



LEAGUE OF  
WOMEN VOTERS®

## Manhattan/Riley County

PO Box 834, Manhattan, KS 66505; E-mail: [lww.manhattanks@gmail.com](mailto:lww.manhattanks@gmail.com); Website: [lww.manhattanks.org](http://lww.manhattanks.org)

## President's Message

### *Beginning a New Year*

**By Glenda Phillips**

My first column as President of a League of Women Voters chapter; I am sooo nervous. Well, I have been president of other groups before, but I think it's mainly because I talk a lot....

Seriously, I am very honored to chair this chapter of the League of Women Voters. You are an experienced, intelligent, studied, well-read group of people who have accomplished much over the years and, I am sure, will continue to do so in the future. Thank you for putting your trust in me to do this job.

Speaking of the future, put the next Lunch With League on your calendar. You won't want to miss it. On Tuesday, May 12 at noon in the Manhattan Public Library, we will be hosting Bob Strawn, the new mayor of Manhattan. There are so many topics of interest related to our fair city, I am sure you will want to be there for listening and asking your great questions.

Recently, several members got together for Unit meetings discussing the National Popular Vote. This is a topic being explored with LWV US as well as statewide. Questions arose that

created much discussion which created more questions. Many wanted to investigate deeper into the issues. None of this was a surprise to me. I can tell you all care deeply about our city, state and nation and sometimes we want more knowledge and time to discuss topics. This is why we are looking into discontinuing Brown Bag Lunch and replacing it with an evening discussion time over cocktails (sodas), dinner and/ or sit and talk. Nothing is solidly planned at this point, but if you have some thoughts on this topic, please e-mail, write or call me and let me know what your thoughts are.

Topics such as National Popular Vote, Climate Change, Health Care and others can always be found on the LWVKS and LWVUS websites. Our own LWV M/RC site has links to many topics and how they affect us at home. GO CHECK THEM OUT. I know you will love being informed and up on the issues. This is why you joined the League. Take full advantage of the organization and together we accomplish great things!!

---

## Health Care Report Available

In December, the Manhattan/Riley County League hosted a community forum on health care reform as part of President Obama's transition to discuss ways to improve our health care delivery system on December 30th at the Manhattan Public Library auditorium. The combined report from all the national events is now online at: <http://www.healthreform.gov/reports/index.html>

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEWSLETTER May 2009

# How the Media Affect Our Democracy and Citizen Participation in Government

## 2009 Annual Meeting Keynote

by Lewis Diuguid, *Kansas City Star*

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for having me as your speaker today. I value the work that you do to keep people informed and energized about one of the key pillars of our democracy, and that's voting. Too many people kiss off their responsibility to go to the polls whenever our republic needs their input on who best should occupy an elected office, whether taxes should be increased for public services and on questions about the governance of our nation, state, county, city, college districts, school boards, libraries and health. This is a national problem, and it affects the quality of life in each of our communities, for our children and for our homes. In my 2007 book on diversity, *Discovering the Real America: Toward a More Perfect Union*, I note that before we can begin to problem-solve, we must first be problem-identifiers. In the time we have together tonight we will explore the cause of people withdrawing from participating in our democracy and in government. In columns I have written for *The Kansas City Star* and in my two published books, I have identified the media as being the No. 1 culprit behind folks backing away from being civically responsible. It's as if a national epidemic of apathy has gripped the country. The malaise has been in place and growing for decades. It happens to coincide with the advent of television. In the two decades that I have written columns for *The Kansas City Star* and in my books, *Discovering the Real America* and in *A Teacher's Cry: Expose the Truth About Education Today*, I note that television is far from a benign flickering box of sound and light that's there just for our amusement and entertainment. Television is a cancer. It has served an accelerating purpose designed to make us more emotional, less analytical, more impulsive, more irreverent, less community-minded and more selfishly individualistic. Many of you would expect a print journalist to trash television. Television, after all, is the competition for newspapers. But what I am sharing with you is far more profound than that. In my 2004 book, *A Teacher's Cry*, I quote Jane Elliott, a diversity guru whom I heard speak in the 1990s in Kansas City. She said a formula for raising racist, sexist, homophobic, violent, classist and elitist children is for parents to put

those kids in front of TV sets when the children are barely old enough to sit up, turn the TVs on and walk away. The sweet, vile lessons of all of the "isms" and more will ooze from the tube, and they affect our children, our families and our schools. This stuff happens so insidiously. You wouldn't know it unless I pointed it out to you. I note in *Discovering the Real America* that Ray Suarez of Public Television fame describes the media as projecting "melanin-free zones" offering to people a view of America that is mostly white. In his book, *The Old Neighborhood: What We Lost in the Great Suburban Migration: 1966-1999*, Suarez wrote how popular television shows in the 1990s excluded people of color:

The writers and casts of "Seinfeld," "Mad About You," "Friends," "Ellen," "Caroline in the City" and other popular television programs extol the excitement, sophistication, variety and sheer with-it-ness of urban life. But these shows seem to exist in urban environments unrecognizable to millions of their nonfictional neighbors. Most Latinos in the United States live in large urban areas. Most blacks in the United States live in large urban areas. The networks beam their vision of white urbanity and cozy consumption into the homes of millions of white suburbanites without having to recognize or apologize for the real black-and-brown world that exists just beyond the camera frame occupied by Jerry, George and Kramer.

The dramatic urban landscape is another matter entirely. Unlike the melanin-free zone of Caucasian sitcoms, the urban jungles of "Homicide," "The Commish," "NYPD Blue" and other (shows) feature brown and black characters galore. They are cops, secretaries, victims and most notably, suspects. The membrane between late prime-time and your local news grows thinner with each ratings period, as the clenched jawed realism of black-and-brown urban pathology segues easily into the mayhem of local news. It must be a comfort to an increasingly suburbanized reportorial staff, management and audience that the 'alleged' wild men in their center city are far, far away." (p.127)

Such TV shows cause people to care less for others not like them. Television also talks to our children and

# How the Media Affect Our Democracy and Citizen Participation in Government

Lewis Diuguid Keynote continued...

to us more than anyone or anything in our society, reinforcing the status quo of not caring. In my book, *Discovering the Real America*, I quote a 2004 State of the News Media study that says more than 80 percent of the population gets its news and information from television. In my book, *A Teacher's Cry*, I point out that part of the academic achievement deficit is because of television. Kids grow up with television, and they expect everyone in front of them, including teachers, to entertain them as television does. When that doesn't happen, bad behavior comes on with the kids and they become disruptive influences in class. Television also teaches youths to be irreverent and to think that learning is uncool. Being stupid counts. That creates a negative mindset and a population-wide problem.

I also note in *Discovering the Real America* that a 2005 Ball State University study said people on average spend more time consuming the media than they spend at work or in school and with homework if they are students. Americans spend more time consuming the media than they do sleeping. We spend on average nine hours a day consuming the media, and television takes center stage. What's worse is people aren't just consuming one form of the media. They are texting their friends while listening to their iPods or MP3 players, while watching TV or doing e-mail. They are doing all of these things at once, and most people know that our attention is so divided when we multitask that we aren't doing any one thing well. But that is what's happening to our kids. Their attention is divided, making it difficult for these overstimulated youths to be still and concentrate in class. In addition, minorities and kids in urban areas spend even more time consuming the media – more than 10 hours a day – than white suburban kids do, which puts them at a greater disadvantage. Keep in mind that television is a marketing device, which again is designed only to make people feel what the media have preordained as individuals' natural response. The media also want people to act impulsively – never to think. When I speak in grade schools, middle schools and high schools about this, I ask kids how they would react if I went into their homes and told them that their momma was ugly. I ask what would they do if I said their furniture was raggedy. I ask what would they do if I said their bodies stank and their breath stank, too. I ask what would they do if I said the car they drove was a hoopty. Without exception, the kids become very animated and often say they would toss me out of their homes on my head. And I respond that they should. However, television, which is a guest in most people's homes, does

the same insulting thing every time it is on. Television says that unless the kids' moms look like the TV moms then their mom is ugly. That should be particularly offensive to minority kids who rarely see moms who look like their moms. Television says that unless the furniture in kids' houses and apartments looks like that on TV programs and commercials then what kids have is raggedy. TV says unless people are using the advertised personal hygiene products then people in the kids' families stink. And unless the kids' family cars are like those on TV then the kids have clunky old beaters. Television makes people feel inadequate and insecure unless they own certain products. But then if people buy those things, they quickly find that they still feel insecure because they have to acquire even more products to feel better. Television keeps us grabbing after a happiness it allegedly offers that none of us can ever own. The insecurity makes us less inclined to be civically engaged. I also think we have to ask why when we are thirsty we don't just settle for water from the tap. TV implants in our heads the desire for certain products. I note in *Discovering the Real America*, that the best artists, the best writers, the best psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and psychiatrists are employed by companies to put together commercials and other programming that will explode in people's heads to create a desire in people for Pepsi, Coke, Lays potato chips and other products. Television also spurs us to pick up the language from shows and commercials and to discuss the sports and other programming that it wants us to talk about. We are being puppetted and we don't even know it.

Acting emotionally and not thinking before one acts is not good for our democracy. Our nation depends on people of all ages being more informed than television would ever allow. But we accept television in our homes and treat it as if it were part of the family.

In a Nov. 1, 2006, column, I wrote about a study done by Jody Baumgartner and Jonathan S. Morris at East Carolina University. The report was titled, "The 'Daily Show' Effect: Candidate Evaluations, Efficacy and American Youth." Baumgartner and Morris tested the effects of "The Daily Show" on people, exposing them to humor about then-President George W. Bush and Sen. John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election. What they found was people "tended to rate both candidates more negatively."

The study found that "viewers exhibit more cynicism toward the electoral system and the news media at large." The study said the "soft news" projected in programs like

## How the Media Affect Our Democracy and Citizen Participation in Government

Lewis Diuguid Keynote continued...

“The Daily Show” may have the “detrimental effects (of) driving down support for political institutions and leaders among those already inclined toward nonparticipation.”

Humor trivializes serious things. About torture and the Iraq war, Jay Leno said, “There was so much snow in Washington, D.C., that Vice President Dick Cheney had to take the chains off a detainee and put them on his



*Lewis Diuguid*

car.” It’s funny, but it diminishes the suffering and death in the war. It dissipates the outrage. The “Daily Show” study notes that “exposure to the show lowered trust in the media and the electoral process. This may be the result of Jon Stewart’s tendency to highlight the absurdities of the political world.” As we think about future elections, we must more

carefully discern what’s really funny and what we must take seriously. What we have now is a widespread and growing apathy of why be bothered with those politicians. They are all a bunch of bums. When such irreverence takes hold two things happen: It causes people to pull away from the political process and not bother to vote or force government to be better. It also enables people who are running government to do whatever they want because there is no hands-on, public oversight on what’s going on. Neither is good for our country.

When I wrote about this unnerving trend, however, this is what I got in a response from a reader of *The Kansas City Star*.

(Plays tape of angry read who uses profanities.)

There were several responses like that. It tells me that people are so convinced of the goodness of TV, or at best the benign nature of television that they accept it without question. And why shouldn’t they? We have been conditioned through three to four generations of TVs being planted in our homes to accept what this one-way communication device tells us. It also leads us to believe that we have control over the box. But do we?

Schools, which are supposed to teach civics, are not doing a good job of it either. How could they? They don’t have the needed material to make it happen. The dumbing down trend has enveloped the schools, too. I

had shared in a March 13, 2004, speech here in Manhattan for the Manhattan Peace Alliance what James Loewen wrote in his book, *Lies My Teacher Told Me*.

History textbooks make our government seem like the “international good guys” when that is not how others see us. They see our aid to the shah of Iran in deposing Prime Minister Mussadeh and returning the shah to the throne in 1953. They see our role in rigging the 1957 election in Lebanon, which entrenched the Christians on top and led to the Muslim revolt and civil war the next year. They see our involvement in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba of Zaire in 1961. They see our repeated attempts to murder former premier Fidel Castro of Cuba and bring down his government by terror and sabotage, and they see our role in bringing down the elected government of Chile in 1973. You can add to that now what the United States has done to the elected leaders in Venezuela and Haiti and the U.S. involvement in the Middle East, Africa, Afghanistan and Iraq. Loewen writes, “Covert violent operations against foreign nations, individuals and political parties violate the openness on which our own democracy relies.” He adds: “Educators and textbook authors seem to want to inculcate the next generation into blind allegiance to our country. This international good guy approach is educationally dysfunctional if we seek citizens (patriots I might add) who are able to think rationally about American foreign policy.”

Television makes things even worse, boiling what is simply wrong in history books into a crystal meth version of highly addictive and destructive American ignorance. It weakens our civic and moral teeth and our bones so that we are unable and unwilling to grab hold and really bite into what’s wrong about our government and our democracy.

Here’s another example: Loewen writes that history makes us think that civil rights advances were the result of the work of our good government when in fact “African Americans, often with white allies, challenged unjust laws and practices in nonviolent ways, which then incited whites to respond barbarically to defend ‘civilization,’ in turn appalling the nation and convincing people to change the laws or practices.

“Certainly many political scientists and historians in the United States suggest that government actions are a greater threat to democracy than citizen disloyalty,” Loewen notes. “By downplaying covert and illegal acts by the government, textbook authors narcotize students from thinking about such issues as the increasing

# How the Media Affect Our Democracy and Citizen Participation in Government

Lewis Diuguid Keynote continued...

dominance of the executive branch. By taking government's side, textbooks encourage students to conclude that criticism is incompatible with citizenship. And by presenting government actions in a vacuum, rather than as responses to such institutions as multinational corporations and civil rights organizations, textbooks mystify the creative tension between the people and their leaders. All this encourages students to throw up their hands in the belief that the government determines everything anyway, so why bother, especially if its actions are usually so benign. Thus our American history textbooks minimize the potential power of the people and, despite their best patriotic efforts, they take a stance that is overtly antidemocratic.”

So schools prep young people to not be engaged in our democracy, and then television and other forms of the media finish them off. I might add that the corporate media – television in particular - by effectively shutting out a diversity of voices, ideas and dissent make the willing-handover of power from the people to the ruling elite simple, effective and complete. People are left to think they are taking action out of their own free will by making choices that seem logical, but they've actually been made to be existential victims acting on information that was pre-ordained to elicit a mass inappropriate response for our democracy and for our good governance. Can you say Iraq war? Can you say WMDs? Can you say Patriot Act? Can you say let's hate and mistrust all Muslims?

In columns and in my books I also quote Robert Putnam, a Harvard public policy professor. Putnam wrote the book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Putnam talks about social capital. Social capital is the lubricant that keeps the engine of society going. Social capital also is the glue that holds us together. Social capital is what's generated when people get together to talk. It creates a sense of belonging, a sense of trust, a sense of faith, hope, togetherness and community that we are sorely lacking today. New ideas, intellectual capital and intellectual products are hatched from talking. The conversations occur when people gather in groups like this. But they also stem from get-togethers that include picnics, dinner parties and playing cards with others. Social capital pours out of groups such as the PTA and in what Putnam calls the small animal clubs such as the Kiwanis, Elks and Lions organizations. People also talk and share ideas when they bowl in leagues. But since the early 1950s, the amount of social capital in this country has been declining rapidly. Organizations such as the PTA, and

the small animal groups have trouble recruiting new members. People are less willing to dedicate their time to such endeavors selfishly wondering what's in it for me. But those groups were where people got a sense of how they were doing in the world, how they fit and how they could work together to make things better. Community standards were enforced in such groups, and that included philanthropy, volunteerism, voting and people supporting our democracy. It included people being civically engaged and included citizen participation to ensure good government. Good government is not guaranteed without good citizen input. But folks today get their sense of how they are doing and how they fit in the world from TV, which again is merely a great marketing device making people feel insecure and less willing to connect with others. Television gets people not to think and to act emotionally and impulsively.

The images projected on TV also affect who we will vote for and whether we vote at all. It has gotten so bad that candidates now have handlers who help them to shape themselves to fit the image in people's heads of the president, senator, House member or mayor vs. the person running for office being himself or herself.

The issue now is what are we going to do about it? Strangely enough, I say that we, the people, and groups like yours need to turn to the media to help reverse the problems that the media created. If people are fixed on watching the media, then the television media must change to help to bring people together in community groups like this. The good news comes from a friend of mine who worked as a journalist on three continents. She said that the news media are like seat cushions. They bear the impression of the ass that last sat on them. It is important that your organization be that ass sitting heavily and sitting often. You must be consistent and persistent in accessing the media to get the truth out. You have to get the media's attention and sell the media on ways to get people more civically engaged. They have to appeal to people on a “what's in it for me” level, which is an American, marketing mantra, otherwise people won't bite. But I think it is possible for your organization and others to forge alliances with the media in your area to bring people together for the betterment of your town.

The good news is that it is infinitely more possible to do it here than in large cities like Kansas City. You already have a sense of community built around geography, churches, schools and other institutions. It's in churches that social capital is highest. Forging alliances with churches could be beneficial. All avenues must be

# How the Media Affect Our Democracy and Citizen Participation in Government

Lewis Diuguid Keynote continued...

explored to build bonds and create a sense of togetherness and community, which is wearing thinner with each passing day. We have to get over our oppressive sense of selfishness and our sense of continuing to do things the way they have always been done. Let me close with a poem that illustrates that point and with a story. First the poem. Listen closely to this poem by Jay Patrick Hinney, and think of how it is important for people to work together for our community and for our country. We've used the poem in diversity training sessions at The Kansas City Star. It's called "The Cold Within:"

Six humans trapped by happenstance  
In dark and bitter cold  
Each one possessed a stick of wood,  
Or so the story's told.

Their dying fire in need of logs,  
The first woman held hers back  
For on the faces around the fire  
She noticed one was black

The next man looking cross the way  
Saw one not of his church,  
And couldn't bring himself to give  
The fire his stick of birch

The third one sat in tattered clothes  
He gave his coat a hitch,  
Why should his log be put to use  
To warm the idle rich?

The rich man just sat back and thought  
Of the wealth he had in store,  
And how to keep what he had earned  
From the lazy, shiftless poor.

The black man's face bespoke revenge  
As the first passed from his sight,  
For all he saw in his stick of wood  
Was a chance to spite the white.

And the last man of this forlorn group  
Did naught except for gain,  
Giving only to those who gave  
Was how he played the game.

The logs held tight in death's still hands  
Was proof of human sin.

They didn't die from the cold without,  
They died from the cold within.

The poem instructs us to realize that we all need each other. We must serve as enablers for each others' success and rebuild our sense of community and the public's full and unyielding engagement in our democracy.

Now comes the story called "Shape of an Ape" by Richard Stone of Bremerton, Wash. Again, think of what you now must do.

The story goes like this: "Researchers start with a cage containing five apes. In the cage, the scientists hang a banana on a string and put stairs under the banana. Before long, an ape goes to the stairs and starts to climb toward the banana. As soon as he touches the banana, the researchers spray all of the apes with cold water.

After a while, another ape decides to make the same attempt for the banana with the exact same result -- scientists again hose down all of the apes with cold water. Then the researchers turn off the cold water. Another ape later tries to climb the stairs, but to the scientists' amazement, all of his buddies in the cage try to prevent that one ape from going after the banana even though no water sprays any of the apes.

Next, the scientists remove one ape from the cage and replace it with a new ape. The new ape sees the banana and starts to climb the stairs. To his horror, all of the other apes attack him. After another attempt and attack, he knows that if he tries to climb the stairs he will be assaulted.

Next the scientists remove another of the original five apes and again replace it with a new ape. The new ape goes to the stairs and is attacked. Researchers watch and note that the previous newcomer takes part in the punishment with great enthusiasm.

Again, scientists remove one of the original five apes and replace it with a new ape. The new ape makes for the stairs and is attacked as well. Two of the four apes that beat him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs, or why they were participating in the pummeling of the new ape.

After replacing the fourth and fifth original apes all of the apes that had been sprayed with cold water are no longer part of this primate committee. Nevertheless, no ape ever again approaches the stairs. Why not? "Because that's the way it's always been around here." Sound familiar.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's strive to change the way things have always been. Thank you very much.

# Observer Reports:

## USD 383 School Board

**Kathy Dzewaltowski, Observer**

**March 4, 2009**

The board discussed using "Construction Management At-Risk" (CMR) for the high school's projects and listened to public comment on the matter. The board approved 7-0 the use of CMR for the high school's projects. Board members then discussed their intent to publish "requests for qualifications" for CMR and whether to allow the CMR to bid on projects.

The board was provided with information from Greg Vahrenberg, the district's bond advisor, about selling most of the remaining bonds, approximately \$87.7 million. Mr. Vahrenberg recommended selling the bonds due to favorable interest rates.

Board members approved 7-0 to allow Parks and Recreation to use Wilson or Roosevelt Elementary Schools for its summer day camp program while the park pavilion is under construction.

**March 25, 2009**

The work session focused on creating construction project bundles. Six bundles were created, with some of them being smaller projects with the goal of attracting smaller architecture and general contracting firms.

During the regular meeting Greg Vahrenberg, the

district's bond advisor, informed the Board that he did not sell the remaining bonds as had been previously discussed due to climbing interest rates.

Board members were provided with information gathered from a survey of teachers, principals, and parents regarding elementary parent-teacher conferences. The conferences were held in February this year, and the survey highlighted the benefits and drawbacks of holding the conferences at that time of the school year. The board discussed the possibility of creating a task force to determine the optimum time to hold conferences.

**April 1, 2009**

Dr. Bob Shannon, Superintendent, updated the board on Legislative action on school finance. The Legislature is considering an additional reduction of \$33 per pupil in state funding and additional cuts to special education funding.

The board discussed the Head Start program. The school district has been providing Head Start with fiscal oversight for years, and the board approved 7-0 to become the "grantee" and governing body of Head Start to meet federal requirements.

---

## Urban Area Planning Board

**Barbara Withee, Observer**

**March 16, 2009**

Members present: Jerry Reynard, chairperson; George Ham; Mike Hill, Bill Meredith.

Members Absent: Stephanie Rolley; Nikki Miller; Mike Kratochvil.

Consent Agenda: Approval of the final plat of the Purple Heart Addition, a replat of Lot 1, American Legion Addition which is southeast of the intersection of McCall Road and Tuttle Creek Boulevard Frontage Road. This is the property of the American Legion-Keller Post No. 17 and the location of their club house.

Final approval of the Stone Pointe Townhomes residential P.U.D. Owner is Stone Crest Land Company and Tim Schultz, builder.

The only item on the general agenda was the scheduled public hearing to consider rezoning of the proposed "The Lofts" residential planned unit

development located on the northeast corner of North 11th Street and Vattier Street.

It is planned to contain 113 dwelling units in a four story structure with portions of the off street parking under the building. There will be three floor levels of dwelling units above the garage. Owners are Clayton J. and Esther Umscheid and the builder is Elsey Partners-Bryan and Chris Elsey.

Steve Zilkie, senior planner, recommended tabling of the hearing to April 6 due to some significant issues associated with the issue and the absence of three board members. Motion passed.

**April 6, 2009**

Member absent: Mike Kratochvil

The postponed public hearing was opened for the consideration of rezoning of the land at 11th and Vattier to allow a proposed apartment building. It will contain 113 one (1) bedroom 350 square feet efficiency

apartments in three levels of the four story structure with some of the required off street parking occupying the lower level. Balance of required parking is planned between the building and alley and access is limited.

The decision of the Board was that the plan as presented does not meet several of the requirements for such an apartment building: the design is not sensitive to the character of the neighborhood; the building will encroach onto the front yard set back necessary on both Vattier and 11th Street; building is taller than maximum height limits; landscape design is inadequate; entrances into the large building are limited; density of the development will cause problems for the sewer system in the area; no visitor parking provided.

Developer was encouraged to come back with a plan that meets the building requirements in the area.

#### **April 20, 2009**

Members Absent: Mike Kratochvil; Bill Meredith.

---

## ***Riley County Commission***

**Jan Kruh, Julie Merklin, Lyndal Nyberg, Joan Strickler, Observers**

**March 26** – The commission met in Riley and was greeted by Mayor Marion Schroll.

Commissioner Kearns reported that the Community Foundation has funded the dishwasher replacement for the Riley County Senior Center.

Register of Deeds Debbie Register reported on recent revenue and advised that leaving a position unfilled will save \$56,000 for the year.

Extension Director Jennifer Wilson reported that winning a recent energy program competition brings the county a prize of 1,000 light bulbs from the National Association of Counties. She also noted that 275 low-income taxpayers were assisted in the volunteer income tax assistance program this year – 25 more than last year.

Commissioner McCulloh presented background on possible consolidation of county and city services. She was named to chair an ad hoc committee to report on opportunities for likely areas of cooperation.

The commission heard progress reports on a number of current projects, including Marlatt Avenue improvement, the Konza sewer, Eureka Drive, expansion of the Law Enforcement Center, runway extension at the airport, a pedestrian bridge in Anneberg Park, relocation of waterlines through the NBAF area, water and waste water plant expansions, a Corps of Engineers project on the Blue River, and

The final plat of Grand Ridge townhomes, located east of the intersection of Grand Mere Parkway and Grand Ridge Court, was approved. Owner is Mary L. Vanier, Grand Mere Development.

The rezoning of the proposed “Willie’s Villas” residential planned unit development was opened for public hearing. The PUD will consist of the existing two story fourteen dwelling unit apartment building at 1029 Vattier Street and a proposed three story, twelve unit, apartment building to the immediate east of the existing building, generally at 1021 Vattier Street. Additional improvements include landscaping, signs and screening. The owners are John and Holly Irvine. Staff recommended approval with several conditions. The public and the board had no questions and approved the request 5-0.

George Ham has resigned from the Planning Board effective at the close of the meeting. He was a county appointment and Linda Morse has been appointed to serve in this position.

storm water improvement.

**March 30** – Budget Officer Johnette Shepek reported that the county has received \$290,000 in federal stimulus funding for the Konza sewer trunkline.

Treasurer Eileen King reported that the state will cease issuing new auto license plates for renewals, as it does not have sufficient funds.

Commissioner Johnson reported that the county has the lowest per capita tax rate in the state at \$163 per annum.

There was a lengthy discussion of funding the new boiler and cooling tower for the court house, and it was finally decided that, to save money, the county would undertake the work rather than have it done by a private contractor.

**April 2** – Meeting in Ogden, the commission appointed Linda Morse to a term on the Manhattan Urban Area Planning Board.

Appraiser McHenry reported that there have been 493 tax appeals this year as compared to 664 in the corresponding period last year.

The commission continued to discuss funding for repair of the cooling tower and boiler for the courthouse.

**April 6** – Public Works Director Hobson gave updates on construction projects – the Marlatt Avenue completion, expansion of the Law Enforcement Center,

## Riley County Commission, continued...

and the extension of the Konza Sewer south of the Kansas River.

Finance Officer Johnette Shepek reported on improvements in security for use of charge cards by county personnel.

**April 9** – Chamber of Commerce President Lyle Butler reported that a national real estate guide placed an article on the front page about NBAF coming to Manhattan.

**April 13** – Rich Vargo reported on budget and expenditures to date. He said that overtime hours by county employees were relatively low so far this year. Part of this is due to having less snow to be removed. Some items are over budget because of timing of payments but are expected to be balanced by the end of the year.

Greg McClure reported on the response of wheat crops to the late freeze and gave an explanation of the vulnerable stages of the wheat plant. How much of this year's affected crop will recover he didn't know at this time.

Joan Smith announced dates for the County Health Fair in April. Tests are provided at a moderate cost.

Two future road projects were explained by Jerry Haug of KDOT. The intersection of Bluemont and Juliette will be reconfigured with a left turn lane. The McCall Rd/Highway24 intersection will be "straightened out".

Cheryl Collins announced the quarterly meeting Monday, April 20 at the Zeandale community Church.

The election canvass went smoothly with no changes in the outcome of the voting.

**April 16** – Noting revenue shortfalls, the commission projected possible budget cuts, a hiring freeze, and travel restrictions.

Emergency Management Director Collins reported on testing of the storm warning system and the dam failure system, responses to fires, maintenance of fire equipment, and community presentations on emergency procedures. He noted that 53 fire calls came in on Saturday, April 11, and that one fire was fought in a hailstorm. A Homeland Security grant is being used for emergency radios, with about 800 provided for Kansas.

Debbie Register, Register of Deeds, asked the commission for advice on handling refunds of overpayments on applications for registration of documents. Present policy is to send a cash refund if

the amount is less than \$10.

Counselor Holeman gave an update on legislation dealing with development near military installation, an issue extensively covered in the Mercury. He also told of a pharmacy discount card for county employees. Jail inmates will also be able to get a discount of up to 20% on prescription drugs.

Extension Director Jennifer Wilson discussed the Energy Star Pledge Campaign and the five-year plan for energy efficiency, with special targeting of youth education.

Assistant Public Works Director Rod Meredith conducted a bid opening for crushed lime-stone chips. Bayer Construction's bid, considerably lower than the other, was accepted.

**April 20** – Budget Officer Johnette Shepek conducted a discussion of out-of-state travel by county employees, which led to a unanimous vote requiring commission approval in all cases. The commission also discussed a hiring freeze and voted to freeze full-time hiring starting immediately. They stipulated that department heads can request exceptions.

A representative of the REACH committee brought a draft of the survey to be sent to county employees, with the final version subject to commission approval.

The commission authorized the use of a pharmacy card, intended mainly for uninsured and underinsured people. Many local pharmacists participate.

Public Works Director Leon Hobson conducted a work session for new road design standards being developed into a uniform policy and involving professional consultants and the county's Road and Bridge Advisory Committee. He also reported that Marlatt Avenue will be open in about 30 days and that the Konza sewer project is about 80% complete.

Extension Director Jennifer Wilson presided over the presentation of 1,000 compact fluorescent light bulbs to charitable organizations in the county.



*League Observers are honored at 2009 Annual Meeting.*

MANHATTAN/RILEY COUNTY  
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS  
PO Box 834, Manhattan KS 66505  
e-mail: [lww.manhattanks@gmail.com](mailto:lww.manhattanks@gmail.com)  
web site: <http://lww.manhattanks.org>

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS NEWSLETTER May 2009

## League Calendar

*Keeping up with the League*

**May 2** - Kansas League of Women Voters Convention, Great Bend

**May 12** - Lunch with the League

Speaker: Bob Strawn, New Mayor, City of Manhattan 12-1pm  
Manhattan Public Library

**May 19** - Board Meeting - 6:30 pm, 2201 Hillview Drive

**June 5** - Edith Stunkel Award Event - Manhattan Arts Center - 7pm

**June 9** - Lunch With League - TBA

**June 16** - LWV M/RC Board Meeting - 6:30pm