

LWVSAA

President's Message

The following is taken from Madhu Sridhar's address to the Annual Meeting.

I want to thank the Nominating Committee and the membership for placing your confidence in me to lead this great organization. I feel energized by the possibilities that lie before us. In



Madhu Sridhar

my involvement with the League, I have always been amazed at the League's influence, vitality and its members' unfailing commitment. For an all-volunteer organization to last for 100 years, create an impact and keep going strong is no easy task.

Let me start by posing the question: Is the League's mission still relevant and important?

Our democracy is suffering from low turnout and erosion of confidence in the
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Forum to reflect on Texas education

What does the future hold for Texas education?

"Texas falls at or near the bottom in a number of important academic measures," says Madhu Sridhar, newly elected president of the League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area. "Public education in Texas is in dire need of attention in light of rising challenges. Growing population, changing demographics, greater academic needs, inadequate funding – they all make it harder to educate our children and make them globally competitive."

In light of such need, the San Antonio League's Program Committee will present a forum on "The Future of Public Education in Texas" on Monday, June 12, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the San Antonio Public Library.

The moderator, **Richard Middleton**, was superintendent of the North East Independent School District for 21 years. He graduated from the district's Lee High School earned a bachelor's degree from Trinity University, a master's in curriculum and instruction from the University of Texas at San Antonio and a doctorate in education-

al administration from the University of Texas at Austin. After teaching stints at San Antonio, North East and Lamar school districts, he returned to North East as associate superintendent and later, superintendent. He is now vice president for the nonprofit College Board's southwestern regional office, based in Austin, where he works to boost college readiness among a diverse student population. A visionary leader at NEISD, Middleton took

an active role in advocating that legislators give superintendents greater flexibility to save money.

Speakers will be **Shari Albright**, chair of the Department of Education at Trinity University; **Catherine Clark**, senior consultant, Texas Association of School Boards;

Pedro Martinez, superintendent of San Antonio ISD; and **Brian Woods**, superintendent of Northside ISD.

Albright serves as the Murchison Distinguished Professor of Practice in Education and chair of the Department of Education at Trinity University. She is the past president of the Texas Association for Colleges of

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Richard Middleton will moderate a forum on Texas education.

election process (perceived or real). I can think of no other organization than the League that is better positioned and better equipped to close this participation gap and protect the voting rights for all citizens. It is our heritage, and it is the issue that the public most closely associates with the nonpartisan League. Given our unique combination of credibility and experience, we have an obligation to take the lead. If we don't do it, who will?

The League also plays an equally important role in educating and engaging citizens in the community on our priority issues and issues of concern to our community. The three priority issues for this biennium are: Education, Water and Transportation. Getting citizens engaged and informed on important issue is an effective way to boost voter participation.

Fulfilling League's mission in rapidly changing times of new challenges will require us to escape from the gravitational pull of the past. As an organization, we will need to streamline our decision-making process such that we are not so bogged down in the process that we are left on the sidelines. It must include adapting to a changing volunteer workforce that has less time to give but still wishes to remain engaged. We will have to find creative solutions, engage in innovative thinking

and combine execution excellence of the for-profit world with the compassion and commitment of the nonprofit world.

Focus

What will be our focus as we embark this journey together? Our shared vision and the detailed plan will unfold as we get a chance to work together as a new board and a chance to have a brainstorming session with all of you during our Strategic Planning meeting on June 24.

It is extremely important to be strategic in choosing what we want to work on with very limited resources. We can have more impact if we focus our efforts on a few selected key areas.

Three key areas that I know for sure will need our attention for League as an organization to thrive.

Membership Growth and Retention

If membership is that important, why do we leave this important task up to just the membership chair? Let each member of the League bring in one new member in the next 365 days. **JUST ONE MEMBER!!!** We will double our membership.

Technology

We will have to be a technologically savvy organization not only to save money and time but also to disperse information and enhance communication and mass outreach. As a trusted

source of nonpartisan election information, we must maintain a robust and current website. Breaking down the information barriers that keep people from the polls will be a key goal. Voter turnout in Texas is not something any of us can be proud of. We must divert our resources to it.

Visibility

Keeping League visible will be high on our priority list. We will make the League visible by holding forums like the one on Future of Public Education in Texas.

Am I being ambitious? But then again why not?

I am part of a great team. We are in this together.

Yes, you are part of the team. This team includes our experienced past presidents, seasoned League members who have served at both local and state levels and the dedicated board members who for personal reasons are not continuing to serve on the board but have given their commitment to guide us.

I also consider myself very fortunate to be part of this stellar team that you just elected. They are a talented group of professional individuals and bring with them tons of diverse experience and skill sets. But most importantly, the team includes YOU, the members who are the driving force always advocating on behalf of the League.

I am confident this team will rise to the occasion and safeguard democracy for the citizens of San Antonio, Texas.

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Teacher Education and serves as the secretary of the municipal board for Pre-K 4 SA, a citywide early childhood initiative. She is also a member of the governing board of the Holdsworth Center, a new statewide educational leadership center for Texas. Albright received her BA in Education and MA in School Psychology/ Educational Administration from Trinity University and her Ed. D. in Educational Leadership from Teachers College of Columbia University.

Clark is senior consultant at the Texas Association of School Boards, serving as the association's school finance expert. In her 26 years with the association, she led an in-house research organization for several years and headed the governmental relations division of the association in 2013. She has a doctorate in educational policy from Stanford University.

Martinez, the SAISD superintendent, has more than 20 years of experience in the private, nonprofit and public education sectors. He most recently was Superintendent in Residence for the Nevada Department of

Education in Reno, Nevada, and was responsible for advising the governor's office and the State Superintendent of Instruction on education policy decisions. As superintendent for Washoe County School District, he improved graduation rates and increased the percentage of students participating in and passing the Advanced Placement exam. He is a data-driven leader with a strong financial background and in-depth knowledge of academic reform strategies. He received an MBA from DePaul University and a bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Woods became superintendent of Northside ISD in July 2012. He began his career in Northside in 1992 as a social studies teacher at Marshall High School. He helped open O'Connor High in 1998 as an assistant principal. He became vice principal at Clark High in 2000 and principal in 2004. He was appointed NISD's assistant superintendent for secondary administration in 2006 and became deputy superintendent for administration in 2008. Woods has a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of

Texas at Austin and a master's degree and doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Texas at San Antonio. He serves on the executive committee for the Texas Association of School Administrators and is the chair of the regional advisory executive committee for Education Service Center, Region 20. He is a member of the Go Public steering committee, the board of P16Plus Council of Greater Bexar County, and the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, where he serves on two committees. He also serves as president of the board of Texas Academic Decathlon and is a member of the Superintendents Advisory Board of Principals' Institute, the steering committee for Fast Growth School Coalition, and the Commissioner's TASA Cabinet of Superintendents.

"We need to make public education our top priority," Sridhar said. "We must have continuous public dialogues of best practices and innovative ways to educate our children and make schools the gateway of opportunities. Education, as they say, is a great equalizer of opportunity and the universal bridge that connects dreams to reality."



Speakers at the education forum will be (clockwise from left): Brian Woods, superintendent of Northside ISD; Catherine Clark, senior consultant, Texas Association of School Boards; Shari Albright, chair of the Department of Education at Trinity University; and Pedro Martinez, superintendent of San Antonio ISD.

Importance of advocacy explained at annual meeting

By GLENDA WOLIN

From atop the Omni Hotel at the Colonnade on May 20, members of the League of Women Voters of the San Antonio Area and their invited guests watched storm clouds roll across the city as the League elected new officers and conducted other business at the 2017 Annual Meeting.

They also visited old friends and made new ones, ate a tasty lunch, and heard a legislative update from Grace Chimene, state League vice president who sends weekly alerts and advice about what we can do to keep our legislators on their toes. She was a last-minute substitute for Susan Morrison, a fellow state League board member who had planned to talk about legislative issues but who was called away on a family emergency.

The big news is that the League has a president for the first time in several years – Madhu Sridhar, who joined last year after moving from Massachusetts, where she was a League veteran who served as both a local and state League president.

Re-elected as Vice President for Community Engagement was

Kathy Hill; Elaine Talarski was elected Vice President for Program; Sue Robertson Dodd is the new Secretary; Nancy Price was

re-elected as Finance Director; and Chris Forbrich was elected Director of Voter Service. New at-large members are Annalisa Peace, Gayna Dupont and Linda Ar-



Grace Chimene speaks on the advocacy role of the League at the annual meeting,

ronge. Carry-over board members, who will serve the second year of their two-year terms, are Treasurer Theresa Poenisch, Vice President for Organization Martha Lankford, Membership Director Sybil Morgan, “The Voter” Editor Glenda Wolin, and Member At Large Evelyn Bonavita.

The nominating committee consisted of Leslie Altemeier, Phyllis Ingram, Nancy Price, Elaine Talarski and chair Evelyn Bonavita. The 2017-18 committee, chaired by Phyllis Ingram, includes Diann

Andy, Marian Edson and two others to be named.

Madhu Sridhar made clear in her first address as president that in her

opinion, voter turnout should be emphasized over voter registration.

Quoting League founder Carrie Chapman Catt, who said “Someone’s got to do it,” she said getting

citizens engaged and informed is the way to boost turnout.

More of her address is in her President’s Message on Page 1.

Three long-time League members, all of whom have also served on the board, were honored at the luncheon for their service. Phyllis Ingram, Steve Ingram and Nancy Price were all praised for their dedication, hard work and willingness to pitch in, and they were presented with gifts of appreciation.

Grace Chimene, speaking on the advocacy role of the League, reminded her audience that while we remain nonpartisan, we are dedicated to studying issues, working on issues and taking a stand on issues.

One of the things that happened with the November election, she said, was that it gave the League an incredible opportunity, because “so many people are becoming civically engaged right now. The Austin Area League has doubled in size, we’re having small Leagues start up in areas where we haven’t had Leagues, and smaller Leagues are getting more people.”

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As the League grows, so does its power. Chimene talked about the Capital Action Report, which is emailed weekly to all League members during the legislative session. It details the status of bills on which the League takes a position and suggests what members can do to participate in the process.

She noted that as the Legislature drew to an end, the League statewide had taken action on 300 bills, gave 65 testimonies, and made more than 200 legislative visits.

She showed graphs that indicated why we have politicians trying to meet the needs of a very small number of voters – they showed that slightly over 3 percent of voters cast ballots in the primary elections.

“This is what I’d like local Leagues to work on,” she said. “Get out the vote – everywhere, but get out the vote in primaries especially, because in many parts of the state, it’s the only time you have a choice.”



Phyllis Ingram, (from left) Steve Ingram and Nancy Price were recognized for their service to the League.

Planning, training sessions set for summer

Call it the Summer Session.

The League has two opportunities for planning and learning this summer for all members interested in expanding their knowledge of and participation in making the League more responsive to the needs and desires of its membership.

The San Antonio League will have its annual Strategic Planning session Saturday, June 24, at 10 a.m. at the Parman Library, 20735 Wilderness Oak, in the Stone Oak area of San Antonio. Lunch will be served. This is your opportunity to help outline specific goals and identify strategies to make the best use of our limited resources to accomplish the league’s mission. Sign up at league@lwvsa.org.

Then, on July 15, from 1:30 to

4:30 p.m. at Canyon Lake, the state League will hold regional training focusing on communication for Leagues, membership development, fund-raising, protection of “non-partisan” stance, alternate candidate forums, and greater voter information services through Vote411.org.

Anyone from a League wanting to learn more is encouraged to attend, but especially new board members.

It will be held at Tye Preston Memorial Library, 16311 S. Access Road, Canyon Lake – and there’s nothing to stop you from enjoying a morning or late afternoon at the lake, which is just blocks away. Registration deadline is July 1, and cost is \$10 per person. For an application, email league@lwvsa.org.

2017-18 Leadership Team

President: Madhu Sridhar
210-668-1250
madhusridhar2012@gmail.com

Secretary: Sue Robertson-Dodd
830-481-3030
jsuerobertsondodd@gmail.com

Treasurer: Theresa Poenisch
210-732-3789
theresa.poenisch@gmail.com

VP Organization: Martha Lankford
210-340-5366
mblankford1@gmail.com

VP Community Engagement: Kathryn Hill 210-313-7484
kathy@khillpr.com

VP Program: Elaine Talarski
210-521-5496
bookdoll99@gmail.com

Finance Chair: Nancy Price
210-223-8986
nanknox@sbcglobal.net

Membership: Sybil Morgan
210-349-7012
sybilmorgan349@gmail.com

Voter Service: Chris Forbrich
210-843-5766
chris@forbrichassociates.com

Editor, “The Voter” Glenda Wolin
210-378-4614 gwolin@gmail.com

Directors at Large

Annalisa Peace
210-275-9336
annalisa@aquiferalliance.org

Evelyn Bonavita 210-828-1368
ebonavita@satx.rr.com

Gayna Dupont 210-273-7321
gaynadupont@yahoo.com

Linda Arronge 210-342-7349
rarronge@gmail.com

Local League website up and running

We promised you a new website, and now it's here! It has a new address, <http://lwvsa.org>, but the old familiar address, <http://lwvsanantonio.org>, will also take you there, and you'll find a new site waiting to be explored.

Here's a guide, from top to bottom.

The red bar has handy buttons that let you donate through PayPal or fill out an application to join (handy for friends you tell about the League), and a link to the latest Voter and two years worth of past editions.

The blue bar has drop-down menus with useful information for non-members as well as members. Just hover your cursor over each title on the bar and you can



see the variety of options, from details about what the League is and what it does, to how to contact local, state and federal government officials, to everything you need to know about voting and voting rights.

To the right of the blue bar is a magnifying glass. Click on it and you can search for anything anywhere on the website.

The photo slideshow highlights what members have been up to. Right now there are pictures from our Annual Meeting, from Lobby Days in Austin in January, and from our recent Meet & Greet. If you have photos of members

doing something, you can email them, with identification and description of what's happening in the photo, to league@lwvsa.org.

Find other photos and more news on the website's front page too.

We plan to update the website often with fresh material, so you never know when there will be something new there. Future plans include a quiz and a calendar of events. You might want to bookmark it and make a habit of checking it often. We hope you enjoy it.

If you've got suggestions, please let us know at league@lwvsa.org.

Upcoming

Runoff elections for San Antonio mayor and City Council seats for districts 1, 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10 are June 10. Early voting is May 30-June 6. Go to <http://bit.ly/bexalex> for locations and times.

Future of Public Education in Texas forum is June 12 from 6-8 p.m. at the Central Library, 600 Soledad St., San Antonio. Details, Page 1.

Strategic planning for the San Antonio League's upcoming year is June 24 at 10 a.m. at Parman Library, 20735 Wilderness Oak, San Antonio. All members are encouraged to attend. Details, Page 5.

Regional training for all members of area leagues will be held July 15 from 1:30-4:30 at Tye Preston Memorial Library, 16311 S. Access Road, Canyon Lake. Registration is \$10 and deadline is July 1. Details, Page 5.

Local program priorities set for 2017-18

By LOCAL PROGRAM COMMITTEE

League President Madhu Sridhar announced three program priorities for the 2017-18 year. Committees have been established to focus on public education, transportation and water.

Education

The first product of the plan is a forum June 12, "The Future of Public Education in Texas," with a panel of experts with deep local experience. (See story on Page 1.) One of the most important topics to be discussed is funding, including charter schools and the funding of preschool education.

A crisis in funding public education in Texas became a critical issue when the 82nd Legislature in 2011 cut \$54 billion from public education funding. Part of it was restored in 2013 and 2015, but previous levels have not been restored to keep up with the growing population and programs to meet special needs of many school-age children.

Funding of public education is threatened as some members of the Legislature push to fund vouchers and charter schools at the expense of traditional public schools. Fund-

ing of successful preschool education is also jeopardized by any decrease of public school funding.

Providing a quality and equitable education in our community for all school-age children, as required by the Texas Constitution, is challenging. In 2016, the Texas Supreme Court ruled the funding system, based primarily on property taxes, is imperfect, with immense room for improvement, but it satisfies minimum constitutional requirements. The ruling also stated the responsibility for education policy rests squarely with the Legislature.

Education is vital to maintaining democracy. Funding of public schools and the source of funding are issues that need improvement to provide the opportunity for a quality and equitable education for all school-age children in the community for the future of our democracy.

The Education chairs are Jean Aratingi and Marian Edson.

Transportation

A suggested emphasis on transportation in the city/county/area is the second priority issue that the League will be concentrating on. Traffic gridlock, lack of light rail or

other mass transit options, ongoing housing development, street repairs, etc., are all issues that have been discussed in the current city election and we plan on holding a panel discussion in the fall.

The Transportation chair is Elaine Talarski.

Water

The third priority issue that the League will be working on is water. In spring of next year the program committee will look at the current situation regarding water issues in San Antonio. Water management and water quality are, and have been for a very long time, a real concern for San Antonio League members, who are knowledgeable and well-versed on the subject. We have worked with other Leagues in our area, including Comal Area, Hays County and Victoria, on conferences dealing with water issues, and they were very well attended. It's time we revisited the subject.

The Water chairs are Evelyn Bonavita and Annalisa Peace.

Get in touch

Committee members are needed. Those interested should [email league@lwvsa.org](mailto:league@lwvsa.org).

Mission Statement

The League of Women Voters of San Antonio Area (LWVSAA), a nonpartisan political organization, encourages informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

"Nonpartisan political organization" means that LWVSAA does not endorse a political party or candidate in elections, but it does advocate for issues that the organization has studied and taken a position on after consensus from our members.