

THE VOTER

Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Berea & Madison County

STATE OF COMMUNITIES: Past, Present, Future

Local leaders cite progress, concerns

Connelly says history key to city's search for steady revenue

BY JEANNE HIBBERD

Berea Mayor Steve Connelly gave the first of the League-sponsored "State of the Community" addresses Jan. 8 at the Berea Municipal Center.

Connelly noted that he had read the League's Vision Statement and felt the city was in agreement with the vision put forth.

However, he said it was like "apple pie," noting that we might all agree it's what we want but that doesn't necessarily get us there.

Known for his keen interest in the city's history, Connelly described in detail the series of economic and political events which led to passage of the 2007 tax increase. The history lesson spanned nearly 50 years and was intended to clarify why the City Council came to the conclusion that a more diverse revenue stream was necessary.

Connelly talked about the city's planning history, citing a 1978 Berea Comprehensive Plan, which suggested the city's economic well being was tied to its ability to attract new industries. The plan stated: "Retail trade establishments do not as a rule create economic development."

Connelly noted that manufacturing growth peaked nationally at about the time the 1978 plan was written. Berea's decline in manufacturing didn't start until around 1999, but has continued.

Connelly also described the city's historic property tax rates and why the rates were reduced significantly in the mid-



Richmond Mayor Connie Lawson emphasized city services and her to-do list at Jan. 22 meeting with LWV. See story on Page 5.

1960s due to a combination of increased property assessments and the establishment of a school tax when Berea Community School was built.

At the time, the city felt the citizens would not vote for the school bond issue if property taxes weren't reduced. The occupational tax was adopted around this same time and became the primary source of the city's tax revenue.

Recognizing that decreasing manufacturing jobs left the city in a vulnerable position, the Council felt it unwise to continue under this scenario and proposed the 2007 tax package to diversify the city's revenue sources.

Connelly noted that the city is still heavily dependent on the occupational tax. It accounts for \$4.8 million of the \$6.8 million general fund budget.

The impact of the nation's economic slowdown will have impact locally. Em-

Continued on Page 3

Observer Corps mtg. Feb. 23

Plan to attend and bring a friend to the next LWV member meeting when we work to revive the LWV Observer Corps. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 23 in the Community Room of the Madison County Public Library in Berea. Bad weather in December forced the meeting to February.

**7 p.m. Monday
Feb. 23
Public Library
in Berea**

**B o a r d
m e m b e r s
Jeanne Hibberd and
Howard Bowden are**

organizing the training session with help from long-time LWV members and observers, Joan Peoples and Betty Wray.

LWV will use its Web site and televised meetings to make the task of observing and reporting on local government more convenient. Observers can write up their reports and place them on our newest "blog": LWV Observer Reports.

Through the revival of the Observer Corps, LWV hopes to expand citizens' awareness of the decisions that impact their lives and to promote government transparency and accountability.

A successful program requires citizen power. With a large enough group, we can share the task.

ACTION IN FRANKFORT

Lobbying is underway on two issues supported by the League, with February rallies organized by Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

LWV is once again supporting efforts to restore voting rights to felons who have served their terms.

On Tuesday, Feb. 10, supporters will join in Restoration of Voting Rights Day to support House Bill 70. This bill would place a proposed constitutional amendment on the ballot to automatically restore voting rights to former felons who have completed their sentences.

The purpose of the amendment is to remove the cumbersome process of seeking a governor's pardon in order to participate in voting as the Kentucky Constitution now dictates.

To participate on Feb. 10, arrive at 9 a.m. to Capitol Annex Room 113 to join a lobbying team; at 10 a.m. the group will move to Room 131 for a Press Conference and Speak Out. More details here are available at <http://www.kftc.org/calendar/events/restoration-of-voting-rights-focus-lobby-day>.

A second event is planned the following week, again to support positions shared by LWV and KFTC.

I Love Mountains Day is Tuesday, Feb. 17 to support streamsaver legislation to prevent dumping of waste in Kentucky streams and to end mountain top removal. A march begins at 11 a.m. starting at the Capitol Avenue bridge over the Kentucky

River and ending at the Capitol front steps for a rally beginning at noon. The afternoon will include meetings with legislators. More details and registration here. <http://www.kftc.org/calendar/events/i-love-mountains-day-2009>.

You may also contact KFTCs organizer Lisa Abbott (859-986-1277 x 223 or labbott@kih.net)

To contact your representatives about these and other bills, call the toll-free Legislative Message Line — 800-372-7181 or use this contact information.

State Sen. Ed Worley
Home: (859) 623-6524
Annex: (502) 564-2470

Rep. Harry Moberly
harry.moberly@lrc.ky.gov
Home: (859) 624-2781
Annex: (502) 564-8100 Ext. 607
Work: (859) 622-4997

Rep. Don Pasley
Home: (859) 842-3337
Annex: (502) 564-8100 Ext. 630

Rep. Lonnie Napier
Lonnie.Napier@lrc.ky.gov
Home: (859) 792-4860
Annex: (502) 564-8100 Ext. 649
Work: (859) 792-2535

LWV_EVENTS

Next Board Meeting
6 p.m., Feb. 9 Home
of Jeanne Hibberd

7 p.m. Feb. 23
LWV Observer Corps
Training and Mem-
ber Meeting

March 23 *TBA; Con-
sensus on National Popu-
lar Vote Compact

VOTER DEADLINES

March 1 for March Voter
April 1 for April Voter

The Voter is published monthly
September through May by the
League of Women Voters of Berea &
Madison County.
To report ideas or corrections, contact
Voter Editor Libby Fraas
<libby.fraas@eku.edu>

E-mail LWV
lwvbmc@yahoo.com

Mail information to
LWV of Berea & Madison County
P.O. Box 254, Berea, KY 40403.

Copies of the Voter are on the Web at
<http://lwvbmc.org>



Support the League of Women Voters

Thanks for your support for our candidate forums, voter registration and voter education materials. Make check payable to League of Women Voters (LWV).

Mail to P.O. Box 254, Berea KY 40403.

DONATION amount _____

Interested in MEMBERSHIP?

Yearly Membership Dues: *Individual \$40; Family or Household \$60 ; Student \$5*

MEMBERSHIP Dues _____

CONTACT INFORMATION Renewal New Total _____

Your name: _____

Your address: _____

E-mail address: _____ Phone number: _____

Today's Date _____



Connelly said Berea needs to emphasize tourist draws such as Berea College.

Taxes part of planning for Berea's future

Continued from Page One

ployee withholding is down by 3 percent. Connelly suggested the impact would be felt in the first half of 2009.

He also said building permits are down from 15 being issued in October to two in December.

"This may be the rainy day we were trying to plan for, and it may have come sooner than what we thought," Connelly said.

"2009 will be a year with few projects and where management will be paramount," he said.

Connelly also discussed the status of a variety of projects. The first phase of the bypass is essentially complete. Phase two is in the process of being redesigned to reduce the cost. It should be bid in the summer of 2010. The state cut about \$8 million out of the phase two design, essentially reducing certain sections from four-lane to two-lane and reducing the bridge over Silver Creek to two-lane.

When asked how Berea's tax rate of 10 cents per \$100 assessed value compares to other cities, Connelly noted the average rate in Kentucky is 22 cents per \$100 valuation. Richmond is 15 cents per \$100.

Another source of revenue is a tax on insurance: Richmond's insurance tax is 8% compared with Berea's 6%. Danville's insurance tax is 6%. The insurance tax excludes health insurance.

A utility rate adjustment was implemented last year and caused some concern. He noted that a new water reservoir will

require an investment of \$10 million.

Connelly asked, "What is the Berea economy? What should it be?" Obviously an educated workforce is important, he said.

Connelly suggested one step is to embrace tourism. He noted that he wasn't just talking about crafts. Berea College is the first draw for tourists.

He suggested we focus on whatever draws people to Berea: workshops, dance, craft, a crafts school, a retirement community and entrepreneurship. His point: We can no longer rely on the old standard of industrial recruitment.

Connelly suggested Berea hasn't done holistic planning since the 1950s and 60s and, maybe it's time.

Near the end of his presentation, Connelly ran through a list of projects that were underway or completed.

These included: Menelaus and Mayde roads; widening Short Street.; a Jane to Jill Street connector by Wal-Mart; Prospect Street improvements, including a new bridge over Silver Creek and sidewalk to Peachbloom Hill; industrial park improvements/ vocational school; parks and recreation improvements; a bypass overlay ordinance (approved); the opening of the Veterans Administration Clinic; a private retirement center (which is currently on hold); and Lowes, which is scheduled to open in 2010.



Kent Clark says county will weather economic slump.

15 years and counting...

Growth has been a key component of Judge Kent Clark's 15-year tenure as head of Madison County government.

County budget: then, \$7 million; now, \$60 million.

Population: then, 55,000; now, 81,000.

County road trucks; then, 7; now, 23.

Besides numbers, Clark was quick to point out the progress made in terms of quality of life. In 1994, only 40 percent of the county residents had clean, safe drinking water. Now improvements in water lines and sewer services have extended that to 99 percent, he said.

Clark's comparisons were a major part of his State of the County address delivered to the LWV Jan. 15 in the Madison Fiscal Court Room and replayed on cable television.

Two departments that developed during his administration are Planning and Zoning and Parks.

He said that adopting a plan and setting up a Planning Commission was the most important accomplishment for the future of the county.

What is the **National Popular Vote Compact**?

. . . and why LWVUS wants YOUR opinion

By Libby Fraas

Local league members will be looking at a very quick and focused “consensus” study in March on whether to change LWV’s position on electing the president.

The current national position adopted in 1970 and revised and updated in 1982 and 2004 calls for abolishment of the electoral college.

At its convention in 2008, delegates voted to review its position again by studying the advisability of using the National Popular Vote compact among the states as a method for election of the president.

The NPV compact is an initiative to elect the president by nationwide popular vote. It does not do away with the electoral college, but it instead

Current Position

Promote the election of the President and Vice-President by direct-popular-vote and work to abolish the Electoral College.

uses the mechanism of electors to allow states to award its votes to the presidential candidate who receives the largest number of popular votes nationwide.

Because it leaves the electoral college in place, it does not require a Constitutional Amendment, but some say it may be subject to Congressional approval or lawsuits.

States would agree to direct their state electors to vote for the individual that received the most votes nationwide. This method would only take place when enough states adopted it to guarantee a majority of the electoral votes, i.e. states representing a total of at least 270 electoral votes.

States not part of the NPV Compact could assign electoral votes in the traditional way of how voters in their state voted, but could not change the outcome of the election.

Local leagues should study the issue and address the advisability of adopting the National Popular Vote Compact as a method to bring about election of the president by popular vote.

Members can access the seven questions at lwvus.org under For Members/Projects & Programs. Look for details on the consensus meeting in the March *VOTER*.

DID YOU KNOW?

■ Four states have adopted the National Popular Vote Compact. They are Hawaii, Illinois, New Jersey and Maryland.

■ A bill to change the way Kentucky allocates its electoral votes and support the National Popular Vote Compact is back in Frankfort. HB 170 is sponsored by Lexington Democrat Rep. Ruth Ann Palumbo.



■ A survey of 800 Kentucky voters conducted on December 17-18, 2008 showed 80% overall support for a national popular vote for President. Support was 88% among Democrats, 71% among Republicans, and 70% among independents. Source: <http://www.nationalpopularvote.com/>

Should LWV support NPV compact?

PRO

One of the most compelling arguments in support of the NPV Compact is that this method ensures that the candidate who receives the most votes in the national election is elected President, and does so by using the Electoral College system of electing the President of the United States. Amending the U.S. Constitution in order to eliminate the Electoral College and, instead, establish the direct election of the president is much more cumbersome and much less likely to succeed. Above all, the most appealing argument in support of the NPV Compact is that every vote, of every party and of every voter is counted fairly and equally, so that if you live in a state that votes against the national winner, your vote for that person still counts.

CON

The NPV Compact is more of a “workaround” and as much as LWV supports getting rid of the electoral college with direct election, perhaps a normal constitutional amendment should be used instead. Also the “vote counts” issue works both ways: Voters supporting the candidate who wins their state might want their state’s electors to support their choice, not the plurality choice.

Mayor Lawson looks forward to 2010 events

BY JENNY BROMLEY

Mayor Connie Lawson presented the State of the City to LWV members and the public from her seat in the City Hall meeting room Jan. 22. The event was carried on Channel 12 and has been rebroadcast.

Lawson's presentation was packed with examples of how the city is growing and solving problems, making Richmond a better place for all its citizens.

Numerous project and programs have been started or completed during the year. Of particular interest is the new fire station No. 2 at Duncannon Lane, which will house some fire science students from EKU.

Focus on families

Lawson commented several times throughout her presentation that projects were good for families. These include our new Aquatic Center which was well used while working out some kinks. Free swim lessons were available and the free swim on Friday night was a favorite, she noted.

She also cited the city's first walking trail off Duncannon Lane.

Families benefited by having over one thousand young people participating in the outdoor soccer program and 400 using the new football fields that parents had wanted, she added.

Noting that skateboarding is a new

Olympic sport, Lawson said there is great interest among ministers, lawyers and families that a skate board park be developed.

Lawson said city revenue is stable in spite of the country's economic problems. The goal is to have the best service at the lowest cost.

The \$23,834,000 in revenue comes mostly from the occupational license revenues and the net profit tax.

Thus, she said her No. 1 focus in 2010 will be in getting and keeping jobs.

To this end, City Commission members are visiting one industry a month to listen and learn from the businesses.

One source of jobs will hopefully be with the third phase of the industrial park in which Sub-Zero is converting an existing plant to make dishwashers.

Eighty percent of the city's revenue is used for salaries, Lawson said. She noted that the Police Department has benefited from a new pay schedule. New hiring has resulted in almost reaching full staffing.

One expense we might not think of is all the lighting in our streets. When one of the seven salt trucks goes out, it costs \$1,000.

To help with abandoned or neglected homes, Lawson said the city is in the process of identifying abandoned homes to repair and sell with low interest financing.

Impact of Equestrian Games

Lawson noted that ,in 2010, the city charter will be 200 years old so planning is underway for the birthday celebration.

The new Performing Arts center, seating 2,000, second largest in the state after Louisville, should be opened by 2010. It is a joint project of EKU, Berea, Richmond and Madison County. Though it will be on EKU's campus and maintained by EKU, it will be run by an independent board.

Lawson said that Richmond should benefit from the 2010 World Equestrian Games, which will be held in September/October of that year. There will be no parking at the games venue, so the city is working on developing transportation from here to the Horse Park north of Lexington. Richmond motels are expected to house visitors as well.

The Games also coincide with two big annual events in Richmond: the annual Pottery Festival and the International Powwow.

Lawson ticked off her "wish list" for Richmond: a new senior citizens' center, a downtown parking garage, work on heating and insulating City Hall, a youth in government project, a Kentucky Children's museum, a monthly newsletter sent to households, a new water tank on Duncannon Lane and a lazy river at the aquatic center.



League celebrates 89th year of service

League of Women Voters will celebrate its 89th birthday Feb. 14. We celebrate this year with a strong commitment to build on the civic energy generated during the 2008 election season by continuing our 89-year history of fostering meaningful citizen participation in our government processes and vigorous public dialogue about public policy issues.

"Now is the time for Americans to come together and tackle the tough challenges we all face," said local LWV president Elizabeth Crowe. "We are so proud that in over 850 communities nationwide, the League of Women Voters remains THE trusted place for citizens to discuss the issues, ask the difficult questions and demand accountability from their government

to help keep our communities healthy, vibrant and strong."

LWVUS will hold its Council 2009 June 13-15 in Washington DC. The LWVUS Board voted to hold a virtual Council to explore and experience new communications technologies, which are now being used regularly by businesses and other organizations.

News to use

Groups seek EMPOWERMENT on energy issues

President Elizabeth Crowe and board members Howard Bowden and Cecile Schubert attended a Networking Luncheon centering on the project of Energy and Empowerment Jan. 14 in Berea.



Elizabeth Crowe met with CELTS group in Berea. Photo by C. Schubert

The purpose of the Energy and Empowerment project is to bring together multiple community organizations and multiple academic department at Berea College, each with their specific expertise, in order to research the energy needs and to develop and maximize the energy assets of our community.

This group is an outgrowth of the energy-related work that many community organizations and individuals are doing and of a three-year community-based research innovation grant focused on energy and empowerment in southern Madison County administered by the Berea College Center of Excellence in Learning Through

Service, conveniently know as CELTS.

Goals include the following:

- improving financial security of low-income families in Madison County
- benefiting the environment by reducing demand for coal-based electricity and
- empowering community members to become actively involved in transforming policy, infrastructure, assumptions and behaviors that drive energy use in Kentucky today.

Organizations, activists, educators, and citizens can get informed and collaborate by joining the Energy and Empowerment listserv at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/energyempowerment/>

If you are interested in workshops being offered by CELTS, e-mail either Heather Schill <heather_schill@bera.edu> or <ashley_cochrane@bera.edu>.

County starts neighborhood recycling program

Madison County Solid Waste is organizing a free Neighborhood Recycling Program for citizens located outside the city limits of Richmond and Berea. This program will be a single stream process where all recyclables can be placed in one container except for glass products which

will not be collected. The recyclables will be picked up every other week.

To get your neighborhood started, 80 percent participation of all homes will be required. Contact the office by phone at 859-624-4709.

2008-09 BOARD

President

Elizabeth Crowe 985-0641
elizabeth@cwwg.org

Vice President

Cecile Schubert 623.5832
cecileL@adelphia.net

Secretary

Mary Bell 859.200.4521
mgbell1@gmail.com

Treasurer

Harriet "Jenny" Bromley 623-5007
harrietbromley@bellsouth.net

DIRECTORS

Jeanne Hibberd 986-1512

jmhibberd@hindmansettlement.org

Libby Fraas

libby.fraas@eku.edu

Howard Bowden 624.5453

HowBowden@aol.com

Jeanne Nakazawa 985.5675

tango4two@gmail.com

We need you!

Members are needed to help with fund raising, voter registration drives and meetings. Contact LWV by phone number listed above or by sending an e-mail to lwvbmc@yahoo.com to volunteer.



LWV of Berea & Madison County
P.O. Box 254
Berea, KY 40403

■ 7 p.m. Feb. 23

**Observer Corps Training
and Member Meeting**