



*Pat Tieman, a Hopewell resident, in her Trenton office. She's been affiliated with the League of Women Voters for 15 years.*

## She Wants You!

Pat Tieman, director for The League of Women Voters of New Jersey, champions the 78-year effort to inform voters about the candidates and issues — and get them to the polls.

**B**ILL Clinton, and his ideas for governing America, rallied a lot of people to his side in 1992 and, again, in 1996. This year, however, his name may pique voter attention for an entirely different reason: his affair with Monica Lewinsky, and the subsequent reaction of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and the House of Representatives to his Oval Office trespasses.

"Whenever there is an issue out there of this prominence — any issue — it gets people to think," says Pat Tieman. "It reminds them that they have to register and vote. And that's when our 800 number starts ringing."

And that's music to the ears of Pat Tieman, who for two years has been the executive director of The League of Women Voters of New Jersey, the nonprofit organization founded in 1920, just before the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which granted women suffrage.

The League of Women Voters of New Jersey — with 3,700 members statewide participating in "local Leagues," including those in Hopewell, Princeton, East-Windsor-Hightstown, Lawrence and Trenton — informs citizens (especially women) of government policy and its elected officials, and promotes voter registration, turnout and issue-awareness.

"We are a true grassroots organization," says Tieman, a Hopewell resident who was appointed to the salaried position by the organization's board. "It is very empowering to know that you can understand issues and actually work to change policies. That's what the League does."

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These are the words of a woman who was a fine-arts major in college with intentions of pursuing a career in advertising. Then, a husband and two boys later, she ended up in a small Arkansas town for 17 years. A friend invited her to go to a local League meeting — the manner in which women are typically recruited into the organization. What she found fascinated her: passionate women who were thoroughly knowledgeable about local, state and national issues. She had to join; by the time she left Arkansas in 1988 for New Jersey, she was the local League president.

"I never dreamed then I'd end up executive director," says Tieman, who remembers lively political discussions over the dinner table during her St. Louis upbringing — the kind of atmosphere, she says, that is the breeding ground for future generations of voters. "But, once I joined the organization, it was everything I had hoped it would be. The women seemed so powerful and smart. Their effort made a difference in voter attitudes and behavior. It has kept me interested for 15 years already."

For the past 20, however, a low-grade cynicism has diminished voter turnout for Congressional, gubernatorial and Presidential elections. Tieman knows that everyone's vote does count, particularly in local elections, which are often decided by as little as 10 votes.

"That potential is exciting," says Tieman, who is pained by low voter turnout. "People, though, seem to be look-

ing at politics as a spectator sport these days. We feel that citizens are dropping out at an alarming rate, and we are trying to bring them back into the political process again."

The League of Women Voters is nonpartisan, offering, for the benefit of voters, bushels of data on candidates and issues. When it stakes a position on an issue — a woman's right to an abortion — the League decides on the merits of its constitutional-ity, not whether it coincides with a liberal or conservative agenda. Tieman, and the League, are vigilant about its nonpolitical posture. "Part of our mandate and by-laws when the League was formed was to be able to study issues and present them neutrally," says Tieman.

The League's "Get Out the Vote" program, for instance, was created to make voting easier, which people will be doing this Tuesday, Nov. 3. "We find that if a person has information, he or she tends to vote," says Tieman. The League provides

a toll-free number (800.792.VOTE) for information about voting, elections, candidates, where to find mail-in registration forms.

The League also informs citizens which candidates are running for public office in their Congressional district and directs voters for finding further information. Many people fail to have a rudimentary understanding of local politics, not even knowing, for instance, what voting district they live in. Trying to thus inform people of the issues surrounding a local race is compounded.

The League has designed a comprehensive website ([www.lwvnj.org](http://www.lwvnj.org)) to give people pointers. It publishes candidate information in local newspapers, and it hosts forums at the local schools and libraries — the best place, says Tieman, for learning about candidates.

The League, honoring its grassroots mandate, turns its efforts at illuminating the local political landscape. Preparing for its convention, which is held biannually, local League chapters rank the issues warranting their attention. They then submit their ideas, which are compiled and distributed for

the convention delegates, who decide which ones to undertake for a two-year intensive look. At the last convention, the delegates decided on an initiative called "Making Democracy Work." The aim was to ease the ways that citizens could get information.

New Jersey's local Leagues initiated a study of charter schools. "This interest exists on many levels, like the financing of charter schools, how they are formed, and the reporting system

on them," she says. At the next convention, the fact-finding will have led to a statewide League consensus on charter schools. A position will be officially adopted, and the League can begin to lobby lawmakers.

Tieman's job keeps her busy. "I seem to do League morning, noon and night," she says, who prefers to deflect attention away from herself and to the activities of the League. "But as the executive director of an organization, I'm a little bit of everything," like serving as the landlord of the Trenton building that the League owns. "Just when I think we are doing something really important for New Jersey citizens, somebody comes in looking for toilet paper. So I have my reality checks periodically."

Meanwhile, as Election Day nears, the phones at the League headquarters start to ring incessantly. The voters are starting to stir. ●



*Bill Clinton's candidacy in 1992 and 1996 caught the attention of voters. This year he has garnered the electorate's attention for an entirely different reason. Nonetheless, a prominent issue can foster voter turnout — the goal of The League of Women Voters.*