. He presented data showing a strong correlation between poverty and low educational achievement. To help address this gap, the Midland Area Community Foundation has awarded grants for after school programming, job preparation training, science education and a college/career readiness program. He stressed the importance of quality early childhood education as a factor in future achievement, and the difficulties for low-income families in accessing this advantage.

• *Inadequate public transportation* is another area identified in the high need category. Our current public transportation is viewed as too expensive and unreliable. A transportation task force has been convened to look at options for improvement.

*Dolinski (cont.)*

• All of the other top 13 identified needs are also being addressed using a wide variety of resources. The remaining top needs are: *Lack of affordable housing/shelter for low income earners, increased substance abuse, declining access to health care for all/increasing demand, obesity rates among children and adults, access to mental health services, need for senior services, concern for continuing community safety, better coordination of services, insufficient career technical education opportunities, aging infrastructure/maintaining community assets, expansion of non-motorized trails and improved use of outdoor assets.*

At our planning meeting on January 22 we will discuss opportunities for the League to contribute to any of these efforts. All League members are invited to participate in this session.

## **“Great Women of the Great Lakes Bay Region”**

Congratulations to **Dr. Audrey Stryker**, a newer member of our League who was named one of eight “Great Women of the Great Lakes Bay Region”, which honors local women for their commitments to improve quality of life. She will receive the award on Feb. 27 at a reception at Saginaw Valley State University. She is a full-time doctor at the Women’s Ob-Gyn clinic in Saginaw and volunteers at a free clinic in Bay City. Also, she helped create the iWish Foundation designed to provide health care resources to women and children in underdeveloped communities. She has traveled with her foundation to Haiti to deliver medical equipment and instruct medical people there. Dr. Stryker’s mother Rhosan is also a member of our League.

Many thanks to **Rosemary Wilson**, who again hosted our annual Holiday Party in December. Eighteen of our members attended. Rosemary also thanks Terry Townley for helping and Cathy Heng, Fran Hamburg and Sue McCollister, along with the board members who stayed to clean up!

## **Human Trafficking**

**Did you know: three of the biggest businesses in the world are drug trafficking, human trafficking and the illegal arms trade.** There are 27 million people in slavery today, more now than at any other time in human history. Michigan ranks fifth in the states dealing in human trafficking. State Senator Judy Emmons and Midland Police Dept. officer Dan Keeler presented a program on human trafficking in November at Northwood University. Our League co-sponsored the program along with the AAUW and the Zonta Club of Midland. Senator Emmons pointed out that human trafficking is a modern form of slavery and is widespread, occurring here in Michigan. We are close to the Canadian border and waterways, which increases the likelihood of trafficking. Michigan has had cases of traffickers prostituting minors to Michigan truck stops and then over to hotels in Toledo, OH which has been ranked as the fourth largest city in the U.S. for trafficking. Major gatherings of people at events like an international auto show or the Super Bowl are prime targets for human trafficking. Traffickers look for victims who are vulnerable because of their illegal immigration status or limited English proficiency, or who may be in situations of economic hardship, political instability, natural disasters or other causes.

Senator Emmons has introduced a 19-bill Senate package to crack down on this vicious enterprise. She pointed out that half of the cases of trafficking are youngsters involved in foster care situations. Predators also stalk malls for young girls, and sometimes young men, who can be coerced and convinced by master manipulators. There are even parents who will traffic their children. She urged us all to join her cause; we can call or email her office, [SenJEmmons@senate.michigan.gov](mailto:SenJEmmons@senate.michigan.gov) or 866-305-2133. The human trafficking hotline is 888-373-7888 and there are good web sites to learn more, such as [www.polarisproject.org](http://www.polarisproject.org).

*Julie Schmidt*

## Acquisition of Donations (Gifts) – Revisiting our 1981 Position

Have you ever been to Midland's 500-acre Pine River Park? Even heard of it? This city park is out in Midland County (Porter Township – north of Shepherd Road between 7 and 8 mile Roads)) but it is a Midland City park. It was given to the city in 1967 and accepted without much dissent. City attorney Jim Branson calls this gift a "cute puppy." A cute puppy is accepted by someone who is not thinking of the care this "cute puppy" gift is going to require over the years.

Although Pine River Park is undeveloped, it is a responsibility and a cost to the city of Midland. Its uses are determined by its designation – a public, city park. It cannot be sold or developed into anything other than a park. The city has to enforce park ordinances and maintain this way-out-of-town park.

Fast forward to 1979-80 when the city was offered another piece of land – the Whiting Property. This was offered as a donation to Midland, provided it would be preserved as a public park for citizens to enjoy. Many city officials were prepared to accept the property; it was a free and beautiful piece of land. But others pointed out the problem; it would require high maintenance and would take a valuable piece of city property off the tax rolls – a huge cost to the city shortly down the road. This gift, they claimed, was another expensive "cute puppy." The resulting battle lasted for months and prompted the Midland LWV to undertake a study resulting in the position "Acquisition of Gifts by Governmental Bodies," adopted in 1981. In the end, the city turned down the donation and the property was developed privately; it is now the Whiting Forest. It's still a park, but privately run and not a burden to city taxpayers.

The City of Midland receives donations all the time, says Mr. Branson. Julie Schmidt and Karen Sherwood interviewed him in December about donations to the city. Gifts for the library, to upgrade existing city parks, for the golf course and many others are common and the city has rules for accepting donations. They have to be transparent and no city employees are allowed to accept personal donations; fruit baskets and free soft drinks for employees at Christmas are not even accepted. But the general rule covering donations to the city itself is that they will be accepted. The gifts are evaluated 100% before they are presented to the city council for approval. The city has an ethics ordinance and an ethics board to cover such donations. The gifts are announced to the public before they are accepted.

Karen and Julie learned much more about acquisition of gifts from Mr. Branson. But as for city parks, although he loves parks, Mr. Branson would not want the city to ever accept a gift as a "park" again. It is too restrictive – a park cannot be changed no matter what the future circumstances would be. But if you want to donate your property designated as an "open space", he would expect the city would accept it.

### With Sympathy

We were saddened to learn of the death of LWV member **Larry Pillepich**, 82, on November 25. Larry's wife **Maureen**, a long-term member of our League, convinced Larry to join when League membership opened up for men. We offer all our sympathy to Maureen and their two daughters.

## Help in Enrolling for Health Insurance Under the Affordable Care Act

The LWV supported the passage of the Affordable Care Act and also supports its implementation. If you know someone needing assistance in enrolling in the Health Insurance Marketplace, the Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency can help. Jennifer Raymond, a federally trained and certified healthcare navigator, is available to answer questions and provide assistance in completing the application. She can be reached at 877-212-7561 on Mondays and Wednesdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. and Fridays from 8 am to noon. Enrollment will remain open through March 2014. Mid-Michigan Community Action Agency is a nonprofit human services agency serving Bay, Clare, Gladwin, Mecosta, Midland and Osceola counties.