



BULLETIN

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF WILMETTE

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League of Women Voters
of Wilmette

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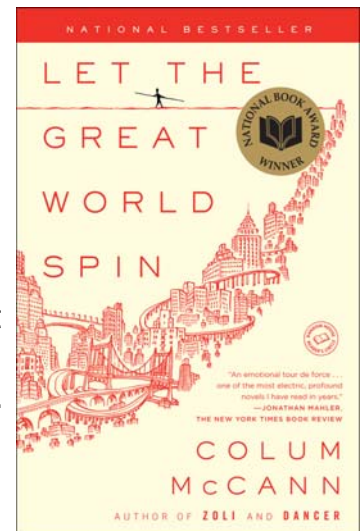
March 2011

DEMOCRACY IS NOT A SPECTATOR SPORT

“One Book, Everybody Reads” Wilmette Public Library’s 2011 Selection Colum McCann’s “Let the Great World Spin”

“Let the Great World Spin,” the 2009 National Book Award winning novel by Colum McCann, is the Wilmette Public Library’s selection for its sixth annual “One Book, Everybody Reads” program to be held in spring 2011. This is the third time in the short lifespan of the “One Book” program that the library is featuring a major award-winning author.

“One Book, Everybody Reads” was created to provide Wilmette and Kenilworth residents with a shared reading experience. It features a multi-faceted series of programs that explore the book and its themes, while creating interest in and discussion of the book. This year’s programs, designed to create opportunities for shared enjoyment of the book and enhance the personal reading experience, will begin in April and culminate with the author’s visit to Wilmette on May 22. To facilitate the experience, the library will offer numerous copies of the book in various formats for patron use. The Friends of the Wilmette Public Library annually provide funding for this series.



As in years past, the League of Women Voters of Wilmette is proud to partner with the library for this program. The League has a copy of the selected book available for member’s use. Contact Therese Steinken (tmsteinken@gmail.com) if you would like to borrow the book.

“Let the Great World Spin” is the story of seemingly unrelated individuals whose ordinary lives become intricately woven amidst the backdrop of the day in August of 1974 when a mysterious tightrope walker crossed between New York City’s twin towers. The book explores the dual themes of love and loss and was hailed by the New York Times as an “emotional tour de force” and “one of the most electric, profound novels...in years.” In addition to the 2009 National Book Award, the book has received numerous other awards and accolades.

CALENDAR

March 1	District 39 Referendum Study meeting, home of Susan Morrison, 7:30 p.m.
March 5	Voter Registration at Wilmette Public Library, 1:30-4:30 pm
March 5	Women's History Month Luncheon, The Glen Club, 11:45 am
March 6	Candidate Forums: Wilmette Village Hall Board Room Wilmette Village Trustees; 2:00 – 3:00 pm Wilmette Park Board; 3:15 – 4:15 pm
March 10	District 39 Referendum Study informational program, date and location to be determined

Membership

The membership directory of the League of Women Voters of Wilmette has been updated to reflect 2010-2011 membership. For those members who receive their directories in e-mail format, your directory information will be e-mailed to you along with updated pages regarding League affiliations and Legislators' contact information (which is also found on our website: lwvwilmette.org). For those members who prefer paper mail, the information is included with this copy of your Bulletin.

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MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Should the Wilmette League Support the District #39 Referendum on April 5? A Study.

The decision of the District #39 school board to go to referendum on April 5 has prompted the League to begin the study process prescribed by the League of Women Voters. This process ensures that a position adopted will be based on evidence and will be in compliance with State and National positions.

The following study committee has been formed: Libby Bankoff, Georgia Gebhardt, Mindy Heidekat, Barbara Marsh (Glenview), Piper Rothschild, Therese Steinken and Mari Terman.

At the February 11 organizational meeting, we developed the questions to be answered, identified possible sources of information and set a timeline for completion, which took into account the start of early voting on March 14.

On February 17 a subcommittee met with Superintendent Dr. Ray Lechner to obtain financial data and proposed cuts should the referendum fail. For interested citizens, this information is detailed on the District #39 website at www.wilmette39.org. In addition to the District source, the committee reached out to realtors and to opponents of the referendum in order to gain as complete a picture of the issue as possible.

At a February 22 meeting, the committee consolidated the information and finalized the preparation for a consensus meeting on March 1, 7:30 P.M., at the home of Susan Morrison, 822 Forest Avenue.

What happens at this consensus meeting?

1) Members of the study committee will present information gathered. The question to examine: Does the Wilmette LWV support the referendum to increase the tax levy proposed by the District #39 Board of Education?

2) All members present will ask questions and discuss the pros and cons. If a consensus is reached, the Leagues will publicize the position in the press the week of March 7 and will initiate an action plan to support the League's position, including a community forum.

3) If no consensus is reached, the Leagues will be officially silent on the question. Individuals may work for or against the referendum, but only as private citizens.

Only League members may participate in the consensus process.

Question? Please contact Georgia Gebhardt at ggebhardt@sbcglobal.net or phone at (847)853-8225.

During this past year, the League of Women Voters celebrated its 90th birthday by spotlighting the “Iron-jawed Angels” whose courage and perseverance won the right-to vote for American women in 1920. Carrie Chapman Catt proposed the creation of the League to “finish the fight.”

Our Wilmette League, founded in 1924, has its own “angels.” They are the long-time members, whose many accomplishments have earned our League a place of respect in the Wilmette community. Because they have fascinating stories to tell, we will be highlighting these members in selected bulletins. In this issue, in honor of Women’s History month, we present a piece on Thelma Brook Simon written by Nancy Canafax.

THELMA BROOK SIMON

Citizen of Wilmette

When she moved to Wilmette with her family in 1956, Thelma Simon used a Hunter Road that was a 13 foot wide dirt pathway to reach Highcrest Elementary School; she watched a farmer drive his horse-drawn cart filled with corn to sell from an open farm stand at Wilmette Ave. and Skokie Blvd. When she moved to a retirement home in Northbrook several years ago, Wilmette had high rises, cell towers, three large grocery stores and a French market --- but no more farm stands. For nearly 50 years Thelma was a very active, highly visible participant in Village affairs and a member of the League of Women Voters. She has left her mark on many of the changes which have occurred in Wilmette over the one-half century, and in 1994 was recognized for her contributions when she was named ‘Wilmette Senior Citizen of the Year’.

A Chicago native, Thelma attended Hibbard Elementary School and Senn High School. Her pianist mother taught her piano at a very young age and she studied at the Chicago Conservatory of Music as a 10 year old. Her bachelor degree was earned at the University of Illinois with majors in speech and French; she was awarded a Phi Beta Kappa Key. She entered the University of Chicago on scholarship and there she received her law degree.

After graduating from the University of Chicago, Thelma joined the Chicago law firm of Angerstein and Angerstein as an associate. She was admitted to the Illinois State Bar Association and became a member of the Chicago Bar and the Women’s Bar Association, later serving as its president. The story of her second employment illustrates Thelma’s talent for advocacy. She argued a case before Illinois Appellate Court Judge George Bristol who ruled against her client in that case but subsequently persuaded Thelma to come work for him as his clerk. Judge Bristol became Justice Bristol of the Illinois Supreme Court for whom Thelma continued to clerk. Altogether she was Justice Bristol’s law clerk for 16 years, from 1946 – 1961, at which time she was seated as a Trustee of the Village of Wilmette. She has also been an associate professor at John Marshall Law School where she taught administrative law.

When Thelma moved to Wilmette in 1956, she lost no time becoming involved with local issues. She was an active participant in the evolvement of ‘No Man’s Land’ into Plaza del Lago, a multi year struggle between developers, residents, officials and various of their attorneys. It was 1961 when the future of ‘No Man’s Land’ was assured as a mix of residential and commercial uses, without the motel which had been the original cause of the turmoil. And that was the year Thelma was nominated by the ‘Harmony Convention’ to serve as a Village trustee. She was duly elected as there had been no contested elections during caucus era.

Candidates for local office had always been selected by caucus, and elections had always been uncontested. This system provided another occasion for Thelma to be involved in a major change in the Village. During the 1969 election cycle controversial issues causing heated arguments resulted in a split into a second caucus, the 'United Party'. A hostile and bitter political battle followed and, on election day, the usual six polling places for the usual 2,500 voters was grossly inadequate. 10,000 voters came to the polls and, at closing time, hundreds had been unable to vote. Suit was filed in Federal District Court alleging violation of due process. Thelma testified at the trial after which the Court ruled that a new election must be held in November. Thus 1969 was the watershed election year in Wilmette whereby the caucus system ended and contested elections began. This event also marked the beginning of the Wilmette Forum, initially formed by private citizens as a vehicle for presenting candidates in a non-partisan contested election. Thelma was one of the organizers who drafted the original by-laws. It is the same Forum now sponsored by the League.

During her eight year tenure on the Board of Trustees, Thelma was a major participant in many of the decisions which give Wilmette its distinctive character. She chaired the Board's Judiciary Committee that drafted a new Village code, including the controversial provision limiting the president and trustees to two consecutive terms. Thelma thought many of the people in office with her preferred a 'closed government', which she referred to as a 'dynasty', appointments made on the bases of a buddy system rather than on qualifications, and limited access for citizens who wished to voice opinions. The Judiciary Committee, under her leadership, argued for the limitation saying that, after eight years, the elected become jaded or think the 'job belongs to them'. The position itself is basically voluntary and held by persons with other work as main careers. In addition, the population of Wilmette had increased to the point where there was no lack of talent to undertake such voluntary services. While today this limitation may seem unnecessary, in the context of the '60s era it may be seen as a way to achieve a more open and accessible government.

Another area in the Village where Thelma's energy and intensity may be seen as having been effective is the Skokie Blvd. corridor. A developer's proposal, backed by the Zoning Board, was to build apartments along Skokie Blvd.'s border. Residents were vehemently opposed saying townhouses were more compatible with the single family character of the neighborhood. Thelma supported their objectives and, after prolonged deliberations and intricate maneuvers, persuaded the Board to reject the Zoning Board's recommendations and approve a townhouse project instead.



Other undertakings which illustrate Thelma's talent as a writer and an articulate, forceful advocate include the research, organization and drafting of a manual, prepared at the request of the Illinois Appellate Court, which was published as "Jury Instructions in Federal Criminal Cases." She participated in drafting and sponsoring an ordinance which banned DDT and in enacting Wilmette's first anti-discrimination ordinance. The latter made it illegal to discriminate on the bases of race or religion in renting or selling houses. She also wrote the original by-laws for the Wilmette Historical Society.

Thelma's endeavors collectively amount to a remarkable body of work, a large portion of which directly benefited the Village of Wilmette. As a strong, vocal proponent of open government, her attitudes and opinions anticipated laws such as the Open Meetings Act and the Freedom of Information Act. Her energy and imagination are attributes shown by the size and scope of her work. Through it all Thelma was, and is today, a League member who, in promoting her own goals and objectives, was often furthering those of the League as well.