
LWV Chautauqua County
PO Box 42
Fredonia, New York 14063

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The Leaguer

Volume 23, Issue 5
Jan.- Feb. 2019

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY
lww@lwwchautauqua.org, 672-4275



**February 20 at Noon
Clarion**

Patrick Johnson, speaker
Retired Warden of Chautauqua County Jail,
Professor of Criminal Justice and Sociology
of Deviant Behavior at SUNY Fredonia

Prison Reform



Speaker:

Professor Patrick Johnson is a Lecturer at the State University of New York at Fredonia teaching Criminal Justice. Prior to joining the college in 2013 Professor Johnson was the Warden of the Chautauqua County Jail for seven years. He retired from the Sheriff's Office after 31 years of service in the Corrections Division. Professor Johnson is the Co-Chair of the Chautauqua County Community Justice Coordinating Council, the Coordinator of the Chautauqua County Re-entry Task Force, and consultant for the New York State Division of Criminal

Justice Services, and the National Institute of Corrections. He is also a guest speaker for corrections related topics for CNN and other news networks.

RESERVATION FORM
Clarion Hotel at Noon

- Pasta Alfredo with Broccoli
- Cobb Salad
- Beef on Weck
- Eggplant Parmesan

\$15 Includes coffee, tea, soda, and dessert

Name _____

Contact info _____

RSVP to Nicki Schoenl, 2716 Rte. 39, Forestville NY 14062 (716) 679-1258 schoenl@netsync.net



On March 20th, our League will be hosting a Hot Topic meeting at 6:30 p.m. at JCC North.

For this event we will need volunteers to bake a some cookies or provide a snack for the group.

Please contact Mary Croxton, 679-1774 H, 673-5197 C, mcroxton51@gmail.com

From the President

One of our goals for this year is to work more with allied groups. In the past we have worked with AAUW on candidate forums in Jamestown. We will continue this collaboration for our April program. We are also working with the Women and Girls' Coalition in Chautauqua County for a gathering on April 4th. The purpose of this group is to build a network of women and women's groups to support each other and the goals of gender equality and opportunity for ALL Chautauqua County women.

We will focus on raising awareness of issues women face and the community resources available for them. We will create networking opportunities, share goals and initiatives of each sponsor group, promote personal and professional growth and *inspire and empower*. Lisa Marsh Ryerson, former President of Wells College and current CEO of AARP Foundation, will be the speaker. More details about the time and place will be coming. A video will be shown that features the League and its mission.

Great news from Albany! The Senate and Legislature passed legislation the League of Women Voters has endorsed for some time.

- Early Voting 10 days before the election
- Holding all state primaries in June instead of September

The Legislature is beginning the process of passing constitutional amendments for same day voter registration and no fault absentee ballots to allow people to vote by mail.

We are working hard to fill positions in the League. If you are interested in serving in any capacity please let me know. Any kind of support is appreciated. There are many opportunities for a one time contribution like voter registration, helping out at the booth during the Farm Festival, writing a article for the press. This brings me to an idea that came up at a program meeting. Starting January 2020 each month we submit an article to the press about a woman who was instrumental in getting the vote for women. Articles could also include stories about what rights women had or did not have in our United States history. Interested? Let me know. I would like to get around twelve people to do this.

If you know of a Junior High School student that would like to learn about New York State government please let me know. I need applications by early February for **Students in Albany**.

Warmly,
Mary Croxton

Citizens Lobbying Workshop **How to make elected officials hear your voice!**

Saturday, February 9, 2019 Registration: 9:45 a.m.

**Workshop: 10 a.m. to 12 noon Harlem Road Community Center 4255 Harlem Rd.,
Amherst, NY 14226**

Training conducted by **Ann Converso, LWVBN Legislative Advocacy Chair**
Letters to the editor, phone calls, petitions, personal visits ... what are the best ways to make *your* voice heard? Come and find out from our experienced community activist. You'll learn how a bill becomes a law, how to track its progress, how to conduct a lobbying visit, how to follow up and much more.

Refreshments will be served.

Free and open to the public! Reservations required.

RSVP by Tuesday, February 5, online at www.lwvbn.org, via email to lwvbn@lwvbn.org, or by calling 716-986-4898.

A 'broken system' for mental health, criminal justice

March 11, 2018 Observer

If anyone is qualified to offer a penetratingly honest critique of the criminal justice system as it relates to the mentally ill, it's Patrick Johnson.

Johnson, who retired as warden of the Chautauqua County Jail in 2013 after a 31-year career in corrections, and currently teaches as a professor of criminal justice and sociology of deviant behavior at SUNY Fredonia, had little positive to say about the system he spent most of his career working in.



"We have a very broken system and there's not a big urgency to change it," Johnson told a packed lecture hall at State University of New York at Fredonia during a recent panel discussion about mental health and the criminal justice system.

The other panelists included two Chautauqua County Jail social workers Lynn Graziano-Shaffer and Tamie Gates; psychiatrist Dr. Caillean McMahon Tronetti; and cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Dani McMay.

The event was proctored by Dr. Lisa Denton from the Department of Psychology. While the panelists agreed that the structure of support for mentally ill patients who find themselves in the jail/prison system is better than it was 10 years ago — particularly with the quality of medication, much improvement is still needed.

The event began with the showing of a PBS Frontline documentary called "The New Asylums" which tracked the lives of five inmates suffering from significant mental illness within Ohio's state prison system. The overall thesis of the documentary is that while the prison system struggles "as best it can" to help treat inmates with mental illness, it is far from the ideal place for such people, especially given the extreme lack of support for inmates returning to society.

This issue turns even bleaker when considering a 2015 Urban Institute Report stating that 55 percent of male inmates in state prisons are considered mentally ill. The same report finds that 73 percent of female inmates are mentally ill.

As illustrated in the video, many mentally ill prisoners in this country are serving time for crimes that initially came with short sentences. However, due to their mental illness, their behavior deteriorates to such an extent, they find themselves getting regularly put into solitary confinement and end up missing out on parole opportunities.

When they do finally serve their sentence and are released into society, they are given only two weeks worth of their prescribed medication. Without the support from family or social networks, the released prisoner often can't secure a doctor's appointment in time to refill their prescriptions and run out of the drugs designed to treat their illness.

Continued on Page 6

Now off their meds, the mentally ill often become homeless and again turn towards crime, resulting in another jail or prison sentence.

Dr. Dani McMay, who has experience in Gowanda and Collins correctional facilities, said that although there are some services for released prisoners with mental illness, "You have to know about them. You have to be very aggressive to get them. When you're already suffering from an illness, it's going to be very difficult for you to aggressively advocate for yourself to get help."

Tronetti, who has more than 30 years of psychiatric experience and currently works with the Chautauqua Center, challenged the audience, many of them psychology students, to become advocates.

"You're going to have to advocate for your clients, advocate for the population in general," she implored. "Advocate for improvements. Improvements do not come on their own. They move at the speed of a glacier; by the way, enjoy the metaphor, because your kids will have no idea what a glacier was. You're going to need to realize the limitations of the system and find ways to overcome them."

Among the improvements the panel called for are better and more housing for newly released prisoners. Such halfway houses would ideally be staffed by professionals who would monitor and support the released individuals with transitioning into normal society.

When asked by an audience member if there is any such housing within Chautauqua County, the answer was a stark "no."

At the local level, Gates and Graziano-Shaffer said that communication with staff regarding mentally ill inmates at the Chautauqua County Jail has been improving.

"We're trying to create (support) services for them," Gates said. "Lynn (Graziano-Shaffer) and I try really hard to help them get to the right place they need to be that's not jail. Medication is just one piece of the puzzle. Healthy support, exercise, food."

Gates said that families and communities often lose hope and run out of energy to support their mentally ill relatives who fall into crime.

"They feel they can't help anymore," she said. "If this were any other kind of illness there would be fundraisers and casseroles, but because it's a mental health or addiction issue, we don't see that same sort of support."

Johnson urged that experts and politicians look to other developed nations for answers, especially given that the United States has more prisoners per capita than any other country in the world.

"We can look at models they've been (implementing) in Europe and Scandinavia and see how those systems can work compared to what we're doing in this country," Johnson said.

"In Norway, they use correction officers, take the (released prisoners) out of the doggone prison, they take them to the mall, sit down and have coffee. There are people coming out of prison who don't know how to wash their hands because they've never seen one of those motion detecting sinks.

"(In Norway) they have officers bringing people out to the community helping them with the transition. Here, you're in prison one day and free the next, what the hell do you do? We can do better in this country."

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

February 11	1:30 p.m.	Board Meeting at Mary Croxton’s, 22 Gillis Street, Fredonia. 679-1774
February 20	Noon	Hot Topic Luncheon, “Prison Reform”
March 20	6:30 p.m.	Hot Topic Meeting, “Medical Cannabis” at JCC North
April 17	Noon	Hot Topic Luncheon, “The Erosion of Democracy” Harbor Hotel in Celeron
May		Annual Meeting
June 7-9		LWVNYS 100th Anniversary Convention, Albany Hilton, Registration details coming!

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lww@lwwchautauqa.org, 672-4275



*The League of Women Voters of
Chautauqua County is where
hands-on work to safeguard
democracy leads to civic
improvement.*

Invite a Friend to Join or Give the
Gift Of League Membership!!

Make Your Voice Heard!
Join Us Today!

**League of Women Voters
of Chautauqua County**

Mary Croxton, President
Minda Rae Amiran
Priscilla Bernatz
Gen Ludemann
Marcia Merrins
Lisa Mertz
Judy Reynolds
Linda Warner

Membership Form

Mail to:

LWV Chautauqua

P.O. Box 42 Fredonia, NY 14063

Membership Dues: through December 31, 2019 Individual: \$60; Family: \$90;
Student: \$25 (Check payable to LWV Chautauqua County)

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Fax _____

Email _____

I would like to get involved with:

_____ Local Issues _____ Voter Service _____ State/National Issues

_____ Local Newsletter

_____ Assisting with minor tasks occasionally

Other: _____