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League of Women Voters

Time called from a heavy schedule for anniversary pat on the back

By Jeanne Whittaker
staff writer

JO ROBERTS of West Bloomfield is looking forward to a day in May when there will be time for a well-deserved vacation with her jazz aficionado husband, nighttime disc jockey Jay Roberts.

One of 16 metropolitan Detroit League of Women Voters presidents, Roberts is nevertheless thinking beyond the brief hiatus she plans for herself after a three-year stint as president of the Detroit Metropolitan Area Chapter of the League.

Roberts said that she was once told that joining the League would be an education. It is more like a way of life, said the activist, whose career with the League began years ago when her daughter, Cynthia, was safely enrolled in kindergarten, and she joined the West Bloomfield League.

That chapter ultimately joined with the Farmington League to become the West Bloomfield-Farmington Chapter, where Roberts still retains her membership.

Cynthia, now a young woman, will be the focus of her next project with the State League, which is undertaking a long-range plan to address the League in the year 2000.

"The planning group is about young people like Cynthia," Roberts said. To attract young women, the League and other volunteer-run organizations are going to have to provide the types of jobs and challenges they will find relevant.

It won't be enough, Roberts said, to offer them mimeograph-machine jobs. From now on, it will be computers to be in touch with all the facets of the farming organization.

ACCORDING TO Roberts, communication has always been the League's biggest problem. She said that most Americans identify the League of Women Voters with pre-election presi-

dential debates — "We use the term candidates' meeting."

Not many are familiar with the variety of the League's other activities and the diversity of its membership, which includes men as well as women over age 18. The League is a national network of 1,245 local Leagues, which operate on a grass roots, non-partisan basis to shape public policy.

There are 16 League groupings within the Metro Area, she said.

"Each League has its own bulletin. Each one is an independent group," she said. The League is a national network of 1,245 local Leagues, which operate on a grass roots, non-partisan basis to shape public policy.

Quite simply, she said, the grass roots membership establishes League positions. The metro, state and national Leagues implement those positions.

ONE OF THE Metro League's most recent and visible activities has been its involvement with the reorganization of SEPTA.

"We spend a lot of our time monitoring, testifying and lobbying for things on which we have taken a position."

The League position on transportation is that all communities and governmental units must be involved, with no one opting out of the plan; that there must be mobility throughout the entire metropolitan area; and that the plan must help the population to get to jobs.

It also states the League's concern over transportation service being handled by private business.

The position includes a statement of concern, Roberts said, because the League believes that private carriers would tend to go where the routes are most profitable, leaving those less profitable — and the very people who need transportation the most — without adequate service.

Another League concern is voter registration.

"We are very interested in voter reform," she said, adding that there are areas of the community where the

League is allowed to conduct voter registration.

"We believe that it should be easier to register."

ROBERTS SAID public confusion also results from the League's two distinct roles. Its non-partisan role includes sponsorship of such activities as televised presidential and vice presidential debates; similar debates are conducted at the local level.

"We like to be on TV when there is a variety of candidates. It's much more effective than having a few hundred people in a room."

The League's partisan role includes working hard to promote issues on which the League has taken a position.

The League role, however, never extends to sponsoring or opposing a candidate, she said.

"Our definition is that we do not support or oppose candidates ever. We would wait until a person is elected, then we would try to influence or educate him."

ROBERTS SAID the league is respected because its members are serious about what they do, and because they don't waste anyone's time.

"We are very well prepared."

That preparation can come in handy at unexpected times.

She recalled a day when she returned a phone call to "Harry," who turned out to be Harry Command, director of the American Indian Health Service of the Detroit metro area.

Command was calling to ask for help in preparing a sentence for Indian representatives from five states.

The League was able to put on a workshop to teach the Indians methods that would enhance their position within the legislative process.

"We put on a legal workshop for them," she said. League members instructed the Indians in such things as forming coalitions, letter-writing campaigns and organizing support.

"None of it was new or magical information," she said. "It was simply a matter of reminding them how things work. We taught them that lobbying isn't a bad word."

Roberts said the diverse membership can best be described as professional, unpaid volunteers.

Some members are employed and others are not. Some elect to affiliate with a grass-roots group such as a local League chapter. Others, like herself, may elect to begin at the grass-roots level then move on to one of the metro, state or national groups.

Detroit Metro Area League has established positions on such things as water, the river basin, housing, government and voter services.

The League also produces pamphlets on a variety of topics, including one devoted to renters' rights.

These pamphlets are available through a League-run citizen information center, which also disseminates information on such things as the status of legislative bills, the names of agencies that can help, the state constitution and laws, voter information, campaign laws, election dates and a guide to government officials.

The League also makes informational tapes that appear on cable and local television.

With local elections past, state elections a half year away and presidential elections two years hence, Roberts is looking forward to Feb. 14, Valentine's Day, when the League of Women Voters of the Detroit Metropolitan Area will host a 66th birthday luncheon for the League of Women Voters at the Novi Hilton Hotel.

"It will be a day to give ourselves a pat on the back," said Roberts.

For information about the League of Women Voters of the Detroit Metropolitan Area or the luncheon, call 424-8099.



DARY CASKEY/staff photographer

Jo Roberts, a member of the West Bloomfield-Farmington League of Women Voters, winds up her stint as president of the League of Women Voters Metro Detroit Area, in May. But before that happens, she'll be at the league's 66th birthday luncheon when members will gather to reflect on jobs well done.

Artist fields sophisticated questions

Artist Dennis Orlovski said he answered "an extraordinary amount of penetrating and sophisticated questions" from Woodcreek Elementary students when he attended the dedication of a mural he designed and painted in memory of Amit, Ardi and Shashi Gupta.

There was some sobbing and some choked up throats there, but I was amazed at these kids' insight," said Orlovski, who teaches elementary school children in Detroit.

Orlovski chose scenes and characters from Kipling's "Just So Stories" for the mural in the school's media center to honor the three members of the family who were killed in an Air India plane crash last June.

"They wanted to know why I chose the subject, why I would paint an animal purple, and why I chose a tilted wall and how I prevented the paint from running," he said. "I have painted a lot of murals for a lot of different groups and never got questions like that from any audience."

Orlovski has painted either murals or frescos for Wayne State University, the Detroit City County Building, the Detroit Historical Museum, and many in San Carlos Area in Mexico City.

He was commissioned for the mural in Woodcreek by Sudhir Gupta, husband of Shashi Gupta, who was a bilingual aide for Farmington Public Schools, and father of Amit and Ardi; both students at Woodcreek.

The Farmington Hills resident left the area immediately after the dedication for an extended visit in his native India.

Legionnaires observe Americanism Month

The American Legion will observe February as Americanism Month, and Legionnaires of Farmington are planning a number of events in observance.

"The month marks the Legion's annual observance of Religious Emphasis Week, (Feb. 2-8) and Four Chaplains Sunday (Feb. 2)," said Commander

George Jurmu of Groves-Walker Post 346.

"Americanism is a major program of The American Legion," Jurmu said.

"It reaches beyond the fundamental and important elements of patriotic expression — holiday observances, flag etiquette and display for example —

and channels a great amount of effort and resources into education program and citizenship activities for the youth of Farmington and Farmington Hills."

Such endeavors include Boys State, scouting, the National High School Oratorical Contest, sponsorship of baseball leagues and bowling for the handi-

capped and the State Trooper Program. In extending an invitation to all eligible veterans in the area to become Legionnaires, Jurmu said "Membership gives the veteran the opportunity to be involved in meeting the needs of our community through the Legion's many and varied programs."

Concert celebrates Chinese New Year

The Chinese Cultural Center of Greater Detroit is sponsoring the Taipei Youth Chamber Orchestra, from Taiwan Normal University, in concert to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

The chamber orchestra will perform at 8 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 18, in Garden City High School, 6500 Middlebelt.

Advance tickets, at \$5, \$4 for seniors or \$3 for students are available for persons in this area by calling Dr. Leo Ho, 553-9075.



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Table Manners

Paula Myers and Bob Smitham appear in the Farmington Players production of Alan Ayckbourn's "Table Manners."

Volunteer honored

The Farmington Community Center has named Janet Minehart as its Volunteer of the Month.

She has served the center actively for the past two years. Among her accomplishments are chairing Originals, Ltd., the fine arts boutique in the center, and chairing the Fall Arts and Crafts Show.

She helped make the center's Friendship Quilt and has made numerous craft items for the Santa Luncheon.

Minehart is also a member of the Farmington Community Center's Women's Club and has been recording secretary for the center's volunteer board.

She and her husband, Kenneth, and three children have resided in Farmington Hills for 12 years. Her hobbies include quilting and needlework, gardening and reading. She has studied



Janet Minehart

business at Oakland Community College.

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