ANNUAL DINNER & BUSINESS MEETING

Tuesday, May 25 ~ Oneonta Country Club

Hartwick Students on the Campaign Trail - January 2004 - New Hampshire
Presented by Laurel Elder, Andrew Seligsohn & Students

6:00—6:30 .... Social Time
6:30—7:15 .... Dinner
7:15—8:00 .... Speakers
8:00 .......... Business Meeting

Before the meeting, please review the 2004-2005 Proposed Budget, the Nominations for New Officers, the Bylaw Revisions, and the Local Program for the coming year. It would help if you would also bring your April Bulletin to the meeting with you.

CANDIDATES’ FORUM

Candidates for Oneonta School District Board of Education

Tuesday, May 11 @ 7:00 PM
Craven Lounge in Morris Hall ~ SUNY Oneonta Campus

Debates televised by IRC-TV Studios on Public Access Channel 23
Live and television audience welcome
Candidates will answer questions from the live and TV-viewing audiences.

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Oneonta LWV General Membership Meeting

On April 26th the League held its General Membership Meeting with its presentation on Capital Punishment in New York State. The League is currently undertaking a State-wide study to come to a position specifically on Capital Punishment in New York State. This meeting provided us with an opportunity to view the video *The Empty Chair*, which showed four scenarios, all true, and representing experiences in different parts of the country regarding the death penalty.

We learned about current laws regarding Capital Punishment, and heard varying opinions on the topic. The panel of speakers for the evening included John Muehl, Esq., Otsego County District Attorney, Otto Rothermel, Esq., Otsego County Public Defender, and Eugene Obidinski, retired Professor of Sociology at SUNY Oneonta, and Otsego County Sheriff Donald Mundy.

The meeting began with viewing the 50 minute video, which clearly outlined the dilemma faced by families of victims, by communities where a murder has taken place, by legislators who must make decisions by which all citizens must live, and by the courts and the prisons who must carry out those decision. Four different scenarios illustrated four different opinions on implementing the Death Penalty.

One man was opposed to the death penalty because killing his father’s murderer would forever preclude the possibility of his forgiving that man. He went on to say “healing is a process and not an event. Execution is an event, and you don’t get better from an event.” He also recognized that the son of the murderer would lose his father to execution, and from his own experience that would only compound grief with pain of another kind.

One woman asked to meet with the man who murdered her parents. She needed to know who kills for $61.00 and an old truck? Her healing began when she forgave the convicted murderer, and later became his advocate against the imposition of the death penalty. “Do not kill in my name” was the message she sent back to the courts.

One mother whose daughter was slain was never able to see her daughter’s body because of the brutal disfigurement. She told of how she was directed to sit quietly in court, not making any comment or showing her emotion as the murder weapons, still covered in her daughter’s blood, were displayed as evidence just feet from where she sat. This mother works tirelessly lobbying for the death penalty in the state where she resides and in other states as well. She maintains the punishment should fit the crime. Her daughter is dead, but her murderers will be free after 20 years. Her grief and outrage will never let her rest, and she will never forgive the murderers.

In the final scenario a couple deal with grief in very different ways. Their son was a victim of terrorism who died in the plane crash of Pan Am Flight 103. The mother has turned her grief into a project, sculpting a series of personifications of grief called “Dark Elegy.” The figures depict the mother’s physical reactions to loss at the moment they heard about the plane crash. She is outraged that the families of victims had to fight for information, demand extradition and trial for the terrorists, and know that the murderers will serve about 1 month per person in prison. She does not, however, support the death penalty. Her husband would like to have seen the death penalty applied in this case, and has not found a way of coming to peace with his grief and outrage.

A prison warden in the film says that he is not soft on crime, but he discusses the difficulties of having to carry out the judgment of the courts, and to oversee executions. Fear is a deterrent, he said, but not one murderer he had ever questioned told him that they gave a thought to the death penalty before committing murder. “I was just doing my job,” he said, until he met a prisoner who maintained his innocence through 14 appeals and 3 times in Supreme Court. The night this prisoner was put to death, the warden was no longer sure he could support the death penalty.

Following the film Sheriff Mundy was the first speaker. He read his position statement, taken from the notes of Paul S. Cassell, Professor at the University of Utah, and a Law Clerk for Chief Justice Warren E. Burger. The notes acknowledged the frailty of human judgment and allowed for the possibility of the execution of innocent persons, but noted that unprecedented safeguards are in place, and that the death penalty will only be considered where aggravating circumstances outweigh all of the mitigating circumstances. There is a judicial review of capital cases, and the procedures followed are lengthy, thorough, and meant to determine that no possible information is overlooked.

Sheriff Munday stated that “the implementation of the death penalty is a punishment, not a deterrent.” It is, he said, the most effective means of preventing further acts of murder by this individual. The next most effective means of doing that is life without parole. “We must hold people personally responsible for their acts,” said Sheriff Munday, when questioned.

Otto Rothermel informed the audience that from 1973 to 1993 48 people were released from prison after spending time on death row. They were released because they were innocent, as were 6% of prisoners on death row found to be innocent upon appeal. He quoted Judge Thurgood Marshall, who had said the possibility of perjury, or of mistaken honest testimony was all too real.

Otto gave an example of a case, which was later overturned in Texas, where a court assigned attorney got $111.84 per hour to defend a client. Technical errors occurred in the process which
led to conviction in the case, and the conviction was later overturned, but "The court got their money's worth," said Otto. Unfortunately a man's life was in the balance. Otto was not in favor of the death penalty because of the possibility of error. 6-7% error rate is too high. Later in response to a question asked from the audience about what he would do if a member of his family were murdered, Otto responded, "I would like to think that I would be against the death penalty."

Eugene Obidinski spoke of the controversy in society regarding the death penalty. In 1998 a large percentage of people, 71% of the general population, were in favor of the death penalty. Others favored life without parole. "Justice" he said "is the filter we place between crime and punishment." For Americans, justice is Constitution based, and involves due process, culpability, and aggravating and mitigating circumstances.

"If the system works right, and everyone does their job right, then the chances of error are limited" said John Muchl. He went on to inform us of the circumstances which would allow for consideration of the death penalty in New York State. They are as follows:

- intent to cause a death and a person dies in carrying out the attempt
- murder of a police officer when it is known that the person is a police officer
- murder of peace officers, corrections officers, state or federal officers
- murder of a witness in order to preclude their testimony
- murder for hire
- murder during the commission of a felony rape, robbery, burglary
- murder of two or more people at the same time
- murder of anyone when there has been a previous murder conviction
- murder of more than one person in NYS within a 24 hour period
- murder committed during an act of terrorism

John allowed that forensic teams have great skills, however, he would really have to believe in his own mind that someone was guilty of the above to invoke the death penalty. He also believes that he would not invoke the death penalty against the wishes of a victim's family, and he believes families have a right to say how they feel. "Would cost be a consideration for you in invoking the death penalty?" asked an audience member. "No, it would not," he replied.

There have been no executions in New York State since September 1, 1995 when the death penalty option became available.

~ Kathie Greenblatt

GARRET GANSVOORT SENDS NEWS FROM THE TOWN BOARD

Work continues on Hemstreet and Fortin parks. Hemstreet should be available for use this summer. Additional fields will be ready for use in Fortin.

The zoning amendment process for Covered Bridge Estates (housing development in West Oneonta) is underway. The development will have to have an environmental impact (SEQRA) review before the site plan can be approved.

Discussion continues on amending Code 103.76 which is a very complicated issue. New legislation would require a developer to build at least one house in a development in order to keep the site plan valid indefinitely. If the property remains undeveloped, the site plan would be subject to review after a certain period of time. There will be a new public hearing on this issue.

Dr. Chris Wolf-Gould has organized an afternoon of jazz and fun to benefit the Oneonta Branch of the NAACP. The "Duke Ellington Singers" showcase will take place at the Autumn Cafe, Main Street, Oneonta, on May 9, 4-7 PM.

In addition to the singing and music, the annual Thurgood Marshall Unity Awards will be presented, as well as a scholarship to an area high school senior in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dessert and beverages will be available.

There will be a $5.00 minimum charge per person.

They Represent You Update

A new edition will be printed after the school board election. In the meantime, please make the following corrections to the one you are now using.

City of Oneonta-District 13:
Michael Swiderski, 205 River St., 433-2188

United States:
Charles Schumer, 313 Hart Senate Office Building
Invitation to Attend the 57th Annual Conference for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOS) associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI)

The 57th Annual DPLINGO Conference
Millennium Development Goals: Civil Society Takes Action
United Nations Headquarters, New York
8-10 September 2004

The Conference is open to representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOS) associated with the United Nations Department of Public Information (DPI), those in consultative status with the United Nations through the Economic and Social Council, those working with UN agencies and programmes and with UN Information Centres and Services.

Please note:
- We must limit the number of participants from any one organization to no more than five persons in order to allow others to participate.
- Each participant must fill out this form.
- The deadline for registration is 30 July 2004. Registrations after this date will not be reflected in the formal list of conference participants.

A letter of confirmation will be mailed (not taxed) to the participant upon receipt of a registration form. A confirmation letter must be presented upon arrival at the Conference, together with a photo ID.

Are you interested in an unusual opportunity to view the United Nations from the inside out? This conference is your opportunity and registration forms are available by calling Dorothy Bloom at 432-1642.

The State Budget: Late Again

The overriding issue this session as with the previous twenty sessions has been the perennial late state budget. For several years the League has been extremely vocal about reform of the state budget process. We have supported specific reforms including:
- an independent budget office (IBO);
- a clear concise budget document;
- public disclosure of off budget items;
- consensus revenue forecasting;
- joint budget conferencing;
- a three-year financial plan;
- agency budgeting process open to the public;
- use of a contingency budget if a new budget is not passed by the start of the fiscal year.

League members were persistent over several years in pressuring their elected representatives to adopt budget reforms; this session the legislature finally responded. (Twenty years would seem to be the magic number). Following passage of similar but not identical bills in both the Senate and Assembly, leaders announced a joint conference committee process that met in public for seven sessions. These joint conference committees were fascinating to watch and reassuring in the fact that rank and file legislators can think through and negotiate very complex issues. In particular, Senators Libous, Kuhl and Vellela were thoughtful negotiators on the Senate side, as were Assembly members John, Destito, and the Ways and Means Chairman, Denny Farrell. Following the sessions, reporters were able to ask question of the legislators which allowed even more illumination of some of the finer points of the negotiations. These open negotiating sessions were so instructive that the League suggested to the leadership that they be televised statewide.

Four hours before the start of the new fiscal year on April 1st the joint conference committee announced its reform recommendations. Most of the recommendations were right on point with the League position on budget reform. A great League victory! The legislation is currently being drafted and as always the devil is in the details, but the outline for reform is as follows:
- all agency requests will be made public prior to submission of the executive budget;
- three-year financial plan;
- enhanced fast start (similar to the Leagues recommendation of revenue forecasting);
- creation of a joint independent budget office;
- “off-budget” items such as HCRA included as part of the state budget (an issue the League strongly advocated for).

HAVA issues are bubbling under the surface and my information is that federal money for new machines will not be appropriated until the Assembly is satisfied with the concerns that they have on voter ID issues and machine procurement. Repeal of the full-face ballot in New York, although strongly advocated by the League, is not likely to happen. In Albany nothing is done until everything is done, so look for HAVA to be negotiated as part of the final state budget negotiations.

Campaign for Fiscal Equity is another issue for which the League has lobbied strongly. We will continue to press the Governor and the Legislature for a statewide solution and a “sound basic education” for all students in New York State.

Capitol Beat, Volume 4, No. 1

Welcome New Members
Karen Brown
271 East St., Oneonta, 432-8285, brownka@oneonta.edu

Judith Sweet
7 Walling Blvd., Oneonta, 433-1170, judithsweet@stny.rr.com

Laurie Neander, 15 Roosevelt St., Oneonta, 432-5536, laurieneander@stny.rr.com
LWV Inside Albany Essay Winners

Report On Trip To Albany

From having done well in a regents level American Government and History course as well as a college level Public Affairs class, to reading news periodicals from The Daily Star to Newsweek to Foreign Policy, to listening to the news daily, I thought I knew how our government functioned. Now I know how wrong I was.

The Students Inside Albany Conference was an eye-opening experience into both the functions and dysfunctions of the New York State government. Perhaps nothing exemplifies the conference as well as a discussion with three Albany lobbyists. The three represented the New York Public Interest Research Group, Weingarten and Reid, LLC, a contract lobbying group, and Planned Parenthood. From serving public interests to business interests to special interests the three lobbyists provided a breadth of detail— representing different sides of an issue and of an occupation.

This breadth was found throughout the conference. From shadowing both a state Senator and Assemblyman to discussing the responsibilities of the student, the school, and the state with a representative of the Campaign for Fiscal Equity the conference provided a balanced and informative presentation of the various facets of state government.

Ultimately, the Students Inside Albany Conference provided four intense days. Both educational and entertaining, the conference afforded me an opportunity to gain knowledge that I could never find in a textbook. It also provided me with a great opportunity to meet an exceptional group of very talented students, and I speak for all when I say that none of us wanted to leave Albany on Wednesday afternoon.

~ Courtney Ricci

The LWV conference that was held in Albany was a great way for people to get to know how their state government works. The meetings with lobbyists, media people, a CSEA representative, etc., were a great way to look at our New York State government with new eyes. All of the things that we learned can be used in school and our communities. Shadowing an Assemblyman and Senator was a great experience, especially when it came to talking with them about our communities and learning about what they are doing in their positions.

Meeting all of the teens from around the state was an unforgettable experience. Teens from different backgrounds coming together like this was great, especially how everyone got to know one another. Making new friends is always a good thing. Going to Jillian's was a great way for us all to unwind and have fun, learning about our differences and more importantly our similarities.

Tom did a great job organizing everything for the Conference and got very little recognition. We all did something special to show our gratitude to him though. He made sure that everyone had transportation, that everyone was where they were supposed to be, that everyone had what they needed, and that everyone was happy. He tried getting to know all of us by talking to us, and he was a fun person to be around.

Overall the Conference was fun and educational and I would recommend it to anyone who is thinking about getting involved some way with the government, or for someone who just wants to become more familiar with their local state government.

~ By Kevin La Buz – Oneonta High

Dues – It's that time of year again

LWVUS Board Recommends $.80 PMP Increase

A not so subtle reminder of the costs of running the lobbying efforts taken on by the State and National Leagues: have you paid dues since Jan. 04? Read no further.

The rest of us, however, need to write a check. You may have noticed that we have not raised our local dues for several years. We keep them as low as possible because we do not want the price of membership to be an impediment to anyone. It is as easy to write that check as turning to the back of this month's Bulletin and making your reservation to the Annual Dinner.

Where do our dues go? You say most of our work is done by volunteers. And you are right! Still we do have many expenses, as shown in the Budget in last month's Bulletin. A big expense is the PMP - Per Member Payment - we pay to LWV New York and LWV United States. Both the State and National Leagues, of which we are all members, provide information and training to each of us, and a lobbying presence in Albany and Washington. We need them - and they need our PMP.

Scholarships are available, and if this is an especially bad year for you, or if you know someone who would join if the dues were less, call Maggie. Of course, scholarship applications are confidential.

~ Kay Stuligross
Watercolors
Peg Hathaway

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Membership Renewal and Dinner Reservation
LWV of the Oneonta Area 2004-2005

Name(s):_________________________________________ Phone:______________________________________

Address:_________________________________________ E-mail:_________________________________________

Guest(s):________________________________________

Entrée choices:  ☐ prime rib    ☐ shrimp scampi    ☐ vegetable lasagna    ☐ stuffed chicken breast

Dinner ($18.00 per person) $____________________

Individual Dues ($40) $____________________

Additional Household Member ($20) $____________________

Total  (Please make check payable to Oneonta LWV) $____________________

Contribution to LWV of the Oneonta Area $____________________

Tax Exempt Contribution to the Education Foundation $____________________

(Please include contribution in separate check made payable to Oneonta LWVEF)

Return reservation form & payment by May 21 to:
Kay Stuligross, 10 Walnut St., Oneonta, NY 13820