

Voter



December 2016

League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area

Texas League rates county election websites

By *GLEND A WOLIN*

County elections websites are vital resources for voters and potential voters. They provide, or should provide, information on how to register, where to vote, when to vote and other facts in a clear, accurate form.

Texas League Vice Presidents Grace Chimene and Elizabeth Erkel decided to see how well the state's 254 counties were doing at disseminating information as the November election drew near. In August, with a 6-item questionnaire that used criteria adapted from a survey conducted by Ballotpedia in 2012, they surveyed the 234 counties that had websites. The results were released on Sept 15.

They found that 183 provided election information, and it was relatively easy to locate on two-thirds of them. But just 37 percent provided even minimally adequate information, such as voting dates, various deadlines, polling locations

and sample ballots. Only a fifth provided minimally adequate Voter ID information. A small majority, 58 percent, provided a link to the Secretary of State website or www.VoteTexas.gov. And just 17 percent provided information in Spanish or a link to the Secretary of State Spanish-language website.

A bonus question, asking if there was a link to an LWV website, offered extra points to the 7 percent of websites that answered yes. This was not because the League did the survey, but because it was felt that a link to a source of nonpartisan information about candidates would be useful to voters.

Originally, the Bexar County elections website did not rank in the top tier, but just days after the report was completed, the website was redone. It became one of 15 counties in the "Outstanding" category. In fact, it received the highest number of points of any county website.

The statewide survey was repeated in October, and apparently the counties paid attention.

"We are encouraged that two-thirds of county websites meet the League's minimum criteria for voter and election information informed citizens need to vote this election season," said Elaine Wi-

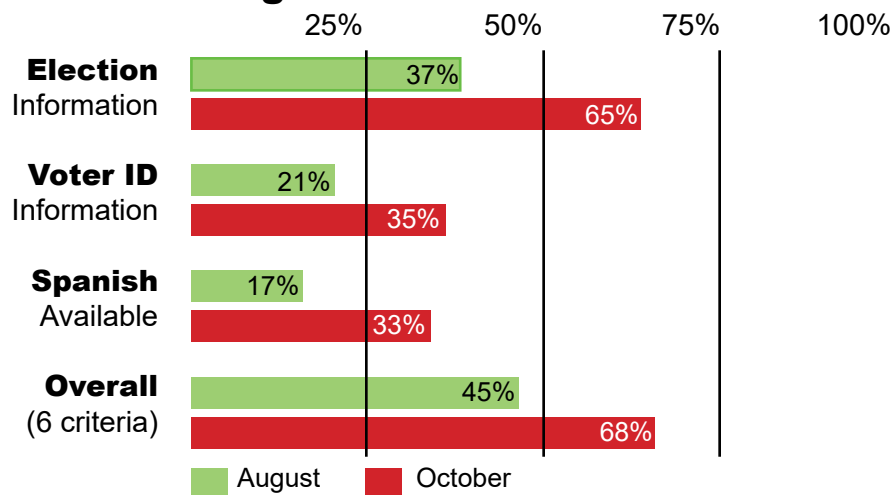
ant, president of the Texas League, when the results were released Nov. 1.

Finding election-related information was easy on three-fourths of the websites, and two-thirds provided voting dates, times and locations and a sample ballot.

The good news is that half

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Adequacy of Election Information on Official County Websites in Texas August & October 2016



Percent of 234 official county Websites with adequate information

Graphic by LWV Texas County Election Website Evaluation

of the official county websites that provide elections information improved their overall evaluation score over August. The number of county sites rated “Outstanding” increased from 15 to 33, and “Honorable Mentions” doubled to 66.

But fewer than half of the counties required to provide information in Spanish did, so there’s still a lot of work to be done. And only a third provided basic information about the new Voter ID requirements.

An “Outstanding” rating doesn’t mean a website is perfect, despite the wording on the chart.

As the report says, “The evaluation criteria considered the accessibility and adequacy of elections-related information, but not its readability. A website may have content that meets these League criteria for accessibility and adequacy, but the content may need improvement in its clarity, readability, and ease of use. A future study should also consider the readability level of the election and voter ID infor-

mation provided on official county websites.”

An example the report used was a link on many websites, including Bexar County’s, to information about Voter I.D. on the www.VoteTexas.gov site run by the Secretary of State. According to a readability study, a person would need a doctoral degree to fully understand it. Guidelines suggest that most documents should aim for a grade level of seventh to eighth grade.

LWV’s recommendation is that the Secretary of State work on improving the readability of information provided to voters so county websites can link to a source that is easier to read.

It makes a variety of other suggestions to county elections officials, including making election information easier to find by requiring fewer clicks, using words

like “vote,” “register to vote,” “request a mail ballot,” and such, on a dedicated election subpage.

Many county elections pages look fine on a desktop, laptop or tablet, but many people, especially low-income people, do not have computers – but they do have cell-phones. And those sites do not look good or work well on a cellphone. Website administrators need to consider that, said Chimene.

She also urged League members to offer to work with county elections administrators to help improve their websites. As the report pointed out, the League did not take into consideration the challenges such as lack of funding and inadequate staff, but even with those, the second review found a 23 percent overall improvement in online provision of elections and voter ID information from the last week of August to the last week of October.

The complete reports can be found at

http://www.lwvtexas.org/Voter_Rights_Election_Laws.html

Former League member turns 100

Former San Antonio League member Ruth Lofgren turned 100 on Nov. 25, but she started celebrating more than a month early. The pioneer in the field of ecology, Quaker, philanthropist and San Antonio’s first peace laureate was given a surprise party on Oct. 14 by her fellow board members on the Bexar Area Agency on Aging and the rest of the folks at the Alamo Area Council of Governments.

Then on Nov. 13, she was honored for her 100 years and for her work to promote peace and justice by the San Antonio PeaceCenter, the organization that named her Peace Laureate in 2008. Always one to think of others before herself, Lofgren said at her October party, “The PeaceCenter is the organiza-



Ruth Lofgren

tion that wants to give me a birthday party and I said not a party, a program that looks to the future. And I’m delighted.”

Happy birthday, Ruth, from your friends at the League of Women Voters!

San Antonio League seeks officers

If you are a League member seeking to learn more about this great organization; to help set board policy and direction; to educate yourself about important issues, voter service, and community involvement; and to get to know other active, interested (and interesting) people; please contact the nominating committee to let us know. The committee is proposing a slate of officers and directors for the 2017-2018 year. Contact Evelyn Bonavita, nominating committee chair, 210-828-1368; ebonavita@satx.rr.com

Two long-time League members die

Two long-time San Antonio League members died in the past month, women who grew up in a very different era but who earned college degrees, thrived on civic involvement and were much loved by family, friends and the community.

Margaret Lecznar



Margaret Lecznar, 90, had moved to Austin five years ago so she could be cared for by her brother-in-law after she developed symptoms of a form of Alzheimer's. She had not been active in the League for a number of years before that, but she had served as the San Antonio president in the 1960s or '70s.

She also spent several decades serving on government boards: the Alamo Area Council of Governments, Charter Revision Committee, Water Board, River Corridor Advisory Committee, and Public

Library Board of Trustees. She chaired the City Planning Commission and produced several programs for KLRN-TV. The San Antonio Express-News honored her in 1979 as Outstanding Woman in Politics, and the Alamo Area Council of Governments named her Regional Citizen that same year.

"She was a great gal," said Rowena Rodgers, a League member since 1956 who is still active. She and fellow member Marlene Richardson had visited her in Austin within the past few years.

Esther Vexler

Esther Vexler, 98, was a woman ahead of her time. She graduated from college in the 1930s, was advocating for equal rights in the 1940s and was the first woman president of any Jewish Social Service Federation in the country. She was the president of the Texas League of Women Voters. In 1963 she was invited to the first White House Conference on Women

and Children.

At 55, she returned to college to work toward a master's in urban planning at Trinity and put together a nonprofit to arrange home repair loans for low-income homeowners. That project eventually became the Community Housing Development Corporation, which then became a city agency.

Amid all this work, "She was always supportive of the League," Rodgers said. "She was always very interested in what was going on around her."

Then there was the yoga. She learned yoga during her travels with her husband, and began teaching it to disadvantaged young women. She eventually opened a nonprofit yoga school in 2014 and stopped teaching just recently.

"The last time I saw her was at our lunch last year honoring Jacque Callanan," Rodgers said. "Until the last couple of years she was very active."



Upcoming Events

Holiday mixer Sunday, Dec. 4, 5 to 7 p.m. at Nancy Price's house, 433 Madison in King William.

Texas Legislative Session begins Jan. 10 at the Capitol in Austin.

Presidential Inauguration is Jan. 20 in Washington, D.C.

Lobby Days at the Capitol in Austin are Jan. 29-30.

Making Democracy Work Dinner is Jan. 29 at the Austin Club in Austin.

Save the Date: The 2018 State Convention will be held April 27-29, 2018, at Inn of the Hills, Kerrville.

More for Hardberger

As an additional thank-you to our 2016 Bravo Award winner,

Amy Hardberger has been given a one-year membership to the League of Women Voters of San Antonio. We neglected to mention that at the luncheon in her honor.



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League welcomes two new members

Jackie Christenson

I am originally from a small town in southern Minnesota. My father was a conscientious objector in World War II. My mother had worked for a mayor of St. Paul, where the Minnesota Democratic Farm Labor Party was active. I earned a B.A., majoring in Spanish and art, with a minor in education from the College of St. Catherine, a very public service-oriented school in St. Paul. A year I spent in Ecuador on a Fulbright Scholarship sharpened my awareness of the role of government and international relations.

Afterward I joined VISTA Volunteers and organized a handcraft production and marketing co-op in Laredo. After coming to San Antonio in 1969, I taught at Southwest and South San ISDs and developed a Cultural Heritage training program at the Education Service Center Region 20. This program put me in contact with leaders of the League of Women Voters and its voter information activities. For 30 years, I was East Central ISD's Coordinator of Bilingual/ESL and was the Public Information Officer.

Now I serve as a Democratic precinct chair and secretary of the North East Bexar County

Democrats club. Increasingly, I understand the importance of voter information and appreciate the efforts of the League.

My husband, George Nelson, is vice president of Maverick Video Productions.

Lana Reynolds

I've lived in a lot of places, but San Antonio has been my home for the past eight years, since my husband's Air Force job transferred him here. He retired about four years ago and we stayed.

I have a BS in Science/Pre-Health from the University of North Dakota and a master's in Zoology from Miami University. Now, after a number of years as school education coordinator with the San Antonio Zoo, I have gone back to school to retake core science classes, hoping to be accepted into UIW Pharmacy School in the fall.

I love to read and learn, and I have a heart for animals. I volunteer for SAPA and the Feral Cat Coalition.

I learned about the League through Veronica Hood and Martha Lankford, who worked with me at the zoo. I wanted to get involved, especially after this election, to understand more about our political system and inform others.

Pass It On *If you enjoyed this issue of The Voter, please pass it on to someone you know who you think would also enjoy it.*

Students study voting



Kathy Hill, vice president of community engagement for the League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area, talks to middle school students about the importance of voting. The students were participating in a legislative workshop organized by Jack and Jill of America, San Antonio Chapter, held on Oct. 1 at the Small Business Development Center Contracting Resource Center. Speakers included Mayor Ivy Taylor, State Rep.-Elect Barbara Gervin-Hawkins, Kenneth Hardeman of the NAACP Youth Council, and Council-

woman Rebecca Viagran. Jack and Jill of America is a membership organization of mothers with children ages 2-19, dedicated to nurturing future African American leaders by strengthening children through leadership development, volunteer service, philanthropic giving and civic duty. The final event of the day was an election in which students could vote for an upcoming program. Younger students voted to attend a Nov. 5 performance of Duck for President. Older students voted to conduct a canned food drive for their service project.

Stories highlight value of League's Voters Guide

If anyone doubts the value of the League's Voters Guide, or of the time and effort that go into it, here are a couple of anecdotes from League members involving other people's discovery and recognition of its worth.

From Evelyn Bonavita: My son is an Austin techie whose friend, also an Austin techie, was dissatisfied with the information he had on the candidates running for office in November. So of course he went online to do his research. His conclusion was that the League of Women Voters had the best website by far and the most comprehensive information on the election. And by the way, he knew nothing about

my connection to the League.

From Sybil Morgan: A local high school English teacher used the Voters Guide as a resource for a persuasive writing project on the election. She wanted unbiased information on the candidates. She was able to borrow a class set of 30 from a library. She found them to be just what she needed. She was very appreciative and returned them after a few days so others could also benefit from them.

