



## **97<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting Memorable Moments**

### **President's Report – Beverly Graham**

2020-2021 has been “The Year of Zoom” for our League as well as for the State and National Leagues. Even as the number of Covid cases climbed and deaths mounted, we soldiered on by shifting our work to virtual platforms so as to continue to make a positive impact on our communities.

In the November election we registered voters and advocated for mail-in ballots and early voting. Even during a pandemic, the largest number of voters turned out than had in decades. (Unfortunately, our hard work on the Fair Tax Referendum was unsuccessful.) And we all held our breath as the loser of the presidential election delayed the transition by refusing to accept the results. At this point we all realized just how fragile our democracy could be. But ultimately the truth prevailed, and the landscape began to be more optimistic as vaccines were distributed throughout the country and the number of new cases began to level off. In advance of the spring election, the Voter Service Committee organized and recorded 12 candidate forums and posted them to our recently resuscitated YouTube Channel for all to see.

We held two successful fundraisers: 1) at The Good Earth Greenhouse and 2) hosted “Tea for Three” starring actress Elaine Bromka. On October 23 we will make and sell donuts at the Oak Park Farmer’s Market, partnering with Pilgrim Church and another organization. Hopefully, next spring we will be able to host in-person fundraising events.

This was also the year of criminal justice reform. The Black Caucus in Springfield approved an Omnibus Bill, now known as the “Safe T Act,” which was signed into law by the Governor. At the same time, a committee of seven of our members researched and presented the Criminal Justice Reform Study which updated our current positions and added new ones that were needed. On January 30<sup>th</sup> we reached consensus on all 50 questions asked. The results of our work were approved by the LWV IL Board to be voted on by the delegates at the State Convention later this month.

We are here today to honor the hard work of members. I also wish to thank you for your support during this difficult year. It has been my honor to serve as your President, and I leave you in good hands with our new slate of officers and committee chairs.

## **In Memory of Those Who Passed This Year – Pauline Koch**

“We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.” About 30 years ago Maya Angelou gave the commencement address at my son’s graduation. This is the sentence that I most remember from that commencement, and it truly describes our League.

Since our last annual meeting, six of our members have passed on.

Marge Gockel, 86, was first. In 1969 she and her husband posed as prospective buyers in Oak Park to demonstrate housing discrimination against Blacks. She is remembered as the 1976 co-founder of the Oak Park farmer’s market and chairing the Observers Corps, for which she received the Hazel Hanson award.

Virginia Cassin “Ginnie,” 96, was the first woman to hold the Oak Park Village Clerk’s office. After 20 years in that office (from 1973 to 1993, when she retired), she then went on to help establish the Hemingway Foundation and restore his birthplace.

Dianne Ruth Ghertner, 73, was a history teacher who collaborated on the U.S. History textbook Land of Promise with Sandy Deines.

Sherlyn Reid, 85, was one of the Black pioneers in Oak Park’s decades-long integration and equity effort, moving here in 1968. For 20 years, 1979-1999, she was head of the Village Community Relations Department and also served a term as President of our League. She always greeted you with a friendly smile.

Mary Daly Lewis, 73, was a dedicated educator and champion of human rights. She was on the District 97 School Board for 8 years and served as its President from 1990-1993. She was generous with her time and resources

And last, but not least, Mary Ellen Matthies, 82, was my friend and mentor in all things League.

In 1972 Mary Ellen met Roberta Raymond and then worked for the Oak Park Regional Housing Center for 14 years, where she was “critical to the founding of this agency.” She was President of our League twice and worked to renew the LWV Cook County from 2002-2006; “... most significantly, she consistently was a warm and welcoming presence, making others feel positive about the League.”

What these women had in common was perseverance, enthusiasm, and a commitment to working to make our community a better place. Because of them, “We see more, and things that are more distant, than they did, not because our sight is superior or because we are taller than they, but because they raise us up, and by their great stature add to ours.” -- Sir Isaac Newton.