



VOTER

TAKE NOTE!

- ✓ **Jan. 28th 7:00 PM**
Immigration
Consensus Meeting
2782 Glenbriar Dr.
404-982-9748
- ✓ **Jan. 31st 7:00 PM**
Town Hall Meeting on
the Future of Jekyll
Island State Park
Maloof Auditorium,
1300 Commerce Dr.
Decatur, 30030
- ✓ **Feb. 5th**
7:00 AM – 7:00 PM
Presidential Primary
Local polling station
- ✓ **Feb. 9th**
10:30 AM - 12:00 PM
Brunch 'n' Learn
Carpe Diem, Decatur
- ✓ **Feb. 14th 8:00 PM**
Stage Play Special
Performance
Angela's Mixtape –
Fundraiser
Tickets: 404-321-0913
- ✓ **Feb. 26th 11:00 AM**
Briarcliff Unit Meeting
Clairmont Place
- ✓ **Feb. 27th**
7:30 AM – Noon
League Legislative
Day
Atlanta City Hall

ISSUES IN THE GEORGIA LEGISLATURE AFFECT DEKALB COUNTY

By Edna Kopez

Many issues in the Georgia General Assembly have a direct impact on the residents of DeKalb County. This point was driven home to members of the DeKalb league at the Briarcliff Unit meeting in November by State Representative Mary Margaret Oliver. A knowledgeable source on current issues, Rep. Oliver has been in the state House or Senate almost 20 years. She currently has a law practice with former Lt. Gov. Pierre Howard and teaches at Emory Law School.

Oliver pointed out that the most important thing the legislature does is pass the budget. Georgia continues to grow and has the fastest growing budget east of the Mississippi. Fannin County is in the top 10 counties for building permits in the country. Despite this, Georgia currently has a \$1 billion shortfall. Our transportation funding is the worst in the nation. There is litigation contesting paying for education. Problems with water and health care loom ahead of us. Georgia has a high population of poor children, with 200,000 uninsured. Grady Hospital has not received the funding it needs with only DeKalb and Fulton counties paying for it, although it accepts patients from all over the state. A high school graduation rate of 56-62% means that almost 40% of students don't have diplomas by the age of 20.

"The most important thing the legislature does is pass the budget." Stated Representative Oliver. The House Speaker's goal is to replace the property tax, which is the most stable tax, with a sales tax on services. Yet this could present major problems to the state, as income taxes and sales taxes are irregular and have wide exemptions. The HOST tax in DeKalb was a reduction of property taxes in lieu of a 1% sales tax. In order to be revenue neutral, there would need to be 10-11% tax on food, health care, legal services, hair cuts, etc. Many consider such taxes to be regressive. Oliver opposes the Speaker's tax proposal because it removes significant power from the cities and counties and places it in the General Assembly.

Other issues confronting the legislature this year, and especially DeKalb County, will be the proposed City of Dunwoody, prohibiting teen cell phone use when driving, and requiring truck drivers to wear seat belts. Georgia loses \$21 million a year in federal dollars because they are not required to do so now.

VOTERS' PRIORITIES SHORTCHANGED IN BUDGET

By Joe Arrington

(This article first appeared in CrossRoadsNews on 1/09/08 and is reprinted with the permission of CrossRoadsNews.)

Throughout the past few years voters have expressed their tax-dollar priorities by choosing to go deeper into debt to have more libraries, more books, longer hours and more staff to provide more services. The same has been true for parks and recreational facilities.

The blind assumption was that necessary personnel to operate these expanded services would be included or provided for in the annual operational budget process. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

The 2008 operations budget proposed by DeKalb CEO Vernon Jones and presented to the Board of Commissioners five working days before the week of Christmas totalled \$623 million with another \$20 to \$30 million to be added later this month when the books are closed, fund balances transferred and end of 2007 encumbrances added to the 2008 budget.

The BOC has a maximum of seven weeks to review, alter and approve the 2008 budget. That is not much time to determine which line items should be increased and which should be decreased. Although the budget process begins in August and September with department heads being told to prepare for next year's needs and submit their budgets before the end of November, some or all of it can get denied or decreased by the administration as it prepares a consolidated operational budget for the commissioners.

The easy fix would be to add back the most vital cuts made by the administration, but that would mean increasing the current millage rate. No elected official seems willing to risk a millage increase, no matter how urgent the need. The only alternative is to reduce some proposed line items to offset any increases in others.

Repayments of county loans (bonds) have nearly doubled, while budget dollars to provide the personnel to operate them has remained the same or in some cases been reduced. Bricks and mortar look impressive while being built and elected officials claim much credit at the ribbon-cutting grand opening ceremonies. However, once completed and before the first taxpaying citizen's family can enter and be served, additional staff must be recruited, trained and be in place.

Although both the library and recreation departments requested the necessary additional funds to staff the new and expanded facilities, neither was included for an increase in the proposed budget. In fact, both departments' requests were reduced below their respective 2007 budgets: Parks & Rec by one percent and the Library System by 13 percent. Several library and park facilities are near completion and will begin coming on line by the end of 2008, but without staff to operate them. How will they open for business? The option is to pull from existing facilities which will reduce hours of operation. If the budget is passed as proposed, both will be required to do more with less.

Some major departments face proposed cuts as well:

- Planning & Development (Inspections, Zoning & Land Use): -15 percent
- Capital Improvements (buildings maintenance): -18 percent

Others proposed increases:

- Information Systems: +15 percent
- Juvenile Court: +59 percent
- Human Services: +57 percent
- Registrar ('08 elections): +130 percent

LIVELY PROGRAM PLANNING MEETING HELD JANUARY 12th

Every year, the LWVDK invites its members to gather to help determine the work the local League should focus on in the upcoming year. This year several dozen members and a few visitors turned out for the discussion, held during the monthly Brunch and Learn event at Carpe Diem in downtown Decatur.

Because this is an election year, much of our efforts will be on voter education and advocacy for a smooth and accurate electoral process. There were proposals to also focus our efforts on issues that we have already adopted in the past, and on which we already have studies and positions. These issues include improving public education in DeKalb County, development and taxes. A statewide issue that falls under this area is that of water policy, about which we are all highly concerned. The LWV of Georgia has already begun work on immigration and the state tax issue, and members agreed we want to support these efforts.

Recommendations from members are then studied by the Board of Directors, who then recommends three of the proposed program items to the total membership at the Annual Meeting, which will be held in May. The Board recommends those programs based on their relevance to the League's mission and position statements, the importance and timeliness of the issue to the community, and the ability of the Board and membership to effectively follow-up on the issues in the coming year.

The League of Women Voters[®] of DeKalb County

2007—2008 Board of Directors

Katesha Sagers-Aguayo, *President*
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Gay Denham
 Lenecia Bruce

UPCOMING MARCH EVENTS

Saturday March 8th
Brunch 'n' Learn
 Carpe Diem
 10:30 AM – 12:00 PM

Tuesday March 25th
Briarcliff Unit Meeting
 Clairmont Place
 11:00 AM

LEAGUE LEGISLATIVE DAY

The League of Women Voters of Georgia will hold its annual League Legislative Day on February 27, 2008 from 7:30a.m. – Noon at the Atlanta City Hall. This event is a wonderful opportunity to learn more about how your state government works, as well as to meet with your local legislators and advocate for issues that are important to you and the League. For more information or to register, please contact www.lwvga.org or 678-547-0755 ASAP.



SAVE THE DATE! 2008 Community Luncheon Friday, May 2, 2008 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM

HOLIDAY CELEBRATION A SMASHING SUCCESS!

By Sidney Mullings-Bradley

The LWV of DeKalb's annual Holiday Mix and Mingle was held on December 11th at the First Decatur Bank. This was a social affair where members and local politicians gathered to meet, greet and share concerns and updates about current issues and to make a contribution to the Decatur Cooperative Ministry by donating canned goods, children's books, and toys.

Local officials informed the members about future events and changes. Claudia Lawson, the DeKalb County Tax Commissioner, as well as Irvin Johnson, the Chief Deputy Tax Commissioner, were very excited to tell us that the tax office is in the process of improving the services they provide and implementing new methods of collecting taxes. In the near future DeKalb citizens will be able to pay their taxes by using their credit cards.

Vivian Moore, the President of the DeKalb NAACP, informed us of the upcoming Martin Luther King parade and rally that will be held on January 21st 2008 in the city of Stone Mountain. She encouraged everyone to attend and to participate in the parade. She also briefly spoke about the NAACP and encouraged attendees to join that organization.

Greg Creech, a newly elected city council member for Pine Lake was also in attendance. He is thrilled to be a representative and looks forward to making a positive impact in his community. Since he and most of the city council members are artistic, they are planning to put together an artistic performance for civics classes and students to demonstrate that artists can bring art into politics. Creech stated, "Politics is an art and you don't have to be a lawyer to be in politics - you can be a comedian and an artist. We want to show the students that politics does not have to be boring but cool and exciting".

Peggy Hendrix, a League member and volunteer of Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GFADP), also took the floor to inform us about the support needed for their petitions on the moratorium on the death penalty and to fully fund the indigent defense system. She briefly announced that once Rep. Stephanie Stuckey Benfield has her bill in place for *Eye Witness Identification Reform*, the GFADP will have petitions for that issue as well.



A festive LWVDK President-Elect Susannah Scott chats with Diane Josey and the Holiday Mix & Mingle.

It was the consensus of the night that the LWV of DeKalb plays an important role in the community and the information it makes available is beneficial and a necessity. Deborah Johnson, a long-time league member and a candidate for the DeKalb Superior Court, strongly believes that the information that the League provides is very concrete. She said "This is especially needed in the judicial elections because there is so little information available to people. It is important to be asking the candidates questions and having them answer them and providing that information to the voters." Vivian Moore also commended the League on the accuracy and the up-to-date information the League provides in its Citizens Guide.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

All memberships expired September 1, 2007. This includes those members who joined since January 1, 2007 and paid half the yearly dues amount. The dues for the full year that runs from September 1, 2007 through August 31, 2008 have not increased. They remain \$25 for students, \$60 for individual members and \$90 for households.

Thank you to those who have recently become new members and to all who have renewed their membership. To those who haven't yet renewed, we ask that you reconsider and PLEASE do so today. You have helped to make the League successful and relevant in the past and we need you to stay active and involved.

Remember, by being a member of the League of Women Voters of DeKalb County you are automatically a member of the state and national leagues and the local league retains some of the dues for local education and advocacy.

Renew today and invite your family, friends, and neighbors to join also.



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF DEKALB COUNTY

MEMBERSHIP and/or DONATION

Student \$25

Individual \$60

Household \$90

NAME(s) _____

FULL ADDRESS _____

PHONE(s) _____
Home Work Cell

E-MAIL _____

<http://www.lwvdk.org/joinus.html>

The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan political organization that encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government, works to increase understanding of major public policy issues, and influences public policy through education and advocacy.

