

The VOTER

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The Newsletter of the League of Women Voters of Kent

April 2005

League Hosts Forum on Kent Charter Review Process

Since early this year, the Kent Charter Review Commission has been meeting to discuss proposed changes to the city's charter. To learn more about that process, make plans to attend a panel discussion on April 21 sponsored by the Kent League of Women Voters.

The panel will feature three Kent residents: Law Director James Silver, former City Manager Priscilla Blanchard and former Kent Councilman John Thomas. They will begin their presentations at 7:30 p.m. at Coleman Professional Services, 5982 Rhodes Road, in Kent. Blanchard and Thomas are

members of the 2005 Charter Review Commission.

Silver, a partner in the law firm Christley, Herington and Pierce in Aurora, will speak on the charter review process. He will discuss how a charter is organized and how it is changed and how the document relates to the Ohio Revised Code.

Blanchard, who now serves as the director of public works for the city of Hudson, will talk about the city manager form of government and elections.

Thomas, a part-time instructor at the Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the Universi-

ty of Akron and in the schools of Management and Public Policy and Administration at Kent State University, will provide historical information on the establishment of the Kent City Charter and discuss the issue of a strong mayor form of government versus the city manager form of government. Thomas is a former Portage County auditor and Portage County commissioner.

The presentations will be followed by a question and answer session facilitated by League Treasurer Nena Hankins.

See *CHARTER*, p. 5.

League Member Wins National Award

Kent League member Edith Chase, well-known for her conservation efforts, was honored with a national conservation



Chase

award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Chase was named Coastal Steward of the Year by NOAA for her commitment to conserving Lake Erie

coastal resources for four decades as a volunteer, citizen and president of the Ohio Coastal Resource Management Project. She is a resident of Franklin Township.

The NOAA award is the latest accolade Chase has received for her environmental work. She was inducted into the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Conservation Hall of Fame in 1992. Two years earlier, she was

See *CHASE*, p. 3.



LWVK Events Alert . . .

Thursday, March 21, 7:30 p.m.

Informational meeting on the Kent City Charter; Coleman Professional Services, 5982 Rhodes Road, Kent.

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From the VP's Desk:

Parks... City Charter Review... Candidates Night... Annual Meeting

First of all, I want to express the League's sincere thanks to Nancy Adams for arranging the March 29 program on city of Kent and Portage County parks. It was a great crowd, and the program was wonderfully received. There are so many interesting and important things going on all around us every day. We are fortunate to get these insider glimpses of the big picture.

Our next program event is April 21. Panelists Jim Silver, Priscilla Blanchard and John Thomas will speak on the Kent charter review process. Topics include how a charter is organized, how a charter is changed and how the city's charter is related to the Ohio Revised Code. Nena Hankins will moderate the session. The meeting will take place at Coleman Professional Services, 5982 Rhodes Road, in Kent. The CPS building is adjacent to the Gabriel Brothers store on S.R. 59. The start time is 7:30 p.m. We plan to finish by 8:30 p.m. Hope to see you there.

There will be a candidates night for the upcoming primary election. It will be held on April

25 in the training room at the Kent fire station on Depeyster Street. Candidates for Kent at-large council positions will be there to answer questions. Information on Issues 1 and 2 will be available. A *Voter's Guide* will appear in the *Record-Courier* on April 26. Thank you to our Voter Services Committee for keeping us up-to-date at election time.

I hope everyone will be able to make it to the League's annual meeting in May. It will not be a potluck dinner this time, as good as those may be. We'll be gathering in the banquet room at the Rusty Nail restaurant in Twin Lakes. A cash bar opens at 6:00 p.m., with dinner beginning at 6:30 p.m. So put May 25 on your calendar. Details will follow. Annual meeting also means electing some new officers and board members, so please feel free to make suggestions to Gail Pytel who is heading the Nominating Committee. Even better, volunteer for a spot on the board. Spring is here, so it's time to wake up and be counted.

— *Christine*

Save the Date: LWVK Annual Meeting

Mark your calendar now for the 52nd Annual Meeting of the League of Women Voters of Kent on May 25 from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

The setting is the Rusty Nail banquet room, S.R. 43 in Twin Lakes. A cash bar with wine and beer opens at 5:45 p.m. A buffet dinner is served at 6:30 p.m. and is followed by a program presentation at 7:30 p.m.

The buffet costs \$20 per person and offers the following selections: chicken marsala, lasagna (no meat), tossed salad, fresh broccoli, roasted red potatoes, homemade brownie sundae, coffee, tea and soft drinks.

An invitation (with more details about the event) is being prepared for mailing. A registration form also will be included in the May *VOTER*.

The *VOTER* is published eight to 10 times a year by the League of Women Voters of Kent. The newsletter is available both in print and online at the League's Web site: <http://www.kent.oh.lwvnet.org/>.

Board Members

Christine Bhargava, Co-Vice Pres.
330/678-3135

Amie Cajka, Co-Vice Pres.
330/688-9545

Jeanne Schmidlin, Secretary

Nena Hankins, Treasurer

Call the vice presidents to help with program meetings, to volunteer for any committees or to obtain information about the League's activities and policies.

Directors

Tracy A. Deep-Ross

Paulla Gates

Vicki Kline

Kerry Macomber

Linda Martell

Jackie Waltz

Stacy Yaniglos

Directors set policy and make financial decisions. They are involved in program, voter services and the organizational activities of the League.

Off-Board Leaders

Nancy Adams

Land-Use Programs

Sylvia Armstrong, Barb Fox
& Karen Fuller

Voter's Guide

Amie Cajka

Public Relations

Audrey Cielinski Kessler

Voter & Web Site

Gail Pytel

Death Penalty Study

Jan Rusnack

Voter Registration

inducted into the Ohio Women's Hall of Fame.

In addition to working as the Franklin Township zoning inspector for many years, she has been active with the Kent Environmental Council and the Portage County Environmental Roundtable. A past president of the Kent League, she has served as this organization's environmental issues expert.

During an award ceremony in Washington, D.C., conservation leader Thomas W. Offutt III said, "Edith's energy, consistency and knowledge have gained her tremendous respect in the environmental community and among local and federal officials. The NOAA award is a well-deserved testament to her accomplishments, advocacy and leadership in coastal stewardship."

Her efforts have resulted in policy changes at the federal level, public awareness and improved stewardship of coastal resources and watersheds of Lake Erie and the Great Lakes. She joined in the effort to pass important environmental legislation in the early 1970s, worked for the passage of The Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and was an early proponent for Ohio's participation in the national coastal management program. She founded the Ohio Coastal Resource Management Project in 1982.

Chase was nominated for the award by the Trust for Public Land, one of many organizations she has supported and worked with over the years.

Reprinted from the March 10, 2005, Record-Courier.

Kent Charter Review Commission Continues to Meet, Take Citizen Input

The city of Kent Charter Review Commission, which began its work in mid January, continues to solicit citizen input.

All proposals for amendments to the Kent City Charter are to be presented in writing on a form furnished by the commission and available in the city clerk's office. An oral presentation of no more than five minutes also is allowed. Completed forms may be returned to the clerk's office or presented at a commission meeting.

Commission Chair Nancy Hansford encourages League members to attend the group's meetings and offer their input. Below is the commission's meeting schedule:

- *April 7* - Public Hearing (90 min.); commission members and alternates present written proposals to amend Articles XI through XV; consideration of proposed amendments from commission members, alternates and hearings, and

set aside those to which the commission does not plan to give further consideration

- *May 5* - Public Comment (15 min.); finalize recommendations for amendments to Articles I through VI
- *May 19* - Public Comment (15 min.); finalize recommendations for amendments to Articles VII through IX
- *June 2* - Public Comment (15 min.); finalize recommendations for amendments to Articles X through XV; review package and authorize drafting of the report for city council.
- *June 16* - Prepare final report for city council
- *June 24* - Send final report to clerk, council members and administration

Attending the League's April 21 panel presentation on the city charter review process is a great start, but head to these committee meetings to see the "real action."

Earth Week Activities Announced

Several local environmental groups are sponsoring a number of Earth Week activities, beginning with a roundtable forum on Monday, April 18, to discuss the development of a plan to protect the five watersheds in Portage County. The forum begins at 7:30 p.m. at the Gardeners Center, 5154 S. Prospect Street, in Ravenna.

The watershed plan is based on a collaborative project involving several organizations and is

funded by a grant from the USDA Forest Service Watershed and Clean Water Program and by money from the Portage County Commissioners.

Forum panelists are Claudia James, Portage County Regional Planning Commission; Kay Carlson, Lake Erie Watershed program director for the Nature Conservancy; Karen Wise, Davey Resource Group; Charles

See EARTH, p. 6.

City of Kent and Portage County Parks and Recreation: Where We Are, What the Future May Hold in Store

The present status and future vision of parks and recreation opportunities in the city of Kent and Portage County were the topics of discussion at a forum March 29 sponsored jointly by the Kent League of Women Voters and the Kent Environmental Council.

More than 60 area residents came to hear speakers John Idone, director of the Kent Parks and Recreation Department; Christine Craycroft, director of the Portage Park District; and Tom Clapper, senior assistant to the vice president of administration at Kent State University, give their assessment of the state of city and county parks today and what residents may see in the future.

Financial Status of Parks and Recreation in Kent

According to Idone, four five-year park and recreation levies with total millage of 3.45 yield more than \$1 million annually and are the main funding sources for operating Kent's park and recreation facilities and programs. Levies, however, do not increase along with property values because of a rollback feature that reduces the effective millage so property owners pay a tax equal to the amount they paid when the original levy was passed. Re-

cent changes in the Ohio Revised Code enable parks and recreation departments to pass levies for more than five years.

This summer, the Kent Parks and Recreation Board must decide whether to replace one of the levies up for renewal with an



Forum speakers gathered at the end of the presentations to talk to audience members. From left, Tom Clapper, senior assistant to the vice president of administration at Kent State University; John Idone, director of Kent Parks and Recreation Department; and Christine Craycroft, director of the Portage Park District.

extension beyond the five-year period.

For the future in Kent, plans for partnering with Summa Health Care System to provide the community with a wellness/fitness center are being weighed. A likely site would be on the city's west side, in the Admore Drive area. An open-space master plan includes a network of greenways for hiking and biking paths connecting parks and people throughout the city and beyond.

Financial Status of the Portage Park District

Under the management of Craycroft and a three-member

volunteer park board, the Portage Park District has been able to expand the county park system with grants from state and federal programs and land donations from foundations, land trusts and individuals.

In addition, Portage County commissioners have provided \$109,000 from the county's general fund to support the management of the county's first parkland, Towner's Woods. This past year, commissioners allocated \$75,000 to the Portage Park District from the recent increase in the county's transfer tax.

Craycroft noted that in response to increasing pressure for development in Portage County, conservation is the park district's primary goal. Park district commissioners have requested that the county commissioners place a .25 percent sales tax on the November ballot to ensure a broad base of revenue for operations, land acquisition and financial partnerships with local communities.

Future Vision for Kent and Portage County

Through partnerships with the following governmental bodies, a network of interconnected greenways is being developed that will link Portage County communities with green corridors for hiking and biking: Kent city, Ravenna city, Portage County commissioners, Portage Park District, Kent city administration, Kent City Council, Kent Parks and Recreation Department and Board, Kent State University,

See PARKS, p. 5.

CHARTER

Continued from p. 1

The Kent City Charter was adopted by the voters in 1963. It was decided that the first Charter Review Commission would begin its task in 1975. Originally, Kent voters approved of the Charter Review Commission meeting every five years thereafter. Subsequently, voters approved a change to allow the charter to be reviewed every 10 years.

The purpose of a charter review commission is to study the charter document's provisions and recommend changes the body deems necessary.

The purpose of a charter review commission is to study the charter document and its operation and make recommendations to city council that it believes are necessary. These recommendations must be submitted to council no later than July 1, 2005. Council then will consider these recommendations and decide whether they should be placed on the ballot for voters to approve or reject. To be placed on the ballot, a charter recommendation must receive an affirmative vote from two-thirds (six members) of the council's members.

The League has maintained a position on the city charter since 1976 and has joined past campaigns to retain the city manager form of government in Kent. An official position is adopted by the local League of Women Voters organization after the issue has been studied by members who then reach a consensus.

That consensus is then written as the official position statement.

The League supports local self-government for the city of Kent. It advocates retention of a charter so that the form of government and the systems of representation and election may be determined locally.

The League also supports continuation of the council-manager form of government, where full responsibility for administration of the city is vested in the manager, the city's chief executive.

In conjunction with this form of government, the League believes the charter should provide for the appointment of a manager by city council and recognize the subordinate position of staff department heads to the manager.

All staff department heads should be appointed by and be responsible to the manager. Department heads should not be elected directly by the voters.

The League's official position on the Kent City Charter includes retention of the city manager form of government.

The League also supports the present system of electing council both from wards and at-large in partisan elections. Four-year terms for council should be retained, as should the present system of staggered terms. Council should be elected by wards that are substantially equal in population.

For a schedule of Charter Review Commission meetings, see the article on page 3.

PARKS

Continued from p. 4

Franklin Township trustees, Ravenna city administration, and Ravenna Parks and Recreation Department and Board.

At the forum, Clapper referred to the network as "The Portage" and stressed the economic advantage of continuing growth while acknowledging that park facilities and recreation programs are quality-of-life issues.

The League would like to thank those who provided snacks and support for the forum: Debbie Smeiles, Jan Rusnack, Amie Cajka, Tina Bhargava, Charlene Badger, Kerry Macomber and Barb Hipsman-Springer. Special thanks to Nancy Adams, a member of both the League and the Kent Environmental Council, for organizing the program.

League to Host Forum for Kent At-Large Council Candidates

The Kent League of Women Voters will be hosting a candidates night for the at-large Kent City Council candidates on April 25 in the training room at the Kent fire station, 320 S. Depeyster Street. The forum begins at 7:30 p.m.

Information on ballot Issue 1, Portage County Children's Services renewal levy, and Issue 2, city of Kent renewal levy, also will be provided.

A *Voter's Guide* for the council candidates and ballot issues is scheduled for publication in the *Record-Courier* on April 26.

EARTH

Continued from p. 3

Frederick, environmental designer and a member of the project's Steering Committee; and Jennifer White, Portage County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Other events include a showing of the award-winning documentary "Livable Landscapes" on channels 45/49. Show time is April 21 at 10 p.m. The Kent Environmental Council is sponsoring this event.

The one-hour film explores the changing relationship between people and the land in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont through a collection of stories about people who are making choices about how their communities grow and change. Funding for the documentary by Cross Current Production was provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The final Earth Week event is "A Walk in the Park" on April 23. It also is sponsored by KEC. League members are encouraged to make plans to spend time with family and friends in the parks of Portage County on this day or volunteer to help with Portage Park District events.



LWVK Calendar . . .

April

- 18** **General Meeting, Portage County Environmental Roundtable**
Topic: Priorities in land-use planning; 7:30 p.m., Portage Gardeners Center, 5154 S. Prospect Street, Ravenna.
- 21** **Informational Meeting on Kent City Charter**
Presentation on the review of the Kent City Charter; 7:30 p.m., Coleman Professional Services, 5982 Rhodes Road, Kent.
- 21** **"Livable Landscapes"**
Earth Week event; documentary presentation sponsored by the Kent Environmental Council; 10 p.m., channels 45/49.
- 23** **"A Walk in the Park"**
Earth Day event; a day to enjoy Portage County Parks; sponsored by the Kent Environmental Council; all day.
- 25** **Forum for Kent At-Large Council Candidates**
Hear from the candidates; information on ballot issues 1 and 2 also provided; 7:30 p.m., Kent fire station training room, 320 S. Depeyster Street, Kent.

May

- 25** **52nd Annual Meeting, Kent League of Women Voters**
Buffet dinner and program; 6 p.m.-9 p.m., Rusty Nail restaurant banquet room, S.R. 43, Twin Lakes; \$20 per person; reservations required.

The VOTER

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