



Westport Voter

March 2007

Visit our website: www.lvwestportct.org

Volunteer Fair: Focus on Bridgeport Children and Families

Sunday, April 1 4:00 – 6:00pm

Center for Senior Activities, 21 Imperial Avenue, Westport



Peter Hurst, President Community Bank

Bridgeport Schools: Why Should We Care?

On the cold night of March 5th, Westporters participated in a Community Conversation at Westport Library to learn about the campaign for an urban/suburban coalition to advocate for the improvement of Bridgeport schools.

Dr. John Ramos, Superintendent, spoke of the Mission of the Bridgeport Public Schools to graduate all students college-ready, in contrast to the reality of an \$11 million budget shortfall last year, which forced the premature closing of two schools and staff cutbacks. Peter Hurst, President of Community Bank, highlighted the economic disparity between Westport, with a median household income of \$135,000, and Bridgeport's median household income of \$37,000. Because of the correlation between the quality of public schools and the prospects for economic development, the Bridgeport area business community stands strongly behind the efforts to improve the public school system.

Bridgeport is Connecticut's most under funded school district, and Marilyn Ondrasik, Executive Director of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition, illustrated the disparity in state funding provided to the three largest cities. Despite having a student population that is 95% economically disadvantaged, arriving from homes in which over 60 different languages are spoken, Bridgeport receives almost \$1,000 less per student from the state than does Hartford, with a roughly equivalent school population size. BCAC advocates for more equitable funding, and encourages Westporters to join their efforts.

Find out how to become involved by volunteering with the families and children of Bridgeport.
Come to the Volunteer Fair - Bring a friend or two!

Budget Study Consensus Meetings



Tuesday, March 20
7 - 9 PM

At the home of Ann Gill, 53 High Point Road

Wednesday, March 21
10 AM to noon

In the Malloy Room at
Earthplace, 10 Woodside Lane

Local Program Planning Meeting Save the Date – Wednesday, April 25

League members are invited to the annual Local Program Planning Meeting, at which we will discuss the up-coming year's priorities. This year the meeting will be held the morning of Wednesday, April 25th. The exact time and location will be announced in next month's *Voter*.

If you are interested in proposing a priority, study or discussion issue, please consider contacting us in advance so that we can effectively address the issue at the meeting.

We look forward to seeing you at the meeting.

Pippa Bell Ader 221-1555

Alison Rivard 254-2079



The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, community-based political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. It was founded in 1920 as an outgrowth of the 72 year struggle to win voting rights for women.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

PRESIDENTS

Eileen Flug , 227 -8474
 Laura Gallagher, 221-1746

PAST PRESIDENT

Lisa Shufro, 221-1350

TREASURER

Jim Graves, 895-3271

SECRETARY

Joyce Orkand, 226 -9953

VICE PRESIDENTS

Community Services
 Jane Fraser, 226-0686
 Yvonne Senturia, 226-6683

Member Services

Athena Ploumis Bradley, 227-8966

Helene Crawford, 227-2572

Program/Advocacy

Pippa Bell Ader, 221-1555

Allison Rivard, 254-2079

Voter Services

Sally Galan, 222-1850

Jackie Gordon, 803-3725

DIRECTORS

Rose Anne Preston, 454-3547

Jackie Cutrone , 222-8772

Liz -Ann Koos , 227 - 2024

Voter Editor

Jane Eyes, 227-0782

OFF BOARD

Member Handbook, Kitty Graves
 Webmaster, Marilyn Bakker

Membership Administrator, Joyce Netherton

Greetings Everyone:

This time of year many of us hibernate in our homes waiting out the worst of winter, but as League members, our flurry of activity has us all heated up. To give you some idea how feverishly busy we've been, we recently held Pie and Politics, State Program Planning and Winter Warm-up and co-sponsored the Library's Community Conversation "Spotlight on Bridgeport Schools." And we're still going strong.

The Budget Study Committee is putting the finishing touches on its consensus study presentation and we're nearly ready to share our results with you. As we mentioned last month and are repeating again, we need your input. Nearly two years of effort has gone into the study, and we urge you all to come and participate in the consensus meetings that will form the basis of a new LWV Local Position. There will be two meetings. The first on Tuesday, **March 20, 7-9pm at the home of Ann Gill, 53 Highpoint Road**, and the second on Wednesday, **March 21, 10am-12pm at Earthplace, Mallory Room, 10 Woodside Lane**. We look forward to seeing you all at one of these meetings.

One final event we'd like to highlight and invite you all to attend (feel free to bring a friend or two along!) is our "**Bridgeport Volunteer Fair: Focus on Children and Families**," **April 1st, 4-6pm at the Center for Senior Activities**. We've assembled an impressive group of Bridgeport organizations to educate us on the various volunteer opportunities that exist there and to offer us the chance to make a difference.

It's been great seeing so many members over the past couple of months, and we look forward to seeing more of you at these two important events.

Stay warm,

Eileen and Laura

LWV WEBSITES

www.lwvwestportct.org
www.lwvct.org (Connecticut)
www.lwv.org (US)

Book Group News

The group will meet to discuss *River of Doubt* by Candace Mallard on March 26 at 1:30 PM at the home of Peg Bishop, 7 Bradley Street. Please contact Peg (226 - 3026) to let her know you will attend the discussion.

April 23 - *Digging to America* by Anne Tyler
 May 21 - *The Doll Maker* - by Harriette Arnow

Multiple copies of the group's selections are available at the Westport Public Library. If you have questions about joining the group, email or call Helene Crawford at helenekc@optonline.net



Welcome New Members

Nancy Bloom
 21 Maple Ave. N.
 259- 9007

Lisa Parrelli Gray
 4 Spicer Court
 341 9397

Alison Fraser Heisler
 167 Imperial Ave.
 341-8925

Pamela Kesselman
 6 Peaceful Lane
 221-1132

Dewey Loselle
 10 Cardinal Road
 454-9722

MARCH ECO ALERT

A web site devoted to the promotion of healthy lawns (www.safelawns.org) states that because of the use of synthetic fertilizers, the US has the poorest soil in terms of mineral quality of any developed nation in the world. Here are just a few of the frightening facts they share:

1. Homeowners and municipalities use up to two thirds of available drinking water on lawn watering during peak times of the growing season.
2. 60% of the nitrogen applied to lawns winds up in groundwater; only 35% of fertilizer ever reaches the plant.
3. Pollution emitted in one hour by a lawn mower equals the amount emitted by a car driven for 360 miles.

The web site has a series of short videos demonstrating how to create a healthy lawn. Spring comes in a couple weeks; it's not too soon to start things about natural lawn care.



Some Background Basics For the League of Women Voters Budget Process Study

The Town of Westport has two separate budgets: the education budget (\$96.5 million) and the Town budget (\$53.7 million) in fiscal year 2006-2007.

Under the Town Charter, the First Selectman is the chief executive officer of the Town. He sets the overall policy and goals for the Town budget. Expenditures are divided into regular operating and capital expenditures, such as for personnel, police cars, etc., and nonrecurring capital expenditures such as for a new fire engine. Nonrecurring capital expenditures (including those of the BOE) are listed in a five-year capital forecast which is updated annually.

The formal process for the Town budget begins following receipt of a memo in December from the Director of Finance, although many department heads have already begun the budget planning process. The memo outlines the increased costs in utilities, etc. and other standards which the First Selectman wishes observed, such as no new hires. The First Selectman approves each department's budget. At the end of this process, when the budget is complete, it is sent to the BOF, which has "all the powers and duties respecting the annual budget of the Town" for approval, and then on to the RTM for final adoption.

A number of Town departments have boards and commissions, which may or may not become involved in the budget process and advocate on behalf of their department. Some of the board or commission members are elected, such as the Planning and Zoning Commission, while others are appointed, such as the Parks and Recreation Commission. The Department of Public Works, and the Fire and Police Departments do not have boards or commissions.

Under Section 10-222 of the State General Statutes, the Board of Education (BOE) is responsible for the Education budget. However, this budget must go to the Town's Board of Finance (BOF) which recommends it for approval by the Representative Town Meeting (RTM).

The Board of Education meets in the summer to set goals and objectives for the following fiscal year (for instance, the summer of '07 planning will be for the 2008-2009 fiscal year.) The Assistant Superintendent for Business is the architect of the school budget. After receiving the BOE's goals and objectives, consulting with the teachers and principals and confirming the student enrollment projections, she prepares the budget. The Superintendent presents the budget to the BOE. The BOE meets several times to discuss the budget, including a full-day meeting in January and a meeting with the Board of Finance, and votes on their recommended budget some time in February. Once the BOE has approved the budget it goes to the BOF and then on to the RTM for adoption.

The Representative Town Meeting (RTM) is the legislative body of the municipal government. It has final say on the budgets. The RTM works through its many committees – e.g. the Environment Committee. By the time the budget comes before the entire 36-member body, the RTM Finance and Education Committees will have attended budget meetings, done in-depth studies and produced written reports, which are sent to all RTM members before the annual budget meetings during the first full week in May. Three evenings are reserved – Monday evening for the Town budget, Tuesday evening for the Board of Education budget and Wednesday evening in case it is needed to finalize the budgets. At these meetings the recommendations of the RTM committees are again reported and also there is time for public comment before the RTM takes its final vote on the two budgets.

Focus: A study of Westport's Budgets

Scope: A study of the budget process for Town departments, including the Education Department. Will include research and review of:

1. Pertinent laws governing the budget process, both state and local
2. The role of the First Selectman, boards and commissions, Town employees, and the public in the budget process
3. The time-line and structure of the budget process
4. Mechanisms for setting priorities, allocating funds and controlling costs
5. How other comparable towns handle their budget process

Consensus Questions

1. To what extent does the Town's budget process ensure participation by residents?
2. To what extent does the Town's budget process identify priorities and reflect them in the budget?
3. To what extent do the timeline and structure of the budget process promote the effectiveness of the budget to meet the Town's needs?



Westport LWV Needs You!!!!

Plant Sale

Calling all LWV gardeners:



Yes, the days are getting longer, the birds are singing louder, and despite that crunchy white stuff on the ground, it will soon be time to start clearing off the winter detritus in your gardens to see what's coming up. As you go about your preliminary spring clean up, please keep the League plant sale in mind.

This has become an important part of our tag sale in recent years, and we rely on contributions of seedlings and divisions from your gardens to make it a success. If you have any questions or need some pots, please contact Lisa Shufro at 221-1350

Back to School with the LWV

As you may know, our League has programs in the schools. In the spring we go to Staples High School to deliver our civics program entitled The Power of One in the second semester American Government classes. This is an interactive program developed to encourage the students to register and vote.



For the younger students we present our annual Reduce, Reuse, Recycle program to every first grade in the district. With the emphasis on making as little garbage as possible, we encourage the kids to be responsible managers of the garbage they do produce.

As you've all heard by now, there are a lot of kids in the school system, so that means we need a lot of presenters for both of these programs. Training will be provided. If you are interested, please contact Lisa Shufro at 221-1350 or

Great things come from Tag Sales Save the date! Friday May 5th & Sat May 6th

With spring almost here and summer around the corner, it's time to clear out some of those unwanted (but valuable) things you've been shifting around for a while now. Don't know what to do with them? The LWV would love your unwanted items that have potential value.

Best-selling items include:

- antiques
- collectibles
- musical instruments
- china
- decorative items
- classic toys
- CDs & DVDs
- jewelry
- Vintage anything too!



Location to be announced.

We will offer terrific second hand bargains. We will help store your items until the sale and even help gather up your stuff. Tax donation forms available. Call Jackie C. at 203 247-4077 or Jackie G. at 203 803-3725 for more info and to volunteer.

Winter Warm-Up



Thanks to our generous hostess Liz-Ann Koos who graciously invited us to have the Winter Warm Up in her lovely home on Sunday, February 11.

It was a great success, the board entertained nineteen new and prospective members.

Environment Committee

Members of the Environment Committee are currently attending a four part workshop on stream exploration and monitoring, focusing on how the health of our waterways is measured, what parameters to look at and why we should be concerned. This program is being taught by staff of River Watch/Harbor Watch and Earthplace.

The information we gather will help the Environment Committee better understand the effects of water run-off (non-point source pollution), an issue of great concern to this community.



If you are interested in joining this committee, please contact Pippa Bell Ader or Alison Rivard.

JOIN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Individual Dues: \$50 Household (limited to 2): \$75

Membership year: July 1 through June 30

Send check made payable to:

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WESTPORT

P.O. Box 285

Westport, CT 06881- 0285

Contributions to LWV Education Fund are tax deductible; LWV dues are not.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- MAR** 15 **Observer Corps** - 9 AM
Action Committee - 11 AM
Library Seminar Room
- 20 **Budget Consensus Meeting** - 7 PM
At home of Ann Gill, 53 Highpoint Road
- 21 **Budget Consensus Meeting** - 10AM
Earthplace, 10 Woodside Lane.
- 26 **Book Group** - 1:30 PM
At the home of Peg Bishop, 7 Bradley Street
- APR** 1 **Bridgeport Volunteer Fair** - 4 - 6 PM
Senior Center, 21 Imperial Avenue
- 4 **Board Meeting** - 9 AM
At home of Laura Gallagher, 7 Sandhopper Trail
- 19 **Observer Corps** - 9 AM
Action Committee - 11 AM
Library Seminar Room
- 23 **Book Group** - 1:30 PM
- 25 **Local Program Planning**

All League meetings are open to all members.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF WESTPORT

Westport Voter
P.O. Box 285
Westport, CT 06881-0285

NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT 110
WESTPORT, CT 06881