

Remarks from the President

Madhu Sridhar, June 2021

The pandemic, the social protocol associated with it, the existing digital divide in Bexar County, and the uncertainty with the ever-changing election rules made strategizing the League's Voter Education and Get Out the Vote efforts for this past year more than challenging.

Bexar County saw record turnout in the November general election, with 65% of registered voters participating and nearly 89% either sending their ballot by mail or voting early. This robust turnout in the midst of a pandemic and in a state with restrictive voting laws didn't just happen. There were many forces at play. Among them were scores of dedicated volunteers – members and supporters of the League who informed, encouraged, and helped voters to vote safely at the polling sites.

It was distressingly clear that not only our Elections Department, but individual voters needed to be fully prepared to participate safely in the November election that was to take place under unprecedented circumstances. Being the prime organization disseminating nonpartisan election/candidate information, it posed a huge responsibility on the League.

In meetings with the Commissioners Court and the Elections Department and through columns in the *Express News*, the San Antonio League advocated sending an application for a ballot by mail to all registered voters 65 or older. We actively encouraged voters over the age of 65 to choose this option. The League prepared a brochure explaining how to vote by mail (working closely with the Elections Dept.). Numerous local organizations distributed the 9,000 printed copies.

At the League's recommendation, the Election Department's website was revamped to include pertinent information with ease of navigation.

The League also promoted a concerted effort to create a reservoir of trained election workers. We encouraged and directed younger voters at less risk for COVID to offer to help with the polls.

To minimize time spent at the polling center, The League encouraged those voting in-person to be prepared with their voting choices by promoting Vote411 and making *Voters Guides* available contact-free at the public libraries.

For the May municipal election, the League's voter education and Get Out the Vote (GOTV) efforts continued to build on the momentum of the November election by educating voters about the importance and impact of the local election on their daily lives.

Emphasis was also placed this year on strengthening the San Antonio League as an organization in terms of membership, leadership, emphasis on diversity, organizational structure, delivery of services, building meaningful collaboration with other community organizations and last but not least, fundraising. The League also worked closely with the city and county leadership to ensure that voter interest remains prime concern with all election related decisions.

The League has been a vital resource for Bexar County voters. And the League leadership takes this responsibility very seriously. It is inspiring to find League members and supporters stepping up to make democracy work for all.

The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.
– Phil Jackson

Highlights of 2020–2021

The League as a Resource for Nonpartisan Information

20,000 copies of *Voters Guide* were distributed for the November election and 18,000 copies were distributed for the May election. San Antonio Public libraries offered the guides to voters contact free.

The League developed, printed, and distributed 9,000 copies of *Steps to Voting by Mail* brochure in English and Spanish for Nov. 3 election.

City Council members shared with their constituents, through their newsletters and websites, information sent to them by the League including link to Vote411.

The League has become a much sought-after resource for nonpartisan information for explanations on ballot propositions and charter amendments. Written explanations were included in the *Voters Guide* and on Vote411.

San Antonio *Express News* published commentaries written by Madhu Sridhar

August 13, 2020: Prepare now to vote safely this fall

June 24, 2020: Want to see change in Bexar County? Inform yourself and vote.

To garner interest in local elections, a brochure *Local Elections Affect You: Vote!* was developed and printed in English and Spanish for the May municipal election. *Vote Local*, a set of PowerPoint slides, was prepared for presentation or self-study.

Area Corporate Organizations Promoting League Resources

VOTE 411.org was promoted by Wells Fargo, Military Officers Association of San Antonio and Texas Nurses Association.

Voter Education flyers for the July primary runoff were shared with employees or on websites by San Antonio Chamber of Commerce, South Side Chamber of Commerce, SA Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, TaskUs, Turner Construction, and 100 Black Men of SA.

League Targets Precincts Where Voter Turnout Less Than City Average

Concerted outreach effort was made to 30,000 voters in 24 voter precincts - 8 precincts each on the east, west, and south sides—where turnout was 10%-25% lower than the city average in the 2016 & 2018 elections. Eighty-one volunteers, many covering multiple shifts, block walked and placed door hangers over the course of 23 days.

Get-out the vote (GOTV) postcards with brief handwritten message were labeled, stamped, and mailed by 55+ volunteers to the sample group in November. Postcards were mailed again to a subset of this sample group for the May election.

Pandemic Did Not Stop League Members and Supporters From Their Voter Outreach Efforts

Drive-up voter registration was organized at some IDEA Schools and the Pearl on National Voter Registration Day.

The League partnered with the VDRs of the Ismaili Jamatkhana for drive-up voter registration.

Program Issues

Propositions 411 - An Informational Forum on City of San Antonio Ballot Propositions

Redistricting: It's Effect on You, Your Community, and Our Democracy

Conducted interviews with legislators elected November 3, 2020, to represent Bexar County: ten Texas House of Representatives and two Texas State Senators.

The Economic Inequity Study Committee presented their findings thus far in a forum.

League Giving Talks/Presentations to Area Organizations

Voter education talks, panel discussions, and presentations were given for AAUW, San Antonio Council of Presidents, Oakes Club, TaskUs, Temple Beth-El, San Antonio IDEA school campus communities and many more organizations.

Media Coverage

Interviews were given at various TV stations including KSAT, FOX, KENS, Telemundo, and Univision. The League organized a virtual forum that was hosted by KLRN before July primary runoff between Democratic U.S. Senate candidates MJ Hegar and Royce West.

Another forum was also sponsored for Bexar County Precinct 1 candidates before November general election on KLRN.

Virtual Candidate Forums for May Municipal Elections

Organized and hosted 10 forums for the May 2021 municipal elections. Virtual candidate forums were organized for Mayoral race and for City Council Districts 1 through 6.

Virtual Forum Support

The pandemic forced the League to adopt other venues to communicate with members and the community. Our events and meetings moved to the virtual Zoom space, which opened the opportunity to learn a new set of skills. We do rely on a professional organization to host our Zoom events, but the League is still obligated to provide support operations for the host and keep the communication open and current with all Zoom participants.

Addition of New Leaders for Building the Organization

Many community leaders joined the board and important committees that allowed us to expand both our role and our reach in the community.

Social Media

The League welcomed **Monica Garza**, a proven community leader, to the board this year. She will help with assessing, strategizing, and creating a plan for strong social media output on all platforms- Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Development/Fundraising

To expand our voter outreach and to meet our growing organizational needs, the League had to strengthen its fundraising efforts. **Jill Torbert**, a board member, stepped up to lead this effort.

Committee members include **Lauren Deal, Jenee Gonzales, Pat Jasso, Mary Malich, Paula Starnes,** and **Madhu Sridhar** *ex officio*.

Database

The League is exploring options for a CRM database to support our expanded membership and organizational needs. **Andrea MacRae**, a board member, is at the helm of this effort and looking for more members to join her with this important mission. Committee members include **Felicia Floyd-Wilman, Harriet Wiygul,** and **Madhu Sridhar** *ex officio*.

Voter Service

Expansion of the Voters Service Committee, under the leadership of **Glenda Wolin**, allowed us to hold 10 virtual forums. A moderator training workshop was held to help train committee members. Committee members include **Barbara Baruch, Kim Cauthorn, Melanie Cawthon, Cathy Kleifges, Martha Lankford, Alene Lindley, Greta Hawkins-Mathis, Ruth Peterson, Teresa Rendon, Teri Swartz,** and **Madhu Sridhar** *ex officio*.

Economic Inequity Study

A study committee, composed of League members, has been working on this important topic for the past year under the leadership of Ernie Wittwer. Committee members include **Diann Andy, Linda Arronge, Judy Branch, Michelle Byrne, Mary Paz, Diane Simpson, and Elaine Talarski,** and **Madhu Sridhar** *ex officio*.

Community Outreach

The massive voter outreach under very trying circumstances was accomplished by this committee under the leadership of Elizabeth Wood-Hull. Committee members include **Mary Dierolf (Director of Community Outreach), Martha Lankford, Veronica Hood, Katie Brown, Alene Lindley, Andrea MacRae, Jill Torbert, Harriet Wiygul,** and **Madhu Sridhar** *ex officio*.

Organization Committee

Under the leadership of **Harriet Wiygul**, the League is adopting technology-driven solutions to enhance efficiency and increase organizational flexibility. With this approach, many League processes have improved member outreach and increased accuracy of member database.

Program Committee

This committee consists of many long-time, knowledgeable League leaders both at the local and state level, including the chair, Elaine Talarski. Committee members include **Diann Andy, Jean Aratingi, Sue Robertson-Dodd, Marian Edson, Ernie Wittwer, Harriet Wiygul** and **Madhu Sridhar** *ex officio*.