

The Montgomery County League in 2009 – 2010

The three major themes for the League this year were:

1. Providing the voters of Montgomery County and Radford City with the information they needed to vote intelligently in the November and May Elections
2. Open Government and
3. Lobbying, especially for non-partisan redistricting, voting with a paper trail, felons civil rights, and health care reform.

In August, we authorized Carol Lindstrom, our new webmaster, to open a new web site, lwvmcva.org with plenty of space for information, videos, studies, and links. Our web site became a major tool, primarily in educating voters, but also in making available videos of old programs and studies. It is an information resource. Our web site has become a model for other Leagues.

We gave 7 Candidate Forums this year: the Christiansburg Mayor and Town Council, the Radford Mayor and City Council, the Montgomery County and Radford City School Boards, the House of Delegates and 2 for Blacksburg Town Council. Meghan Dorsett handled the fall elections as Voter Service VP, Nancy Warren did so for Montgomery County in the spring and Janet Hahn handled the Radford forums. Videos of all these forums, along with Voter Guides, and responses to questions we didn't have time to ask, were all put on our new web site. There were 10,000 hits for this candidate information in November, mostly Blacksburg voters getting information about their 10 Council candidates. Mary Houska wrote an Op Ed in both The Roanoke Times' Current and the Montgomery News Messenger advocating that Christiansburg citizens vote for the referendum to move the Christiansburg Town Council elections from May to November so more people would vote. Because of the efforts of our Christiansburg members and other Christiansburg citizens, 88% of the voters approved the referendum.

Carol Lindstrom received the Virginia Coalition for Open Government's top award for an individual citizen's contribution to open government for obtaining, with Freedom of Information Act requests, Christiansburg documents that should have been available to citizens and posting these documents on her web site: myvaresouces.com. These documents included the Christiansburg Charter and Code, and minutes of Town Council and Planning Commission Meetings. She later began to audio tape and then video tape those meetings and putting those tapes on her web site. Carol was invited to write an Op Ed on the open government rights of citizens in a March issue of The Roanoke Times celebrating open government. We have a second web site, vaopengov.org, in which Carol has put much advice for citizens trying to access public documents. Our League was one of 11 United States Leagues that won the US League's Citizen Initiative for Transparency Grants. Carol wrote that report and it is on our second web site. Forrest "Frosty" Landon, retired Executive Editor of The Roanoke Times, and a founder and the first Executive Director of the Virginia Coalition for Open Government was our featured speaker at our Annual Meeting in May.

Two years ago, our League participated in a Virginia League study on the voting rights of felons. Judy Snoke led our study group. The panel discussion presented by our study group in the fall of 2008 was video-taped. The video of that program continues to be watched on our web site. Judy and members of her study group actively lobbied this fall and winter for the passage of a Virginia constitutional amendment to bring Virginia closer to the far more liberal laws on felons' civil rights in all other states except Kentucky.

For the past two General Assembly sessions, our League worked with the Virginia League to advocate that the House of Delegates pass a non-partisan redistricting law that overwhelmingly passed the Virginia Senate. Delegate Shuler has been a sponsor of this legislation in the past and has given us much guidance. Our members in Delegate Nutter's district put much effort into trying to persuade him to advocate for the bill in the House. We and the Virginia League were more successful in preventing attempts to weaken the Hugo/Davis bill which has as its goal a paper trail for elections.

Health care reform has been a policy goal of the US LWV for years. This year, the US LWV put enormous effort into lobbying for health care reform. Our Congressman, Rick Boucher, was not a supporter of this legislation. We tried to change his views. About twenty members were at Boucher's constituent meeting at the New River Community College--we learned how vocal the opposition was at that meeting. Our members wrote emails and letters and telephoned the Congressman's offices. Janet Hahn and I went to his Pulaski office with representatives from other organizations to talk with his assistants and Karen Novak joined others including members of the Washington County League, in demonstrating outside Boucher's Abingdon office the day before the vote.

What else did we do this year?

Jane Sprague, Dee Pourchot and Nancy Warren ran our popular 8-week Great Decisions program this winter with 41 people buying the workbook. The repeated snow storms stretched out our sessions. Jane arranged for the Foreign Policy Association videos on each topic to be shown on WTOB.

Mary Holliman and her Virginia Tech intern, Alexandria Pirillo, produced our 2010 Handbook. We distributed it with *Virginia Women and the Vote 1909 – 2009*, a book published by the Virginia League in celebration of the 90th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment and the formation of the League of Women Voters. The book presents the history of the League in Virginia and of a Virginia suffrage organization that was established in 1909.

We presented a program to honor that 90th anniversary titled Woman as Voters: the Unexpected Revolution, in February, with historian Marian Mollin and political scientist and League member Karen Hult as speakers. A video of that interesting program is also on our web site. In October, Anna Hawthorne arranged for the League and the Student Film Organization to sponsor a showing of *Iron Jawed Angels*, the film about the actions that led to the passage of the 19th amendment. Karen Hult told us that Alice Paul, heroine in that film, later wrote the Equal Rights Amendment.

We breakfasted, for the first time, with the Christiansburg Town Council in January. In March, we breakfasted with the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, County Administrator Craig Meadows and County Attorney Martin McMahon to talk about County finances.

We continue to lunch together throughout the year on the first Tuesday of each month.

We have been asked to host the LWV VA Convention in May 2011. Karen Cronin has already sent out a request for bids to our local hotels.