

THE VOTER

FEBRUARY 2010

MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TARRANT COUNTY



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
of Tarrant County
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“NOT FOR WOMEN ONLY”

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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- League's 90th Anniversary
- Direction for the League
- Employment opportunity



www.lwvtarrantcounty.org

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HELP WANTED

The League has a job opening for a part-time **Office Administrator** and a volunteer **Webmaster**.

Do **you** or anyone you know possess these skills? Be on the lookout for a talented individual for these positions.

See page 4 of this *VOTER* for more info.

LEAGUE ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



You are cordially invited to celebrate the League's 90th Anniversary at a Luncheon with the League of Women Voters of Tarrant County

Special Guests

*Chandler Roosevelt Lindsley
and Shelley Kofler, News Director for KERA*

Thursday, February 11th

11:15 am to 11:45 am Pre-Luncheon Reception

12:00 pm to 1:30 pm Luncheon and Program

Trinity Terrace, 1600 Texas Street, Fort Worth

\$15 - League Members

\$20 - Non-League Members

*For Reservations contact Donnetta Howard
no later than Monday, February 8th
817-348-8683 or lwvtarrantcounty@sbcglobal.net*

LET'S FOCUS ON THE BASICS OF GOOD GOVERNMENT

By Linda Pavlik, 25 year plus member

Democracy is a treasure that we value and which the League of Women Voters has worked diligently to preserve. One would think that in this 21st century, here in America, we would understand and nurture the tenets of good government. The Texas Open Meetings Act clearly states, "Government is the servant and not the master of the people." Who among us does not truly believe this?

Open Meetings

Transparency is synonymous with open government, and we've trusted this law to keep elected officials from hiding behind closed doors when making important decisions. A recent Star-Telegram editorial stated, "Officials doing their civic duties in good faith shouldn't fear accountability." We as League members surely agree with this and should rally against any changes to this important legislation. Presently, the Texas Municipal League, in which many of our local cities are active, is pushing to weaken the consequences should any elected official knowingly and intentionally act counter to the law. There are concerns expressed by some that criminal penalties—which could mean imprisonment—are too tough of a sentence for conducting business on the phone, by emails, or in "closed" sessions so the public doesn't know what is going on. But if a person is doing the job right—and being open and honest with us citizens, this law is appropriate—just the way it is.

Open Records

In another situation, the City of Fort Worth is expressing concerns that the state's open records act is too cumbersome. Staffers often demand to know a requestor's address, telephone number, phone number, email address—and the reason the information is wanted. But the law does not require you to provide any of this; in fact, it is illegal for you to be required to

say why you are making the request. Also, the City now wants to stop providing copies of police reports requested by defense lawyers, even though these are certainly public information, because of the time and expense involved. Again, let's reflect back to the fact that government is really the servant of the people; the volume of work is not really relevant.

Food Safety

A 22-year-old children's dance instructor was paralyzed from the waist down after being stricken by E.coli found in frozen hamburger meat from a national grocery chain. A number of years ago, according to the New York Times, a company began injecting ground beef with ammonia to kill E.coli and salmonella and selling its "cheaper" product to fast food restaurants and school lunch programs with USDA approval. Only recently, two 27,000 pound batches of beef were recalled for contamination. In the meantime, just think how many kids—and fast food purchasers—suffered! Now the USDA is trying to improve its systems and regulations. But as the newspaper stated in a recent editorial, "Consumers should not have to wait until somebody in the school lunch program blows the whistle."

A Strong Unified Voice

The League's mission states that our organization "encourages informed and active participation in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy." I urge you to think about issues like these—and join me in pushing for two League studies; one being open government and one being food safety. I have thought about which is more important, but they must go hand-in-hand. After all, the government must be the advocate of the people. If you would like to talk about these issues, please contact me at 817-332-2972 or pavlik@pavlikandassociates.com.

What would you like to see brought up in March local program planning? Make your voice heard in the March *VOTER* by submitting your brief program planning ideas to Nancy Stevens (kenandnan@sbcglobal.net) and Donnetta Howard (lwwarrantcounty@sbcglobal.net) no later than February 15.