



LWV Corvallis

Serving Benton and Linn Counties

November/December 2005

MEET YOUR LOCAL JUDGES

Tuesday, November 15th

7:00-9:00 pm

Featuring:

Circuit Court Judge Janet Holcomb

Circuit Court Judge Locke Williams

Circuit Court Judge David Connell

Municipal Judge Mark Donahue

Facilitator: JoAnne Trow

Corvallis/Benton County Public Library

6th and Monroe Ave, Corvallis

Co-Sponsored by Corvallis/Benton County Library

And for a **DISCUSSION OF JUDICIAL ISSUES**

with JoAnne Trow as facilitator, Please join us

Tuesday, November 29th at the

United Way Office

104 SW Second St. (next to Squirrel's)

11:30 to 1:00 pm (Bring your lunch)

DECEMBER PROGRAM PLANNING – Mark your calendar on December 6th for the League's annual soup-bowl social and review of current positions and planning next year's study program. See page 6 for details.



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Speakers for our Civil Liberties and Security program in October enlightened our members about emergency preparedness and the legal safeguards in Oregon. The question and answer session held almost everyone until the end. Many of the 28 who attended commented on the quality of the program. The first discussion group at United Way drew 12 members, many long time league supporters. Another discussion group is scheduled after Thanksgiving.

The local Judicial System study began by interviewing the Trial Court Administrator for background information for our November program. Our Circuit Court Judges will be asked to talk about judicial issues in the Oregon Circuit Court system and specifically in our 21st Judicial District. The Municipal Court Judge will be asked to talk about city issues and the relationship with the circuit court system. The LWVOR Study of the Oregon Judiciary will be interviewing in January and will consider a broader scope of the role of courts in the governmental system. The November discussion group will focus on the Benton County/City of Corvallis judicial issues.

Of course, local programs are an opportunity for league members and friends to get together and have a great time working through the issues. The December potluck is always a good time to visit over warm bowls of gourmet soups. In December we will focus on National Program Planning. In the past we have discussed the Federal Judicial System as a possible LWVUS area of study, since there is no national position on the judicial branch of government. Others have mentioned Universal Health Care, although the national position already supports a national health insurance plan financed by taxes and individual insurance premiums.

The priority action area from the last LWVUS convention was civil liberties; membership can set a new priority action agenda at the next convention in Minneapolis in 2006. The Portland League will host the 2008 convention so we can begin to anticipate the national discussions. See article on LWVUS Program Planning.

Karen Nibler

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Mission

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

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The bulletin is the newsletter of the LWV Corvallis and is produced nine times a year. Members subscribe through their dues. Membership is open to anyone 18 years or older.



MEET YOUR LOCAL JUDGES

Benton County Circuit Court, or the 21st Judicial District, has jurisdiction over all criminal cases alleging a violation of state criminal laws, as well as civil and small claims cases, domestic relations and juvenile matters, probate cases, and others. **Municipal courts** have jurisdiction over violations of the city code. Three judges preside in Benton County Circuit Court.

Tracey Cordes, the Trial Court Administrator for the 21st Judicial District, was interviewed by the local Judicial Study Committee for background information for this local program. Cordes summarizes her job as involving the management of personnel, the court budget, and court technology. She also initiates and oversees program development for the court. Trial Court Administrators are charged with administration of court matters overall, but work in close consultation with and at the will of the Presiding Judges.

In 2004, Benton County Circuit Court received filings in 6384 criminal cases, 1966 civil and small claims cases, 635 family law cases, 183 juvenile cases, 88 mental health cases and 166 probate cases. During the first six months of 2005, 4973 cases were filed. The largest number of filings in any circuit court, including Benton County Circuit Court, are violations, that is, cases for which jail is not a possible penalty. The Violations Bureau offers defendants the opportunity to dispose of their violation without having to see a judge. Most opt to do this by pleading guilty; however, defendants may plead not guilty and may request a trial.

Court clerks handle the paperwork for every filed case. In addition to handling the paper filings, court clerks enter and retrieve case information from the Oregon Judicial Information Network, the court computer system, and also provide service to court customers at the counter and by telephone. The work of court clerks is highly specialized and thus clerks are trained locally by other court staff. Cordes is working with the Oregon Judicial Department Education Advisory Committee to develop more training centrally so as to ease the burden of training on individual court staff. More centralized training will benefit not just the 21st Judicial District, but will assist circuit courts statewide.



Presiding Judge Janet Schoenhard Holcomb guides the administrative matters of the court, although the judges in the

21st Judicial District have opted to divide administrative authority among them according to case type or program area. At present, these areas are criminal/traffic/jury/calendaring, civil/small claims/probate, and domestic relations/juvenile. The court calendar is managed by a docketing clerk who assigns cases according to the three general weekly dockets—long trial, short trial, and miscellaneous. The judges do not necessarily hear recurring or related cases on a single individual, although the court does try to “bundle” family law cases.

In close partnership with other agencies, the 21st Judicial District operates two “**drug courts**”, one for adults and one for juveniles. The adult program has run primarily on grant funds since 2002, but the court is nearing the end of its grant period. The court expects some unused funds to carry over into an additional year, however. The juvenile drug court program received its first participant in March 2005. Grant applications are pending for funding this program. The 2005 Legislative Assembly appropriated some funding for the adult program coordinator.

Benton County Circuit Court also offers mediation in contested small claims cases. The court pays a small administrative fee to **Linn Benton Mediation Services** which, in turn, provides trained, qualified mediators to the court. Parties to contested small claims cases are required to attend an orientation session during which they learn about mediation as an option for resolving their case. Participation in mediation is voluntary, although the majority of parties do choose to try it.

By statute, civil cases involving \$50,000 or less must be referred to arbitration. The 21st Judicial District maintains a list of 35 attorneys who serve as arbitrators. The arbitrators are paid directly by the parties in an amount established by the local Mediation-Arbitration Commission.

The Benton County Courthouse is owned and maintained by the county. Security has been upgraded in the building during the past two years. Planning for the upgrades has been overseen by the Courthouse Security Committee

who has worked in consultation with the Historic Preservation Committee and the Board of Commissioners. The upgrades have been funded by a Court Facilities Security Account that is nourished by assessments in criminal cases. In addition, the Sheriff applied for and received Homeland Security Grant funds that covered the majority of the cost of the door alarms, cameras and monitors. The Sheriff has assigned two deputies from the Corrections Division to staff the security checkpoint at the 4th Street entrance. A handicapped accessible entrance is available at the 5th Street basement level.

The Judicial study group is being conducted by JoAnne Trow, Paula Krane, and Karen Nibler. They will be holding interviews during winter and would love to include a couple of new members. Anyone interested?

CORVALLIS MUNICIPAL COURT

Municipal court receives citations from City Police officers, the majority are traffic or parking violations. Some criminal misdemeanors are handled in municipal court, ie., shoplift, assault IV, loud noise, violent conduct, animal offenses, minor property damage, minor in possession of alcohol, hosting a party for minors, open containers, or possession of marijuana. Crimes or violations adopted in the municipal code go to municipal court. Traffic crimes go to circuit court, such as DUII or reckless endangering. All felonies go to circuit court. Oregon State Police citations and Benton County Sheriff citations go to the state circuit court system. The exception is minor in possession of tobacco, which go to municipal court from any police agency.

The Municipal Court has only one judge position and utilizes a substitute judge in his absence. The City Attorney plays a role in diversion agreements in alcohol and marijuana cases. The City Attorney appears in Municipal Court only if a defendant has an attorney; most defendants represent themselves. The majority of cases are given fines for a disposition. The typical fine for a speeding ticket (11-20 miles over limit) is \$141., which may be reduced to \$106. The Oregon State Legislature has set minimum fines, so the judges have no discretion in further reductions. The city retains \$90. of the \$141. fine, and the

remainder of \$51. goes to the state to various funds.

The following statistics were provided by Theresa Young, Municipal Court Supervisor. In 2004, the Municipal court logged 21,042 cases, which were broken into categories: 11,802 parking, 7,358 traffic, 172 bike, 1,658 criminal, 44 shoplifting and 8 civil cases.

For the first 6 months of 2005, the Municipal Court logged 10,414 cases: 5,779 parking, 3,668 traffic, 79 bike, 772 criminal, 14 shoplift, and 26 civil (1 incident).

STILL TIME TO ORDER GRAPEFRUIT!

Our annual grapefruit fundraiser ends November 17. Please order now. Your boxes of delicious grapefruit will be delivered in early December.

PRICES THIS YEAR: \$16 FOR A WHOLE BOX
\$8 FOR A HALF BOX

Send to: Kate Mathews
3336 SW Willamette
Corvallis 97333

Checks made payable to LWV CORVALLIS
Questions: 754-1172



DUES REMINDER

Please use the form on the back page to send your dues in now if you haven't already done so. We are required to send our list of members to LWVUS shortly.

To avoid more postage for the League, you can pay dues at our November 15th meeting and get a copy of our current membership list at the same time.

Thank you members who have paid your dues for the year.

The League welcomes new members **Leah Bolger, Elinor Griffiths, Popi Natsoulas and Kathy Vohland**. They have all expressed an interest in some areas of League program which is really important to the success of this organization.

Workshop Sets the Stage for Homeless & Runaway Youth Study

At the LWVOR Fall Workshop in Eugene, Jean Lasater, Director of Development for Northwest Human Services and a member of the Oregon Runaway & Homeless Youth Coalition, laid out the dimensions of the problem. According to Lasater, nearly 24,000 children and teenagers leave their homes each year in Oregon to live on their own, with no adult supervision, in whatever shelter they can find. The largest single group are 15- to 16-year olds, female and Caucasian.

Who should be responsible for these young people and see that they get the services they need? The last legislative session assigned the Commission on Children and Families to this purpose, but it was an unfunded responsibility. Federal grants support nine runaway shelter programs in the state which serve about 2,000 young people a year. The need for funds, obviously, is critical to establishing shelter facilities throughout the state. Lasater hopes that with the League's participation in the coalition, legislation will be introduced to require the State budget to designate funds specifically for homeless and runaway youth support and prevention.

Everyone attending the Workshop had been given questionnaires prepared by the League's statewide committee for interviews with community members working with youth or likely to come into contact with homeless or young runaways. Lasater said that in the near future, the League committee will distribute another questionnaire specifically designed for interviews with the youth themselves or for youth forums.

Note: The five members of the Corvallis Homeless Youth Study Committee (Barbara Ross, MaryAnne Nusrala, Louise Marquering, Kathy Heath and Karen Nibler) met and divided up the interviews. All of these members have experience with teaching youth and/or working with social service agencies. They will visit local agencies serving homeless and runaway youth to gather information in this phase of the study. They could use some help collating the interview information and the write-up for local results. If they finish with information gathering early, they could hold a March program on this topic. If you

would like to join this study, please e-mail niblerk@comcast.net, or call 541-752-8567.

Each league will combine its data in a report to the state committee. State agencies will also be interviewed regarding statewide services for this group. The Commission on Children and Families and the Runaway and Homeless Youth Coalition awaits our information and conclusions.



Thank you to the following people for their donations:

Donna Allen	Ann Brodie
Louise Ferrell	Jean Leach "
Paula Krane	Kate Mathews
Jean Nath	Karen Nibler
Ann Smart	Jo Anne and Cliff Trow

Your generosity is much appreciated.



Curl Up With A Good Book!

The *Bookseller of Kabul* by Arne Seierstad is November's book club selection. Don't miss this discussion. November 14th is the date. Call Corrine Gobeli (745-7736) or Mary Thomas (757-3612) for directions.

We travel to South America during December, to read about a team of French scientists who are trying to measure the circumference of the earth. But *The Mapmaker's Wife* by Robert Whitaker is more than a story of exploration; it is also a love story, a mystery and an adventure story. Join us 7:30 PM, December 12th at Mary Elizabeth Thomas's house to talk about this remarkable journey and the remarkable woman, Isabel Godin des Odonias. Call Mary to let her know if you'll be there: 757-3612.

On January 9th, we'll finally talk about Housekeeping.

December Potluck

LWVUS Program Planning

Tuesday, December 6, 2005

6:00 to 7:00 PM – Soup Social

7:00 to 9:00 PM -- Discussion

Unitarian Church

Education Hall

2945 NW Circle Boulevard



- December potluck for LWV Corvallis members only -
- Please bring bowls, cups and utensils -
- Soups, breads and desserts provided by the LWV Corvallis Board -

TOP PRIORITIES IN PROGRAM FOR LWVUS

Civil Liberties was chosen by the convention membership as the top **action priority** for the LWVUS in 2004-06. The June '03 Washington D.C. convention was notable for the number of motions from the floor on program topics and action agendas. LWVUS board recommended neither an update of positions nor a new study. The board recommended a program of education and advocacy on national positions. Donated funds were used to hire staff to work on the advocacy of Civil Liberties.

The LWVUS Action Agenda had focused on *Campaign Finance Reform* and *Help America Vote Act* in 2002-04. The LWVUS study *Election of the President* was completed and joined recent national studies on *International Trade and United Nations*. The LWVUS *Judicial Independence*

Project continued into a 4th year and a panel on *Democracy at Its Best: Judicial Decisions* was one of the panel presentations.

The LWVUS Program planning process two years ago had generated a list of 70 program topics with the most votes for the Death Penalty, Citizen's Right to Vote, and Immigration. Other topics with multiple votes were Energy, Individual Liberties, Drug Policies, Health Care, Fiscal Policy and Education. Alternative Methods of Voting, Apportionment, Congress & the Presidency, Judiciary, Privatization of Government Services, Media Ownership, Agricultural Policy, Food Safety and Environmental Protection had fewer votes. Since not one topic was dominant and LWVUS resources were limited, no study was recommended. An increase in dues would be needed for new studies or updates, and the membership voted down an increase.

This year is another opportunity to send input to the national office on priorities for action, study or update. If you cannot attend the December 6 meeting, we ask that you take a few minutes to join the on-line discussion among members across the US. Go to subscribe-lwv-programplanning@lists.lwv.org.

On December 6th we get together as a local unit to send our recommendations for national LWV study and action priorities for the upcoming biennium. This is a chance to guide the nuts and bolts of the organization. Please join us as we review the current LWVUS public policy positions and recommend a position for review and update in the 2006-2008 biennium. LWVUS asked for one other program recommendation for study or concurrence. The recommended program topics are due to LWVUS by March 1, after which the national program policy recommendations will be formulated. The LWVUS convention will be held in June 2006 in Minneapolis, MN. Two local board members may attend along with LWVOR board members.