



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF SANIBEL

# *The Voter*

[lwvsanibel.org](http://lwvsanibel.org)

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## *Our Mission:*

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

Editor's Note: If you do not see photos below, click on "display images" in your email program.

## **Message from Robyn Cook, LWV Sanibel President**

Greetings members and friends!

This is the time of year when we say "so long" to many of our Sanibel Island friends and neighbors, but only for a few months (we hope!). What this means for your local League of Women Voters is that we also take a bit of a hiatus over the summer months. But we will continue to do the planning necessary for the coming 2019-2020 season.

Our Annual Meeting & Luncheon was held April 18, 2019 at the Sundial Beach Resort. This was the last of a highly successful series of luncheon programs held through the year. Beginning with the well-attended "Water Quality" program in November, the programs simply built on each other with audience enthusiasm until the April program featuring "Drinking Water & Social Justice." Please scroll down for a report from the presentation. We have so many people to thank, including all of our speakers, the fantastic personnel at the Sundial, our luncheon series planners and, of course, the many members and friends who lend us their energetic support.

The Sanibel League has grown to more than 100 members! We welcome members to all or any activities and invite your comments and ideas for future programs. I am a firm believer that good things build on good things, so we keep our eyes, ears and doors open!



Speakers at April Annual Meeting

There are a variety of ways that members can contribute to upcoming LWVS events: Join the (2020) 10th Anniversary Celebration Event Committee; get certified to register voters at voter services event; volunteer for the membership committee, or suggest a committee you would like to see us create. We will appreciate any time you can give! Please contact me at [lwvsanibel@gmail.com](mailto:lwvsanibel@gmail.com) with your ideas, comments or to volunteer.

Have a wonderful summer!

Yours "in League,"

Robyn Cook

## Report from the League of Women Voters of Sanibel April Annual Meeting and Luncheon

The League of Women Voters of Sanibel held their Annual Meeting and luncheon program on April 18, 2019. The program featured the award-winning journalists Patricia Borns and Janine Zeitlin. Both have been reporting extensively on social and environmental justice issues in the Southwest Florida region. In the past few years, they have closely reported on two social justice issues involving the devastating results of contaminated ground water in two Lee County communities: Dunbar and Charleston Park. Their stories have truly made a difference in the lives of the affected residents. Both of these stories highlight the need for consistent, well-documented journalistic coverage of the often under-covered social justice issues of our day. Following are edited excerpts from their informative and deeply moving presentation.

The overarching context for both of these stories as told by Borns and Zeitlin is that there are a growing number of drinking water 'deserts' across the nation. Recall the Flint, Michigan, story with it's nationwide exposure. The essence of the stories asks: If clean water is not a legal right, is it a moral one?

A majority of the national safe drinking water violations take place in low-income communities with higher black and Hispanic populations. The Dunbar, Fort Myers, neighborhood is an African-American community that has been without clean groundwater for 20+ years. The Charleston Park, Lee County, community is a primarily African-American community without clean groundwater for 30+ years. These facts were ground zero for the investigative research pursued by these journalists.

In the Dunbar neighborhood, the City of Fort Myers had been disposing of toxic sludge in a residential area for a number of years, beginning in 1962 or before. As the neighborhood developed, the City of Fort Myers never told residents that the contaminated

sludge was present. Neither fencing nor signage went up to warn children. The Department of Environmental Protection commenced testing of lime sludge in 2006; it was found that arsenic contamination of the groundwater exceeded the acceptable levels of arsenic content for both commercial and residential safety. Still there were no warnings of the contamination. As one resident claimed after she was asked if race played a role, "It's a textbook example of environmental racism. They put it there and didn't clean it up."

Residents, environmental professionals and advocates for clean water took on city hall. They organized and demanded months of testing, followed by filing a lawsuit for cleanup and damages. Headlines and news coverage exposed the lack of attention to the historic problem. At last, after 56 years of waiting, the cleanup began in 2017.

Charleston Park (near Alva) is a rural, isolated Lee County community that has no grocery store within walking distance and no public transportation. Homeowners in Charleston Park were without a clean drinking water supply for several decades and were using drinking water from contaminated wells. The Fort Myers News-Press reported a variety of issues: Shallow wells had bacteria; deeper wells had saltwater intrusion and natural radium; water records from the 1980s showed concerns from testing; and residents were forced to rely on bottled water even to brush teeth. But as the timeline shows, from the '80s through 2015 there was a lack of will, funds and solutions that would allow residents access to clean water.

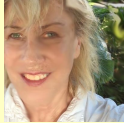
Motivated by Janine's and Patricia's coverage of the problems, testing was finally done under sustained pressure from non-Charleston Park residents. A coalition of Lee County citizens, "Clean Water for Charleston Park," addressed the issues outside of the government with donated systems and bottled water donations. The results: Blankets & Blessings took the lead to minimize contamination; \$25,000 was raised to reach 20+ families; additional testing was demanded and achieved; and finally a water filtration and refill station was installed. The work continues.

The UN has declared clean, affordable, accessible water a human right. California is the only state with a right-to-water act. But even that state is having difficulties finding sustainable alternatives to create and shore up funding to ensure long-term drinking water service to communities. In Lee County, but for the work of investigative journalists, the legal community, environmental activists, and citizens willing to speak out on behalf of low-income residents of color, the denial of clean water, although still being solved, would be unknown to the general public.

Directly following the program, the LWVS held their annual business meeting. After brief presentations regarding the past season of activities and the program for 2019-2020, the members present approved the slate for the 2019-2020 Board of Directors.

They are: Robyn Cook, President; Ellen O'Neill, Vice President; Christine Schluter, Secretary; Bob Terry, Treasurer; and Directors Dorit Fisher, Bobbie Moore, Rick Siders and Linda Kramer. The year 2020 will be the 10th anniversary of the League of Women Voters of Sanibel, which has more than 100 members and continues to grow. In addition, the League of Women Voters will be celebrating 100 years since it began in 1920, coinciding with the year that women won the right to vote with ratification of the 19th amendment.

If you are interested in learning more about the League of Women Voters or would like to join, go to [lwvsanibel.org](http://lwvsanibel.org) for more information and a membership application.



Patricia Borns is known for her work as a social justice reporter in Southwest Florida. She was a 2018 recipient of the Green Eyeshade and Florida Society of News Editors first place awards for public service and community leadership. She is skilled at change-making investigations and storytelling from deep source building, data, and public records. Before coming to the Fort Myers News-Press, she reported for the Miami Herald and Boston Globe, and did video reporting in Haiti where she has volunteered for a healthcare clinic.



Janine Zeitlin is a freelance writer and storyteller for the News-Press. She is also a contributor to Gulfshore Life and Gulfshore Business, and she has taught feature writing at FGCU. She was also a winner of the 2018 Green Eyeshade Award for public service, as well as the 2018 Florida Society of Newspaper Editors community leadership award for environmental justice reporting in Southwest Florida. Her articles and essays have appeared in a variety of publications including The Washington Post, USA Today, Village Voice Media, the Miami Herald, and New York's Daily News.

## 2019-2020 LWV Sanibel Officers and Directors

Robyn Cook, President  
Ellen O'Neill, Vice President  
Bob Terry, Treasurer  
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Linda Kramer, Director, Voter Services  
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Rick Siders, Director  
Carla Benninga, Director Emerita  
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Maddie Stewart

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2019-2020 Nominating Committee

Robin Krivanek (Chair), Judy Adler, Dick Calkins, Linda Kramer

LWVS Founders, aka "founding mothers"



Carla Benninga

Linda Kramer

Linda Robison