

LWV OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM YEAR IN REVIEW 2015-2016

During 2015 and 2016, the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham worked diligently to grow and empower the vote. We stood strong to protect the vote.

LWVGB participated in the final Installment of the Summer Series Commemorating the 1965 Voting Rights Act. It was held on August 6, 2015 at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI). LWVGB and the Upsilon Eta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. partnered with BCRI to provide voter registration and voter rights restoration information. The seminar, "Shelby v. Holder Challenges to Voting Rights Today," featured Joyce White Vance, US Attorney for the Northern District of AL.

On Sept. 13, 2015 LWVGB received the Metro Birmingham NAACP 2015 Voter Empowerment Award for outstanding service with voter education and non-partisan get out the vote efforts. We thank Hezekiah Jackson, IV, President of the Metro Birmingham NAACP, for honoring our League at a beautiful and inspiring awards ceremony at Miles College that evening. We congratulate all fellow Community Empowerment and Voter Empowerment Champions honored that evening.

Girls (and Guys) just like to have fun! It was great fun on Sep. 17, 2015, as the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham celebrated the 95th anniversary of the League and the accomplishments of our own LWVGB at a cocktail reception at The Summit Club in downtown Birmingham. We were delighted to welcome several new members into the League that evening and in days following.

And, oh how we celebrated and worked on National Voter Registration Day 2015! LWVGB held five voter registration events on four Birmingham college campuses. League volunteers registered voters on Sept. 22-24, 2015 at these Community Colleges: Jefferson State Center Point Campus, Lawson State Birmingham Campus, Brown Mackie Birmingham Campus, and Jefferson State Shelby Campus in Hoover. LWVGB wishes to thank Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Upsilon Eta Omega Chapter for their partnership and volunteer service (and photos!) at the Lawson State event. All agreed that this was the most outstanding National Voter Registration celebration ever held in the Greater Birmingham area. The many newly registered voters are the real winners!

LWVGB didn't stop registering voters on Voter Registration Day. We went back to Brown Mackie Community College, and we also held another voter registration at the Bluff Park United Methodist Church Food Pantry on Nov. 4, 2015.

We always love to celebrate! On December 12, 2015, LWVGB held its annual Holiday Dinner and Review at Sweet Tea Restaurant in downtown Birmingham, AL. It's good to look back on the many accomplishments of the year, and 2015 did not disappoint! President Ida Tyree-Hyche led the review. And there was much more planned for 2016, a presidential election year!

We're all concerned about the flood of money in politics and the influence that that wields. On Sunday, January 17, 2016, LWVGB members gathered at the Vestavia Hills Library in the Forest to discuss unbiased research information on campaign finance. We contributed our voice to the national League discussion. Many thanks to the LWVGB "Money in Politics" Study Committee, Connie Arnwine, Chair, Haley Colson, and Nancy

Ekberg, for presenting the extensive study resource materials and to Yvonne Brakefield who served as Consensus Recorder.

On February 8, 2016, citizens were invited to meet the 50 Jefferson County Circuit and District Court judicial candidates running in the 2016 contested races and listen as they answered our questions. This public forum was co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Greater Birmingham and Upsilon Eta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and moderated by LWVGB President Ida Tyree-Hyche. Thanks to the Birmingham Public Library Central Branch for providing free use of the Library Auditorium! The biographies written by LWVGB Secretary Starr Culpepper remain posted online to assist Jefferson County voters when they go to the polls in November.

Spring has been ALL about our Youth Voter Registration Project! We were fortunate to win a generous grant from the LWVUS Education Fund to bring voter registration to eligible students in underserved high schools in the Greater Birmingham area. Thank you to Voter Services Co-Chairs Maggie Howard and Nancy Sales for leading this effort and to the MANY LWVGB volunteers who made it possible. This spring we've registered students at Woodlawn HS and Fairfield High Preparatory School in Jefferson Co. and in Bibb Co. HS and West Blocton HS in Bibb Co.. We are working to schedule even more high schools in Jefferson Co. and possibly some in St. Clair County. We're emphasizing the importance of voting and taking an active part in democracy!

Rev. Sandra Anderson opened the Mt. Sinai AME Church and offered voter registration on April 21 and 23, 2016. LWVGB brought registration supplies and coordinated with the Secretary of State's Election Division to bring a photo voter ID mobile unit to the church for the day. We thank Rev. Anderson, volunteer Mr. Lott and all of the Mt. Sinai volunteers who made this possible. We also coordinated with the AL Secretary of State's Elections Division to bring a photo voter ID mobile unit to the church. Thank you, Clay Helms for providing that service.

The Observer Corps, led by Director Barbara Powell, has been active throughout the year keeping an eye on the happenings at various public meetings of city council, county commission, public transportation and more.

Our Advocacy Team, led by Connie Arnwine, has kept an eye on the happenings on Goat Hill, too. Because we do not have home rule in Alabama, many local issues are resolved (or often not) in the Montgomery Capitol.

Vice President Jean Johnson kept the public informed about elections at the local, state and federal levels. Through our web site and social media accounts, we offered such information as registration and absentee voting deadlines, how to obtain absentee ballot, the photo voter ID requirement (what qualifies and how to obtain one if needed), how to go about restoring felon voting rights, candidate information through our Decision 2016 Judicial Forum biographies and promotion of Votee411.org.

LWVGB is looking forward to continuing our work to make democracy strong for all citizens in the Greater Birmingham area in 2016 and 2017.