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**HAPPY
NEW YEAR !**

Calendar

January 17—Annual Program Planning Meeting —Important for all League Members to be Present. League office at Stone Soup, 9:00 a.m.

Wed. January 21—Regular Board Meeting . League Office—all invited

Wed. February 18-Regular Board Meeting. League Office—all invited.

Wed. Feb. 25—noon. Lunch and Learn. League Office. Mary Todd Lincoln. Details inside.

April 25—Annual Meeting Speaker : Ashley Swearingen Details inside

The Fresno VOTER

LEAGUE AWARDS TEACHERS FOR CONSTITUTION PROJECTS

By Francine Farber 226-5455



LWVF has awarded \$500 mini-grants to nine Fresno County middle and high school history/social science teachers for hands-on projects to advance their students' knowledge about the U.S. Constitution. **The funding was made available through a foundation grant bequeathed through League member Bette Peterson.** Seven of the teachers are from Fresno Unified School District. They are:

Manuel Mendiola —Teilman Education Center A living history tour of Monterey to understand the impact of the creation of the California Constitution and how it compares/contrasts with the U.S. Constitution.

Eileen Fisher-Stewart — Hamilton A trip to Allensworth State Park to study the effects of slavery as first allowed under the Constitution and then abolished under the 13th Amendment.

Miguel Angel Gomez—Roosevelt High School Purchase materials to have students make their own Monopoly board games relating to the Constitution.

Mike Lebsock—Computech Middle School

School Have students create a series of podcasts that chronicle the events, individuals and ideas leading to the Constitution.

Derek Boucher—Roosevelt High School

Purchase high interest lower level books to supplement the textbook regarding the origins and meaning of the Constitution.

Clare Statham—Computech Middle School

School Combine art, history, research, public speaking and technology by assigning a famous American painting about the Constitution or early government to small groups and having each group research the artistic and historical content and present in video format.

Mark Hill — West Fresno Middle School

Students will identify the challenges facing each of the 43 presidents and how the Constitution addressed them. Presentation materials will be purchased.

Two other grants were awarded to teachers outside of FUSD. They are:

Veronica Thomas—Abraham Lincoln MS, Selma

School Students will use art, crafts, essays, community service and poetry to represent the six goals of the Preamble to the Constitution.

Elizabeth Bettencourt—Alice Worsley

School, FCOE A Veterans Fair will invite military veterans to visit the school and share their experiences with students, and how the freedoms guaranteed under the Constitution

See **Constitution Projects**, Page 5

President's Message

A number of public communication opportunities have come my way this past month. First an op-ed piece was published in the Bee's "Valley Visions" section. This article was similar to one I had written for the previous month's *Voter*, describing the enormous progress that has been made toward achieving voluntary preschool for all four-year-olds in Fresno County.

One thing led to another. As a result of the Bee article, the Fresno County Office of Education asked me to attend an all-day Media Workshop offered by Preschool California in Oakland on December 14. We drove up the night before in a terrific storm which probably was the most rain we had seen since moving from the East Coast four or five years ago. The workshop featured a professional communications person who did an excellent job in imparting his firm's method of organizing for public relations opportunities. The other attendees had the common thread of being involved in county level organizations that promote preschool in other California areas.

A few days later, also as a result of the Bee op-ed article, I was invited to appear on Mayor Autry's new radio talk show on Station KYNO, 1300 AM. Wanting to reciprocate, I invited a representative from the County's early childcare office to appear with me. Wilma Hashimoto, formerly a preschool administrator for Clovis Unified who had been a member of our Preschool Leadership Council, is now the Assistant Administrator for Early Childhood Education at the Fresno County Office of Education. Together we were supposed to spend about 30 minutes with the Mayor. Since both of us had attended the Media Workshop in Oakland, we had had the opportunity to test out some communication strategies ahead of time with the workshop participants. Unfortunately, we only got to speak for 5 to 10 minutes due to call-ins from Mike Villines about the state budget and other callers with comments unrelated to preschool. We were disappointed!

A subsequent invitation from FCOE asked me to help represent the County at a workshop to be held in January at Fresno State. This one will include representatives from throughout the San Joaquin Valley who will hear about Exemplary Practices in Education in the Valley. I look forward to attending breakout sessions on preparing middle and high school students for college, building collaborative relationships between schools and communities, and building workforce readiness in alternative schools. You can see I am moving up the educational ladder from preschool!

Francine

FAREWELL

Long-time members **Carl and Esther Robinson** have moved to Ventura. Their new address is: **90 Don Antonio Way Ojai, CA 93023**



Letter from LWVC

Janis Hiohama, LWVC president, wrote a personal letter to Francine Farber regarding the October issue of the *Voter*. In the spirit of the season, we are reprinting it here so that we all may share in her congratulations on our accomplishments.

Dear Francine:

I have been catching up on my reading now that the election is over, and was very pleased to see your very informative Fresno Voter for October.

I particularly enjoyed the article about the City Hall and Court visits for Constitution Day. It is so vital that new citizens and future citizens –in fact, all members of our communities–understand how our institutions of government work. Visits like these serve a valuable function in achieving this goal. On the state commission on impartial courts we have been very much focused on increasing public understanding of the unique role that judges play in our system of government. I'm so pleased that LWVF has been so active in such efforts.

On a different subject, I very much appreciate the advocacy of you and other members of your League on Proposition 11. The passage of Prop 11 is a real victory for fair and open redistricting. The campaign was a hard-fought one and we could not have succeeded without the help of our dedicated leaguers throughout the state.

My best wishes to you and your members and their families this holiday season.

Sincerely, Janis

League of Women Voters Fresno

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LEAGUE'S ANNUAL PROGRAM PLANNING

Saturday, January 17, 2009

9 a.m. until noon

League Office at Stone Soup

by Georgia Sisson 439-5410

Calling all members!

Do you have some ISSUES you'd like to see the League study?

Are you constantly asking, "Why doesn't the League take action on this issue or that?"

At the Program Planning meeting you have the opportunity to influence the issues League studies and the positions it adopts based on the results of the studies. These will become the basis for League action on issues. Every member is encouraged to participate in League studies. Your voice is needed to make decisions about program planning for the year locally and for the next two years on the state level.

Program Planning is at the core of the League of Women Voters' membership participation foundation:

- Topics of studies are chosen and then prioritized considering time and people resources: we can think of many more subjects than we have the people power to work on
- Action subjects (on which studies have been completed) are prioritized to maximize our effectiveness and to keep ourselves from being spread too thinly
- Proposals for studies from the state League (this year) and the national League (next year) are also considered

The combined state and local League program recommendations give us a perspective on the total choices we will finally make at our Annual Meeting on April 25. There, local and state program choices are made by consensus, and minority opinions are registered. We recommend our local program to our Annual Meeting. We pass our state program recommendations on to state League to be considered for adoption at its May, 2009 meeting.

It takes the enthusiasm and interest of our members to make our program vital. The planning meeting gives us the opportunity to review our existing program while considering the actions we have taken before the Boards of Education, County Supervisors, Council of Governments, Fresno City Council, and various other local boards and commissions; to recommend new areas of concern; and to state our ideas for needed effort.

Optional background materials that should prove useful to you in preparing for the meeting include: LWVC *Action Policies and Positions, Updated 2008*, with Education: Pre-K through 12 and Energy positions, and the vertical positions in the LWVUS *Impact on Issues 2006-2008*, available online at the LWVC members only website www.lwvc.org/lwvonly. Look for the Program Planning Kit.

If you don't have the time needed for further research, take a look at the summary of the Fresno League's policies and positions in the LWVF Handbook along with the Principles of the LWV and brief summaries of the state and national league positions.

Your opinion CAN influence the action the League takes. Come and Be Heard!!

Refreshments will be served.

Call Georgia Sisson, 439-5410 for directions.

Feel free to bring guests who are potential members. They may discuss the issues, but not vote.



LUNCH & LEARN - SAVE THE DATE

Celebrate the 200th anniversary year of Abraham Lincoln's birth
Wednesday, February 25
Noon, League Office

Board member Diane Blair is an expert on presidential wives and has a special program planned for us.

"As one of the most written about first ladies, Mary Lincoln has been characterized as ambitious, spoiled, tragic, and crazy. In this presentation I explore her controversial performance as first lady as well as discuss her significant contributions and legacy for the role and U.S. presidential politics."

Don't miss it!

Plan to attend and invite your friends.

YOU bring your lunch

WE bring the snacks and beverages

Constitution Projects, continued from page 1

were defended. Students will write essays and create presentations related to this.

The projects will be completed by mid-May, 2009 and students and teachers will make public presentations regarding the projects at a Mini-Grant Expo. The place, date and time will be announced during the project term.

Another round of mini-grants will be made available early in the New Year to be implemented in September, 2009.

A committee of educators and others developed and implemented the grant procedures. Members of the committee were **Judge Hilary Chittick of Superior Court; Jim Lloyd of Fresno Unified; Lisa Benham of Fresno County Office of Education; and Liz Shields, Jane Worsley and Francine Farber of LWVF.**

DID YOU SEE IT?

The "Thumbs up, thumbs down" column in the Saturday, December 20 issue of *The Fresno Bee* featured the following item:

Thumbs up to the League of Women Voters of Fresno for awarding thousands of dollars in mini-grants to history and social science teachers in Fresno County who submitted creative hands-on projects to encourage their students to learn more about the U.S. Constitution. The money came from a League member's bequest.



ELECTING THE PRESIDENT: POPULAR VOTE OR ELECTORAL COLLEGE?

The United States League of Women Voters has asked local leagues to participate in a new study of the National Popular Vote, as opposed to the Electoral College system. Our Board needs to know if there are LWVF members who would be interested in chairing, co-chairing and/or participating in this study. We would have to schedule discussion and reading time for the committee and also consider having one or more public discussions on this issue.

If you think you might be interested in serving on a study committee for this important issue, please call Francine at 226-5455.

SAVE THE DATE

SATURDAY, APRIL 25, 2009

Annual Business Meeting and Luncheon

Meeting: 9 a.m.

Luncheon 11:45 a.m. followed by speaker

Guest Speaker: Ashley Swearingen, the new Fresno Mayor

Site: Stone Soup Dining Room

CSUF Student Unit

By Diane M. Blair 2440239

The student unit held its last meeting of the semester on December 15. Unit members have been gathering information and interviewing students about the current and proposed budget cuts to the CSU for their forthcoming opinion editorial. We have a draft of the essay underway. It was decided by the group to send this essay out to various print media outlets throughout the state, primarily in areas served by a CSU campus. Over the break, students will be gathering submission guidelines from the various outlets in their home towns and beyond, and at the beginning of next semester (mid January) as students are returning to classes, we will send out the essay. This is also when the state legislature returns from its winter break and will take up the budget issues once again, so we are hoping the timing will be optimum. Our first meeting of the spring semester will be held on January 26 at 3:00 pm in the Speech Arts Building on the Fresno State campus.

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NATURAL RESOURCES

By Mary Savala 434-1227

Model Farmland Conservation Program:

The County's Fresno Model Farmland Conservation Program (FMCP) committee met on November 20, 2008 and agreed to recommend to the counties and cities of Fresno that A) a Strategic Agriculture Reserve be created accompanied by a policy of discouraging non-agricultural development within it; B) a set of objective criteria be adopted for expansion of city spheres of influence and unincorporated development districts into the Reserve; and C) a non-regulatory Stewardship Council be established to oversee the program and promote accountability for its effective implementation.

The purposes of the Strategic Agriculture Reserve are to identify as clearly as possible, and to prevent unnecessary development of, the agricultural land in Fresno County, which in the long term is most likely to sustain high value commercial agricultural production.

The purpose of criteria for expansion of city spheres of influence and unincorporated development zones and districts into the strategic agriculture reserve is to balance the anticipated growth of urban areas and the conservation of the most valuable agricultural land by requiring justification for the expansion of spheres of influence and development districts within unincorporated areas.



The purpose of Stewardship Council is to provide independent oversight of the Model Farmland Conservation Program to encourage accountability by all entities whose performance is key to its success. **The County of Fresno will be asked to expand the county's Agriculture Land Conservation Committee to 15 members and make the work of the Stewardship Council part of its responsibilities.**

The citizens and agencies present at the meeting also agreed that criteria for expanding city spheres of influence would not be restricted to these criteria alone and that 30 years was a more realistic time frame for expanding anticipated growth in view of financial planning and general plan horizons.

TreeTOPS and a National Park Center:

TreeTOPS (Trees, Trails and Open Space) is a Regional Urban Forest, trails and conservation lands initiative. The venture focuses on the urban forest as a resource and a regional planning tool, the trail system as a defining amenity for the region, and the strategic conservation lands which must be preserved. **Immediate priorities for TreeTOPS included the Blueprint Plan for Fresno, Madera, Tulare, and Kings Counties, trail projects funded by Measure C funds, grants, private development, Urban Forestry Education in the region, and the care and health of the urban forest.**

TreeTOPS received a planning grant from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) to hold a visioning workshop, develop an area base map with strategic and available data layers, set up a Project Geographic Information System, refine constraints criteria, display and summarize available

data, establish preliminary criteria for a liner forest, and formulate a conceptual plan to be implemented in the future. The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust is administering the grant on behalf of TreeTOPS, with participation by Tree Fresno, the Regional Jobs Initiative, trails advocates, land conservation agencies, and the COGS for Fresno, Madera, Tulare and Kings Counties.

Preliminary research has been underway for over 2 years. CALFIRE invited TreeTOPS to submit a grant application in May 2007. Grant approval was issued in October 2008. The work will be underway in January 2009.

From this initial effort has come a "trail head" concept for a National Park Center to leverage Fresno's close proximity to Yosemite, Kings Canyon, and Sequoia National Parks, the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests, the San Joaquin River Parkway, and other outdoor attractions in our region.

A National Park Center (NPC) is envisioned to be located in downtown Fresno close to the High Speed Rail station, developed on 40 acres, and visible from miles away. It would serve as an education and welcome center for the National Parks and Forests, and become the Central Park for downtown Fresno. It may include exhibits, an auditorium, light, water, music, art, and recreational features, parking for autos and RV's with connections to transit services and bus service to the National Parks, entertainment venues, restaurants, several hotels, and be built according to standards for the conservation of resources and energy.. The NPC would be the nexus for regional trails.

The NPC concept has caught the attention of planners, the National Park Conservation Association, advocates for neighborhoods near the downtown, and High Speed Rail proponents as a possible theme for the High Speed Rail Station in Fresno and an attractive beginning for visitors on their way to visit the San Joaquin River Regional Park, the Kings River, the National Parks and Forests.

Lee Ayres, project coordinator for TreeTOPS, has consulted with an extensive list of key public and private leaders in the region on preparation of the NPC concept, and he may be asking Fresno League to endorse these efforts.

The League Board will consider inviting Mr. Ayres to make a presentation to the membership and be available to answer questions.



McDonald Community at Copper River:

The Fresno City Council has continued its hearing on a Tentative Map and CUP approval for a Gary McDonald Homes gated community at Copper River Ranch (CCR) to February 10, 2008. McDonald wants the city to allow the development without sidewalks. The planning commission denied the approval without sidewalks and the application was appealed to the council. Although the city has a policy in the general plan requiring sidewalks on both sides of the streets in new developments, an exception See McDonald Community, page 7

Letter from a History Teacher

This article was written by Mike Lebsack, a history teacher at Computech Middle School, who is one of our mini-grant winners. He wrote it especially for the Voter and we are including it here to demonstrate the high quality of the people who were awarded the mini-grants.

For some reason, history has always held some degree of fascination for me. But it was not until I was able to spend a week in Colonial Williamsburg as a participant in one of their weeklong summer teacher institutes that I found my passion for history.

For over twenty-five years I have been a teacher in Fresno Unified. For just over twenty years, it has been with 4th-6th grade students. The last four have been at Edison Computech, teaching 8th grade language arts and U.S. History. Ever since my first year as a teacher, I have always held to the belief that history is a subject that should be done with students and not done to them.

Sadly, the typical method of social science instruction is students reading chapters in a rather uninteresting history textbook and then answering even more uninteresting questions at the end of those chapters. It is no surprise that many students come to middle school with a bad taste when it comes to history.

In my classes students engage with historical events and individuals in a variety of interactive ways. We have turned the classroom into a living museum featuring the various historical periods of California's past, or America's early discovery. We have created a documentary style video of the key battles of the Civil War. We have published an enhanced podcast of the reading of the Declaration of Independence and a video version of the same. We have simulated an archaeological dig at Jamestown, featuring actual and recreated artifacts from the actual area. We have reenacted a typical colonial town hall meeting that led to the Declaration, and had vibrant debates in our own version of the Constitutional Convention. Activities like these and many more put students in the position of "being there", as much as is possible without leaving the classroom.

To that end, my experiences in Williamsburg were fueled with the desire to bring back as much history as I could...literally. I have been able to attend the Colonial Williamsburg Teacher Institute three times over the past four summers. The first two were as a teacher participant, and then this past summer as a peer facilitator, chosen from a nation-wide pool of applicants. While there, I felt as

though I had hit the "Historical Mother Lode". Each time I returned with an oversized suitcase stuffed with as many items as I could fit into the bag, and that my wallet would allow. Along with the artifacts, I snapped over 2,000 pictures of my visits to Jamestown, Yorktown as well as Williamsburg. Loaded with these amazing resources I have been able to share my passion of history with my students like never before.

I absolutely love being a history teacher, for the American story is what connects us together as a people. It is a story of triumphs and tragedies, average men and women doing impossible things, twists of fate, and a sense of destiny. This is our past; it shapes our present and guides our future. In the words of a popular song, "History starts now."



McDonald Community, continued from page 6

has been made in several cases for gated communities at Copper River Ranch. Those approvals were made by the planning commission without going to the council.

The League monitored, commented and was a very involved public voice in the Copper River Ranch rezoning and the Master Environmental Impact Report (MEIR) process. When the MEIR on CCR was approved, League and Medical Advocates sued the City and the developer over the inadequacy of the Air Quality, Ag Land, and Housing mitigation. The lawsuit was settled out of court. The MEIR did require development to have sidewalks. League and the disabled community testified against approval of this application without sidewalks. **The City staff is recommending approval of the development with sidewalks**

League has met with our counsel, Patience Milrod, and it was decided to build a formal argument to the City against approval without sidewalks, which is a violation of the mitigation. League will meet with the Interim City Planning Director, Keith Bergthold, and is working with the disabled advocates to present an argument at the February 10th hearing. The Council is pretty evenly divided on the issue, but a proponent of the sidewalks, Brian Calhoun, and a supporter of no sidewalks in this particular development, Jerry Duncan, is leaving the Council, and the new council members will have to be lobbied. If the Council votes to approve this development with its exception to the sidewalk requirement, it will be amending the City's General Plan Policy.

Education Report

By Kay Bertken 226-2720

Recent education news includes the appointment of Arne Duncan, the Chicago schools superintendent, to be the Secretary of Education in the Obama administration. Mr. Duncan appears to be the consensus candidate among those who were being considered for the job. He has been a tough reformer in Chicago but has been able to work with teachers' unions. In June there were rival educational manifestos circulating promoting alternative education agendas. The first recommended a get-tough policy, leaning on teachers and administrators to raise achievement. The second advocated broader investment in community programs that might support school efforts, including health clinics. Mr. Duncan signed them both. He is a strong advocate for major investment early childhood education, regarding it as more effective than investing in remediation efforts later in children's school careers.

On the State level, the legislature is still struggling with the budget and major revenue shortfalls. The state budget has major implications for school funding, and districts are bracing for midyear cuts this spring. At its last meeting the Fresno Unified Board heard the first interim report on its budget for 2009-2010. The budget plan proposes a balanced approach in meeting anticipated revenue declines, making some reductions in District expenditures and drawing on District reserves that have been built beyond state requirements in anticipation of the downturns that are part of our state's financial volatility. There is general optimism about the ability of FUSD to meet the coming budget challenges without classroom or teacher impacts.

At that Board meeting Larry Moore was sworn in to his new seat and Janet Ryan and Carol Mills were sworn in for their second terms. Valerie Davis was elected as the new Board president and Michelle Assadorian as the new Board Clerk. Among its actions the new Board declined the petition of Big Picture Charter School after the District's charter review team found numerous weaknesses and omissions in the petition. A second Charter petitioner, MidCal, withdrew its application. Based on mixed results from local charter schools, FUSD seems to be taking its petition review process more seriously.

The Board approved a new administrative position for Equity and Access. The position will be responsible for working on college readiness and assuring that the District's



secondary school students are on target to graduate. The Class of 2007 lost 500 students during their senior year. A preliminary District investigation of this year's seniors has found 200 who fall five credits short of what they will need to graduate.

An update on District information technology showed the progress that has been made since 2006, when an outside review team found that the District's networks, computers and technology structures were rated as among the worst in the state. The District has completed work on 56 of the 67 recommendations made in that report and will complete work on nine more in the next 10 months. The remaining two will not be addressed due to other changes that have been made. Fresno Unified is now considered a technology leader and has been advising other districts. The network has been upgraded with wireless access in all classrooms. The email system has been converted to a new and uniform system. Security issues have been addressed. The District has forged strong relationships with technology companies and helped design the HP Minions laptop to fit on a school desk. 10,000 laptops are in use in the District; 1,500 classrooms have been equipped with Smart boards; 3,000 classrooms have computer projectors. The District is also in the process of converting human resources and payroll functions to a new software application.



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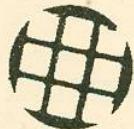
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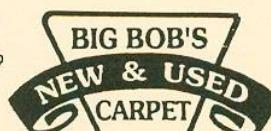
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gender, sexual orientation, disability, or socio-economic level.

DIVERSITY POLICY: There shall be no barriers to participation in any activity of the LWVF on the basis of race, creed, national origin,

NONPARTISANSHIP: The League does not support or oppose any candidate or political party.

MISSION: The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens and influences public policy through voter education and advocacy on issues.

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