



## League of Women Voters of Cortland County

# VOTER

Spring 2016

Editor: Sheila Cohen

Official contact information:

[lwvcortland@gmail.com](mailto:lwvcortland@gmail.com)

LWVCC, 12 Pearl Street, Cortland, NY 13045

Website: <http://lwvcortland.org>

### **Mark Your Calendar for the Cortland League's 2016 Annual Dinner Meeting!**

Wednesday June 22, 2016  
Tinelli's Hathaway House  
3976 Rt. 41, Solon NY

**Social Hour 5pm; Dinner 6pm**

Dinner includes entrée (strudel or spinach-stuffed chicken breast), salad, vegetable, rolls, and a luscious dessert. Cost is \$25. To reserve a spot, call or email Charlotte Farris (756-7284, [farrisdc@yahoo.com](mailto:farrisdc@yahoo.com)). Reservation deadline is Thursday, June 16.

**Welcome**

**Students Inside Albany**

**Presentation of Alice Walker Award**

**Featured Speaker: Mary Alice Bellardini**

**Business Meeting**

### Welcome New Members

Skylin Baestlein

Susan Beals

James Bugh

Ingrid Casper

Christine Cecconi

Mary Kay Hickey

Jeanine Masse

Mecke Nagel

Irene Rutan

Kelsey Ryan

Susan Suben

Sara Watrous

### **LWV Mission**

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the 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.

### **Contents**

President's Report, 2

Students Inside Albany, 3

Slate of Officers/ Board Members, 4

LWVCC Calendar, 4

Alice Walker Award Winner, 5-6

LWVCC Membership Application, 7

# President's Message

"Making Democracy Work®" is the focus of the US LWV. To that end, the Good Government Committee of the LWV of Cortland County (LWVCC) continues to be quite active. Last July, our League President met with Donnell Boyden and Karen Howe to discuss recommendations to improve:

- Legislative procedures
- Oversight of contractors
- Transparency of decision-making
- Accuracy of information disseminated by legislators, and
- Respectful treatment of citizens.

(Mr. Boyden is Chair of the County Legislature and Acting County Administrator; Ms. Howe is County Attorney)

A working democracy means citizens are informed and participate in government. Our League works hard to inform voters about political candidates and local issues.

## **Voter Services**

During October 2015, our League sponsored three "Meet the Candidates" forums, customizing questions for each:

- County Sheriff
- City Council and County Legislature
- City of Cortland Mayor

One of these elections was decided by only 14 votes, showing that Every Vote Counts!

In April 2016, we publicized New York's Presidential Primary, explaining the ballot format. In May, our League moderated a forum for Homer School Board candidates, and we sent two high school students to Albany to learn "hands on" about state government.

This spring, we are excited to join an initiative to increase voter registration, as well as organ and tissue donation, by partnering with the Alliance for Donation. Look for the signs, "Every Vote Counts; Every Donor Counts."

## **Local Issues**

We prioritize educational programs based on input from members as well as requests from our community and the national and state Leagues.

In response to our member survey, we tapped community members in 2016 for an ongoing study of the County Administrator position, which was established by law in 2002 but has been vacant since 2014.

We are also collaborating with the Cortland Mayor in planning two September 2016 forums to address the public's questions about health impact and ethics of proposed fluoridation of the City's municipal water supply.

On another controversial issue, last fall, over 80 people attended an October forum on "Economic and Health Impacts of Importing Incinerator Ash." The forum was cited in numerous citizens' testimony to the County Legislature, which voted down a proposal to import ash as daily cover at the county landfill. Four local organizations joined LWVCC in planning the event: the Cortland Standard, AAUW, YWCA, and SUNY Cortland's CGIS Environmental Justice Committee.

We are also monitoring action on the county (and city) jail, while educating on local challenges. To address state proposals on management of juvenile offenders, we convened a panel of local experts (police, probation, district attorney, and academia) in December 2015. Attendees at our "Crime and Punishment" event were rewarded with a holiday reception.

Check our website ([lwvcortland.org](http://lwvcortland.org)) for upcoming events. And join us for informal discussion at a League Social.

Alison King, President, LWVCC

# Students Inside Albany (SIA)

Linda Frank chairs the LWVCC Youth Development Committee, the group that solicits and evaluates entries for the SIA competition. You can assist by joining the committee and/or by making a contribution to the LWVCC tax deductible Educational Fund.

## **LWV Selects 2 Local High School Students to Attend Albany Conference**

**SIA** is designed to increase high school students' awareness of their responsibility in representative government and enables them to interact with other students from across NY State and with NYS government officials. This year, the Youth Development Committee selected Julia Marshall, a senior at Cortland High School and Samantha Oakley, a senior at Marathon High School to attend the conference

Julia is determined to be an engaged citizen of the U.S. She was eager to get a 'sneak peak' into NY political processes by attending this Conference. She has accumulated over 100 service hours, ranging from cleaning cages at a local cat rescue to playing Santa for elementary school children. Julia has two jobs, plays two varsity sports and maintains a very high academic record. In addition to receiving her Cortland High School degree in June, Julia has taken enough credits to also receive an Associate degree from Tompkins Cortland Community College in May. She will attend Albany University in the fall, majoring in Political Science.

Samantha is also an involved student leader. Examples are National Honor Society Treasurer, Future Business Leaders of America President, and History Club President. She is on the varsity field hockey team and participates in the Student Council, the Yearbook Club, and the Drama Club. Samantha has a solid academic record and has also completed college credit classes through TC3's dual enrollment program. She also holds a part-time job as a cashier at her local supermarket. Although finding time for everything is a challenge, she has managed to volunteer at some local events as well. She will attend Keuka College in the fall, majoring in Sports Management.

Both students were sponsored by the local Cortland County LWV with contributions from Zonta International and AAUW members.

You'll hear about their experiences inside Albany at our annual dinner.

## **Slate of Officers 2016-2017**

President: Alison King

Vice President: (open)

Secretary: Suzanne  
Etherington

Treasurer: Lenore Schwager

## **Board Members 2016-2018**

Dottie Fowler

Norma Rhodes

Jo Schaffer

Sara Watrous

## **Board Members 2015-2017**

Sheila Cohen

Charlotte Farris

Linda Frank

Kelsey Ryan (2016-2017)

## **Nominating Committee**

Norma Rhodes, chairperson

Charlotte Farris

Anita Wright

## **2016-2017 Calendar**

*Watch for League Socials*

### **July 14, 2016**

Forum on County Administrator,  
Location TBA

### **August 6, 2016**

Voter registration booth at Cortland  
Arts & Wine Festival

### **Fall, 2016**

Fluoride Forums with  
City of Cortland

Voter registration booth at Cortland  
Pumpkin Fest

"Meet the Candidate" Forums

Holiday Reception

## **2016-2017 Board Meetings**

All members invited!

1:30-3:30 pm

9 Main Street, Cortland, NY

1<sup>st</sup> Monday of each month

### **May, 2017**

Students Inside Albany

School Board Candidate Forums

### **June, 2017**

Annual Meeting

Presentation of  
Alice Walker Award

# Alice Walker Award – Mary Alice Bellardini

The Alice Walker Award is an ongoing tribute to Alice Walker presented to someone who exemplifies Walker's commitment to service with an independent spirit, sense of justice and ability to focus on a need in society. Walker was a member of the league, active in community service and a faculty member of SUNY Cortland. This year, the award committee selected Mary Alice Bellardini as the recipient who was nominated by Victor Siegle.

Below are excerpts from Victor Siegle's letter testifying to Mary Alice's commitment to community service, demonstrated through both elected offices and volunteer activities.

Voters elected Mary Alice to the Cortland County Legislator from 1980 to 1987 and as Mayor of Homer from 1987 to 2001. She was also chosen by her peers to be President of the NYS Conference of Mayors from 1994 to 1995.

Her volunteer activities include service on these boards:

- BlueCross / Excellus
- Brockway Foundation
- Cortland County Business Development
- Cortland County Historical Society
- Cortland YWCA
- Homer Garden Club
- Landmark Society of Homer NY
- Leisure Hour Club
- Le Moyne College Board of Trustees
- Seven Valleys Health Coalition

Mary Alice "has always been completely accessible and helpful dealing with all the complicated issues of political life in our village and county." Even today, entering her 6<sup>th</sup> decade of public service and volunteer activities, she continues to work on the hardest local issues by organizing neighbors, making phone calls, and writing emails and Letters to the Editor of our local newspapers.

When Mary Alice was honored two years ago at the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, N.Y., in the "Makers: Women Who Make America" ceremony, SUNY Cortland published a detailed article on Mary Alice's achievements.

On March 7, during the second annual "Makers: Women Who Make America" ceremony, the former longtime mayor of Homer, N.Y., took her rightful place with eight other contemporary leaders who have advanced women's influence in key areas.

"None has been a better example of leadership in her community than Mary Alice Bellardini of Homer, NY."

"She truly has followed in the footsteps of Matilda Joslyn Gage, not just in paving the way for women as leaders in Cortland County, but contributing to nearly every aspect of her community to improve our quality of life."

The first Cortland County honoree, chosen from among candidates in a region that extends well beyond Central New York, Bellardini has earned a statewide reputation for civic accomplishment. In 2000, Governor George Pataki appointed her to the state's Quality Communities Interagency Task Force.

In 1987, Bellardini was elected the first female mayor of the Village of Homer, a position she held for 14 years. Her administration was responsible for new water and sewer lines and economic development efforts prospered. She initiated weekly summer concerts in the Village Green and fostered the reopening of the Water Street Bridge walkway and beautification of the business district.

In 1987, Bellardini was elected the first female mayor of the Village of Homer, a position she held for 14 years. Her administration was responsible for new water and sewer lines and economic development efforts prospered. She initiated weekly summer concerts in the Village Green and fostered the reopening of the Water Street Bridge walkway and beautification of the business district.

She also served seven years on the Cortland County Legislature.

Bellardini championed causes like sustainability and historic preservation long before they were popular. In 1974, she was a co-founder of the Landmark Society of Cortland County Inc., a non-profit organization that has facilitated much of the restoration efforts in Homer's historic district of more than 200 structures, the largest such district in New York state.

Having already contributed 50 years to the cause of historic preservation, Bellardini continues to play an active part in the Landmark Society. She has served on many boards, including the Cortland County Business Development Corporation/Industrial Development Agency.

Married to fellow SUNY Cortland graduate Harry Bellardini '56, she currently is a volunteer with several organizations, including the Garden Club and the Center for the Arts of Homer.

"As a college student in the 1950s, I began to live my life according to the teachings of The Christophers," Bellardini said in an interview recently, referring to the Christian inspirational group that reaches out to all faiths with the message "It's better to light one candle than curse the darkness."

"You must take responsibility. Don't think it's somebody else's job," was the group's motto, she said.

Bellardini applied it to turning around her local community, one problem or opportunity at a time.

"I found that on the village board you could discuss things and really get things done," she said. "You can encourage people to do things you'd like to see done, like asking people to not park on the lawns. It's not fun telling people but they get used to it. And if you do it long enough, word gets around that the village doesn't like it and people stop doing it.

"People need to speak up about things they want changed, not in a mean way, but just to say that you don't think things are going right. Find your own way to express yourself and stick to your guns."

Homer now finds itself growing stronger and more vital than before.

As Boylan wrote, "Our little corner of America would not be the same without Mary Alice Bellardini."

## Become a Member of the League of Women Voters of Cortland County

Need to stretch your mind and skills as well as make a difference in the community and the world? These are reasons to become a member and volunteer with other members of our organization. We are affiliated with highly effective NYS and US League organizations that support our activities in multiple ways and provide opportunities for state and national involvement.

We tailor the experience to your needs. Below are some ideas to help you think about the perfect role for you!

- Serve on one or more committees; Check your preference:
  - Communications** (work on the newsletter and website; publicize league activities and positions)
  - Membership and Fundraising** (keep our base of support increasing and strong);
  - Voter Services** (organize candidate forums for local, state, and national elections, develop a database of local candidates and their positions, and plan voter registration activities);
  - Program** (plan and execute programs on current issues based on the state and national League agenda);
  - Youth Services** (register new voters through League-sponsored programs such as "First Vote" and identify outstanding students to participate in "Students Inside Albany;")
  - Nominating** (make sure we have a dynamic Board of Directors,) and
  - Good Government** (help ensure that local government is open and responsive to citizens)
- Serve as a member of the Board of Directors or as an officer. We are always looking for new leadership.

### ***League of Women Voters Membership Application – Cortland Branch***

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

*Please send this page with check payable to:  
"League of Women Voters Cortland"  
c/o Lenore Schwager, Treasurer  
42 Pearl St. Cortland, NY 13045*

*Tax Deductible donations of any amount for educational  
programs payable to "LWVNY Education Foundation"  
c/o Lenore Schwager, Treasurer  
42 Pearl St. Cortland, NY 13045*