



CoastLines

The League of Women Voters ® of Curry County

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January 2012

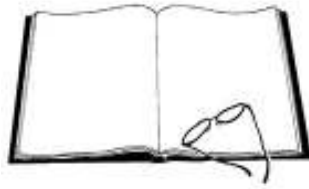
HOLIDAY PARTY A ROUSING SUCCESS



Our Holiday Luncheon was the best one we have done in this aspect: the usual combination of good friends sharing food and fellowship around a big topic presented to stretch mind and vision was realized because each part of the experience was exceptional. There was deep satisfaction that it all went so well with everyone doing their bit with verve.

In addition to a fine meal we heard an important presentation from Bill McMillen, CEO of the Curry Health Network. That presentation is summarized on Page 5.

Statistically, only two of the 24 people who reserved a spot were unable to attend. The League made a modest profit of \$71, which will be used to pay some of our expenses in the months ahead. Your Board feels this is far superior to raising dues. Please let your Board know if you agree.



Dear League Members and Friends,

The holiday party was a great success and I want to thank those of you who attended for being there. We all enjoyed the festive decor, the congenial mood, and superb food. It was delightful to meet invited guests and see familiar faces. From his prospective as CEO of Curry Heath Network, our guest speaker Bill McMillen did an excellent job of sharing the history and future of health care in Curry County. We enjoyed his candid and amiable demeanor, as well as a few words from his wife Heather Eller regarding the Curry Healthy Families project she has recently initiated.

The national League of Women Voters has just announced its new website. Please visit www.lwv.org to see for yourselves the amazing efforts and dedication of our leadership to political education and activism.

Please mark your calendars for the January unit meetings where we will discuss and select national and local issues in which to enlist our energies locally this coming year.

This issue of Coast Lines includes a report from Bob Horel regarding the Citizens Committee for Curry County. These dedicated citizens are looking at the County's financial situation and providing vital feedback to our elected officials. Bob is a member of that committee and his report gives us a view of what is taking place.

League works, thanks to you!

Jan

The League of Women Voters of Curry County



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Coast Lines

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We welcome your comments,
suggestions, story ideas and
submissions. Submissions
must be received no later than
the day of the board meeting
each month. That date is
available on our web site.*

Web site: lwvcurry.org
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CURRY COUNTY CITIZENS COMMITTEE

Editor's Note: One of our League members, Bob Horel, has been appointed to the Curry County Citizens Committee that is examining the financial state of our County in order to make recommendations to our elected officials. Bob has provided this report of what has been done so far.

Curry County is in significant fiscal trouble. The Board of Commissioners has written the Governor declaring the County will be insolvent by July of 2013. As part of the efforts to address the problem, the Board appointed a 24 member Citizens Committee to give them recommendations. They secured organizational assistance from Oregon Consensus, an organization of the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University. I applied to serve on the Committee and was chosen by the Commissioners to be a committee member. Our first meeting occurred on November 30, 2011. The agenda for the meeting was to brief the members on the structure and resources of the County. County staff presented the organizational structure, responsibilities and resources of the various departments. The budget was reviewed and expenditures compared with revenues. The day was long and information intensive. The impression I obtained from this overview of County operations is that we were in trouble because over the years the County had depended upon federal monies to support the County and maintained an unreasonably low local tax rate. As the federal monies declined, the general fund services of the County were reduced and no local taxes added.

The major results of this strategy are:

(1) The County departments have been staffed at below efficient levels, For example the general fund portion of the Sheriff's department provides for 6 deputy sheriff patrol positions. Six positions is the number necessary to have one deputy on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Clearly one deputy on duty in a County of this size is insufficient to provide the level of service and safety expected from law enforcement. Other departments are equally understaffed. The ability of the staff to maintain buildings, preserve public health, run elections, collect taxes, provide medical and mental health services, maintain property records, jail inmates, manage foreclosures, and prosecute criminals speaks to our County employees' admirable competence and commitment. However, the services provided lack sufficient resources to be effective and efficient.

(2) The Curry County tax rate of 60 cents per \$1000 valuation is not adequate to run Curry County. Our County has the second lowest tax rate of any County in the state. If the Curry rate were tripled to \$1.80 per \$1000, Curry would still be the second lowest in Oregon. The median tax rate for all counties in the state is about \$3.60 per \$1000. The highest counties have rates exceeding \$10.00 per thousand. The County tax rate is a small part of all the property taxes in Curry County - representing about 5% of the total property taxes collected. Schools, cities and special districts make up the other 95%. As a point of comparison, the total local taxes collected for County operations is less than the total taxes collected by the library districts in the County.

Continued on Page 4

Continued from Page 3

(3) Over the years Curry County has acquired federal and state funds for transportation. These funds can only be spent on qualifying transportation expenses - i.e., roads, bridges, etc. The County has a reserve of over \$30 million of these transportation funds.

The second meeting the Committee was held on December 15, 2011. The purpose of the second meeting was to explore alternative ideas for addressing the issue. The ideas were summarized into three groups for analysis: Revenue, Expenditures and Organization.

Revenue

Ideas discussed included increasing property taxes, instituting a County sales tax, County income tax or County tax on "tourist services" (restaurants, motels etc.) and adding or increasing fees for the County (business licenses, animal licenses etc.)

Expenditures

The Committee discussed ideas on reducing or modifying services to reduce costs.

Organization

The Committee considered ideas like combining city/county law enforcement, public works or roads, incorporating the entire county, including existing cities into a single city or separating some current county services into special districts.

On the revenue side, Oregon law provides significant obstacles to addressing the problem. Property tax increases are limited to 6% per year. Local sales or income taxes probably cannot be implemented under current state law. It appears any action significant enough to impact the problem will probably require state legislation and a County-wide election. The state is concerned about making accommodations for Curry County because we are just the first of several counties headed to insolvency due to the reductions in federal money.

Federal and state law do not allow for a county to go bankrupt. Some are concerned that a majority of the Curry County voters will not approve a property tax increase to fund the County. We would then see what actions the state and federal government will take when Curry County is not able to provide mandated services such as elections and tax collection for the schools, cities and special districts.

The discussion of the analysis of the groups is scheduled for January 12 and the final meeting to complete our recommendations is set for February 1. The Committee asked for an additional "check-in" meeting on January 19 and is discussing the possibility of one additional meeting. I believe the February target date is to insure any local ballot issues the recommendations might require can be placed on the May primary election ballot.

CURRY HEALTH NETWORK A STATUS REPORT

Bill McMillen, CEO of Curry Health Network (CHN), was the speaker at our Holiday Party on December 10. He told us what has been accomplished in the last year and what is planned.

During the past year CHN:

- Brought in 11 new doctors including specialists.
- Current gross revenues from services by CHN = \$30M/year.
- Patient population is retired and older
- Health indicators: cerebral vascular disease in Curry County is twice the Oregon average; heart disease and cancer the same.
- Other health indicators: among those women 50 years and older in Curry County, in 2009: 56% did not obtain mammograms; in 2007: 78%.
- Curry County has a high number of smokers, those who drink and use drugs and obesity.

The Goals:

- Perform dialysis locally and ED.
- All patients will be able to be seen at the 5th Street facility without traveling to other communities for medical services because that loses revenue for CHN.
- Expand number of medical providers and choices in Gold Beach.
- Primary Care doctors will be retiring soon. They need to be replaced with young doctors with recent training and updated medical practice.
- CHN seeks to expand the health district into the entire county, including Brookings and Harbor. Brookings is the largest city in region without a hospital. Doing this would mean raising taxes and many taxpayers in Brookings/Harbor oppose that. Presently, Brookings taxpayers do not contribute to the health district.

History of CHN:

- CHN started when Curry General was in risk of going under in 1983-84.
- Governor Kitzhaber started OHP (see Oregon Health Authority) in his first administration. It is expensive to administer. One consolidated agency would reduce costs.
- Shore Pines Nursing Home in Wetterburn was privately run and losing money. It is now under CHN management and turning a profit.

Problems:

- A wait time: 2 more doctors going in at 5th St. in 2012.
- Funding shortage: The Property Tax rate of \$0.74 per \$1000 provides 2% of CHN budget. The rest comes from fees for services, usually from insurance companies.
- Too many patients cannot afford medical insurance or the co-pays and deductibles in order to see the medical providers they need. Often this is because they have a limited fixed income.
- Too many doctors who cannot afford to take Medicare patients at the rates currently set for rural Oregon.

Solutions:

- Healthy Communities project (Heather Eller and 4 others): beginning with in-depth assessment of health care in Curry County; and with goals to start the conversation in each community (through a vision council) if needs: bike paths, hiking groups, smoke-cessation, alcohol use education among the young.
- New doctors moving in who encourage their clients to live more healthful lifestyles.
- Affordable health care - "Obama Care"

Next on the CHN Agenda:

Improve the facility at Curry General - needs wireless communications, private rooms, etc.

January Unit Meetings

Program planning is the focus of the January unit meetings. All across the United States local Leagues will look at their own positions and our national (LWVUS) positions. For each position we must decide to keep it as it is, ask for restudy, or drop it. Once we drop a position, of course, we cannot take action based upon it. It is important for as many members as possible to gather for these discussions so that we can be sure that each League position reflects the views of our members. In addition to reviewing existing positions, members can recommend new studies that might result in new positions. Anyone can recommend a new study at either level. There will be an online form to report our League's consensus on the national issues, due March 31.

We hope to have our local positions printed in full for you to look at during the unit meetings as well as summaries of the national positions. If you want background information on the national issues, go to the national website, www.lwv.org and scroll to the bottom of the home page. Click on "publications" in one of the three boxes. When that page comes up, type into the search box "Impact on Issues 2010-2012." The document totals 80 pages with a history of each position, when it was adopted, how it has been used and other information.

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 League of Women Voters of Curry County
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January and February 2012		
Port Orford Unit Meeting	Jan 10; 1PM	Flakes' Home
Brookings Unit Meeting	Jan 11; 2PM	Chetco Community Public Library
LWVCC Board Meeting	Jan 18; 2PM	Chetco Community Public Library
Port Orford Unit Meeting	Feb 14; 1PM	Location TBA
Brookings Unit Meeting	Feb 15; 2PM	Chetco Community Public Library
LWVCC Board Meeting	Feb 22; 2PM	Chetco Community Public Library

Membership Application

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_____ \$55 ONE-YEAR individual membership due on Sept. 1st of the current year.

_____ \$82.50 HOUSEHOLD (for one-year membership for the current year) for two members who share an address

_____ YES, I would like to receive *CoastLines* by email, saving LWVCC over \$10 a year in postage and printing.

Please make your dues checks payable LWVCC, listing the year (2011-2012) on your check, and return with an application form to: LWVCC Treasurer

P O Box 1471
 Port Orford, OR 97465 .

Additional contributions - checks made out to League of Women Voters of Oregon Education Fund (LWVOREF) and mailed to the LWVCC Treasurer are tax deductible.