

## Engaging in Difficult Conversations, October 25 Workshop

Each of us has probably had an uncomfortable exchange of views with an acquaintance or family member as political divisions have widened in our nation. Our civic health depends on keeping communications open and dealing with differences in constructive ways.

The Fall Membership Meeting on Saturday, October 25, offers the workshop **Difficult Conversations: How to Talk with People on the Other Side of the Divide**. Conducted by Dr. Gwendolyn Torges of IUP's Political Science faculty, this topic was requested by LWVIC members and others who attended her May 31 presentation on the constitutional role of the federal judiciary and how it is being challenged to maintain the traditional checks and balances that keep democracy strong. Her presentation emphasized the importance of cross-partisan



Gwendolyn Torges

dialogue and listening to each other with empathy, curiosity, and humility.

The meeting will take place from 12:00 noon to 2:30 p.m. at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Indiana, 285 Twolick Drive in White Twp. Dr. Torges's workshop follows a lunch that begins at noon, featuring main dish salads, breads, beverages, and desserts. Tableware is provided.

The event is free. This is an opportunity to invite people you believe will be interested in this workshop and its coaching in constructive engagement with different points of view.

## Indiana County League Awarded Grant

*by Susan Boser*

In August LWVIC won a Local League Capacity Grant issued by the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. This grant, in the amount of \$1000, will support the Indiana County League's primary goal of extending its outreach in the county. Plans include expanding the League's presence in high schools, libraries, festivals, and fairs through the entire county. The award will support voter registration activities and cover the costs of supplying materials on voting processes including registration, accessing candidate information, mail-in ballots, and contacting our representatives. Some of these activities are already happening, as you can read elsewhere in this newsletter.

## LWVIC at Whole Unity Inc. Voter Initiative Program

Community and League members are invited to "Election Education," an informative, nonpartisan community event hosted by Whole Unity Inc. on Tuesday, October 7, 6:00-8:00 p.m. The location is Horace Mann Elementary School Gym, 205 South 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Indiana, PA 15701.

In partnership with LWVIC, the event provides an opportunity to learn all about the election process in an informal community setting, whether you're a seasoned voter or looking to vote for the first time. Topics include the importance of civic engagement as well as the voting process. Get ready to be informed and empowered! *(continued on page 6)*

## Gerrymandering Threatens Election Integrity

*The following is a summary of reporting by Katie Meyer of the nonpartisan newsletter Spotlight PA and information from Fair Districts of Pennsylvania, a nonpartisan organization opposed to gerrymandering.*

Gerrymandering is the act of manipulating the boundaries of congressional and state voting districts to give one political party an advantage over another. Both the Republican and the Democratic parties have done this as legislative power shifts in elections. Gerrymandering produces non-competitive districts in which election results are preordained, depriving voters of real choice in who represents them.

Some states have independent redistricting commissions that draw the district maps, rather than politicians. Fair Districts of Indiana County is one of many Fair District chapters working toward that goal for Pennsylvania.

While states' redistricting processes vary, traditionally they update their voting districts every ten years, just after a census, to reflect changes in their populations. Texas has just completed an unusual mid-cycle redrawing of its voting district boundaries, gerrymandering the state's congressional district map in an effort to sway the outcome of the 2026 mid-term elections. California and some other states are considering or planning that step prior to the 2026 elections. >

## Fair Districts and LWVIC at the Knotweed Festival *by Joyce Rizzo*



Fair Districts of Indiana County and LWVIC shared a table at the Knotweed Festival in Blairsville on August 9. We talked with festival goers and collected many petition signatures in support of an Independent Redistricting Commission, instead of politicians, to draw voting district lines. Many people were reacting to the news about gerrymandering in the media. Passersby took note of the sign “**Gerrymandering is cheating—no matter who does it.**”





# Gerrymandering Threatens Election Integrity

Pennsylvania has announced that it will not change its voting district map before the 2030 census. These maps are passed like any state laws—both the state House and state Senate pass a bill that outlines the districts and the governor signs it into law. State Senate Majority Leader Joe Pittman has said in a written statement to *Spotlight PA* that “the realities of divided government make [redistricting at this time] a non-issue.”

The state’s constitution promises Pennsylvanians free and equal elections. Voting districts must be as equal as possible in population and must minimize county splits. There has always been partisan competition for votes, but intense political divisiveness and competition for power can unleash fraudulent actions that threaten the integrity of our elections and, ultimately, our democracy.

One current example in Pennsylvania is a large postcard that many of us have received recently in our mail, described by recipients and good-government advocates as “incredibly dishonest.” Claiming that the state Supreme Court gerrymandered Pennsylvania’s congressional district map, the postcard features an out-dated map actually drawn in 2011 by the state legislature. That map was challenged as unconstitutional and ruled by the state Supreme Court a “partisan gerrymander.” A heavily financed political action committee is using this postcard to call for limiting the terms of judges in the state appellate courts, aiming to change the political makeup of these courts. The substitute district map, approved by the state Supreme Court in 2018, was drawn by an independent consultant.

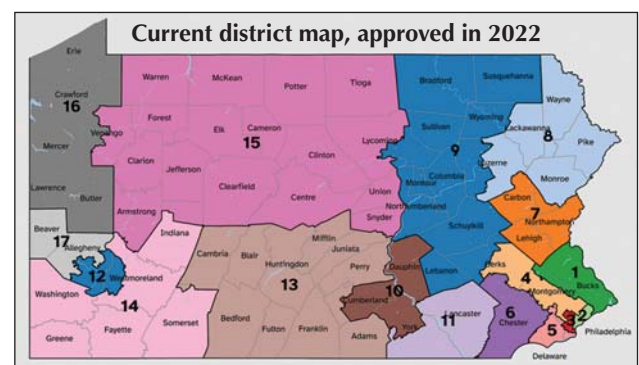
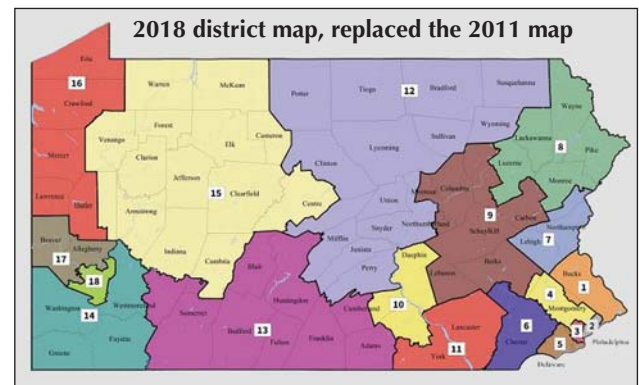
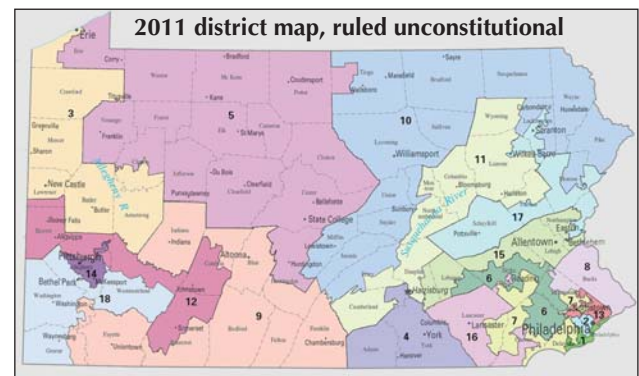
Our current congressional district map is a product of 2022, commissioned by the state Supreme Court when the legislature and the governor deadlocked over passing a new map after the 2020 census.

Links to additional information about redistricting and gerrymandering in Pennsylvania:

<https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2025/09/redistricting-gerrymandering-shapiro-pennsylvania-trump-redistricting/>

[https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2025/09/pennsylvania-supreme-court-retention-election-misleading-redistricting-claims-elections/?fbclid=IwY2xjawNKDTJleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETExZmkwOXISYnk5S2lBbnZ4AR42KxMbz6oleLeyq6lN1zqc8tyUy\\_ff3nu5IHxFz-3PvFlA2W5s-x1wreXAyg\\_aem\\_BUswEn-VIXxBLuh0XuqrAaQ](https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2025/09/pennsylvania-supreme-court-retention-election-misleading-redistricting-claims-elections/?fbclid=IwY2xjawNKDTJleHRuA2FlbQIxMABicmlkETExZmkwOXISYnk5S2lBbnZ4AR42KxMbz6oleLeyq6lN1zqc8tyUy_ff3nu5IHxFz-3PvFlA2W5s-x1wreXAyg_aem_BUswEn-VIXxBLuh0XuqrAaQ)

<https://time.com/6851995/gerrymandering-history-solution/>





## U.S. Constitution Day Observances at IUP

Each year IUP observes Constitution Day in events organized by political science and history faculty. This year's celebration featured a Public Reading of the U.S. Constitution on the Stapleton Library patio and, in the evening, "A Chat with the Founders" in the Great Room of Elkin Hall. On a brilliantly sunny day, LWVIC board member Elizabeth Ricketts Marcus was among the students, faculty, and staff participating, each reading a few sentences of the constitution. Dozens of people lined up to take their turns at broadcasting the words of our founding document across the Oak Grove. Each reader was given a "We the People" t-shirt, a booklet of the constitution, and a bookmark from LWVIC.





## LWVIC Engages Libraries for National Voter Registration Day

In September the League of Women Voters of Indiana County continued its tradition of participating in National Voter Registration Day. The annual observance is a nationwide, nonpartisan campaign to register voters, involving thousands of bipartisan elected officials and community partners, including League of Women Voters chapters nationwide.

As part of this effort, LWVIC provided voter registration forms and informational materials to the libraries in Blairsville, Black Lick, Homer City, Indiana, and Saltsburg. These materials assist eligible county citizens who wish to register

to vote, update their registration if they have moved, or request a mail-in ballot. October 20 is the deadline to register to vote on November 4 this year.

“All eligible Americans deserve the chance to elect the people who represent them, and voter registration is the first step to ensuring your voice is heard,” said Indiana County League President Susan Boser. “The League empowers voters through registration, nonpartisan information, candidate and issue forums, and get-out-the-vote activities. We believe our democracy is strongest when every voice is heard.”

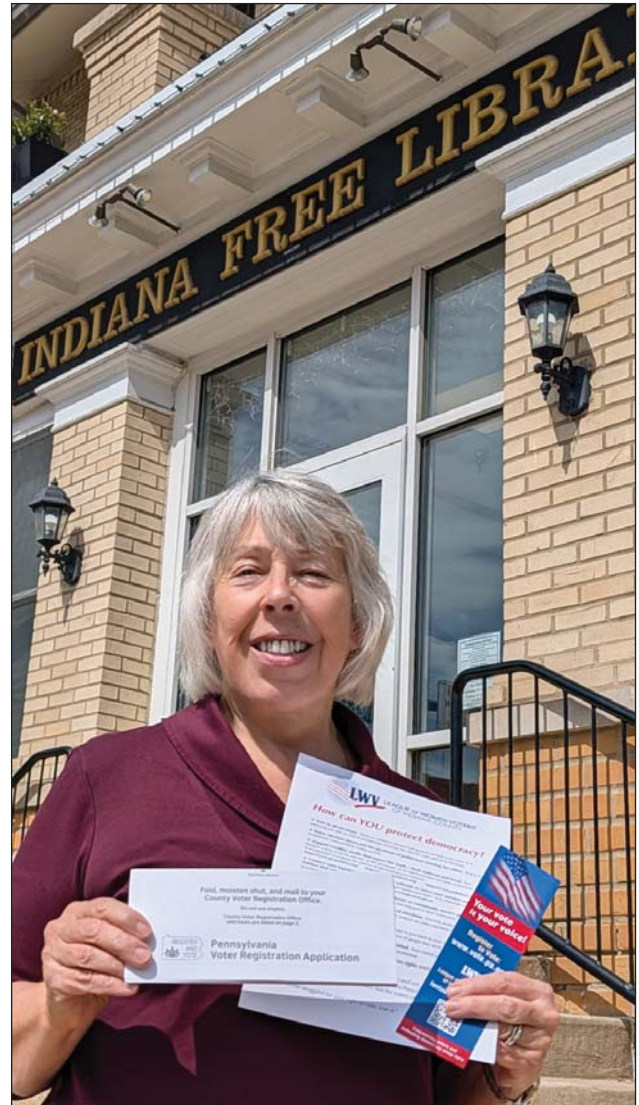
## League of Women Voters U.S. on Mid-Cycle Redistricting

*League of Women Voters of the United States CEO Celina Stewart, Esq., issued the following statement in response to states considering mid-cycle redistricting:*

“The League of Women Voters does not support a tit-for-tat approach to redistricting. State legislatures redrawing their maps mid-cycle reflects political gamesmanship that erodes public trust in our democracy. Redistricting must be fair, transparent, and rooted in the voices of voters—not partisan retaliation.

“Manipulating maps for political gain is a disservice to the people. The League stands for maps that reflect communities, not political calculations. Voters deserve stable, fair representation—not to be used as pawns in a power grab. When politicians rewrite the rules mid-game to protect their control, democracy loses.

“The League of Women Voters is ready to fight to ensure fairness for voters, no matter what politicians do for their own gain. We stand ready to protect the voices of all voters because that is what our democracy is built on.”



LWVIC Board President Susan Boser distributed voter registration forms, bookmarks, and other information to Indiana County's community libraries. (Photo by David Brady)

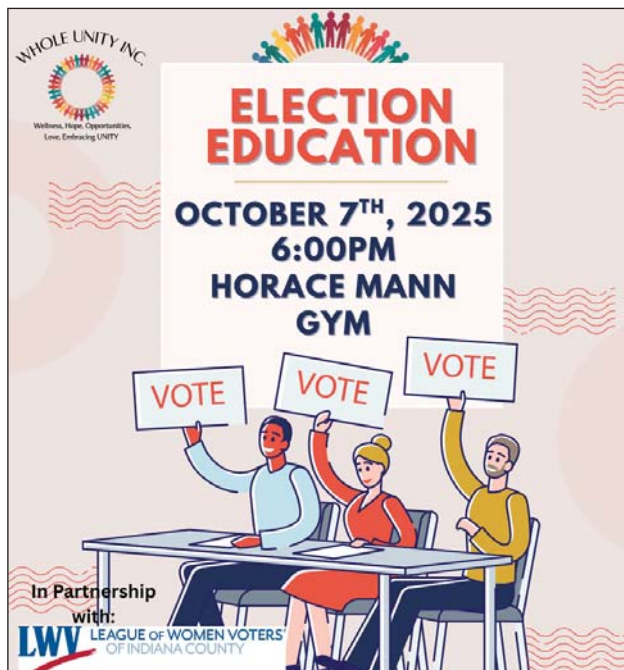
## LWVIC at Whole Unity Inc. Voter Initiative Program

*(continued from page 1)*

Whole Unity Inc. is the inspiration of Quintina Thomas, a specialist in education, child development, and family relations who has dedicated her career to addressing social needs in the community through developing small businesses and nonprofit organizations. She holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from IUP and a master's degree in education from the University of Texas at El Paso. A wife and mother of three children, she has worked as a child therapist and is an educator, advocate, and entrepreneur. Ms. Thomas serves on the Indiana Area School District Board of School Directors, the first African American to hold this position.

"Election Education" is free but pre-registration is requested at:

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/election-education-a-voters-initiative-registration-1538707448399?aff=oddtcreator>



## Updates on Mail-In Ballots in Pennsylvania for 2025

In August a federal appeals court ruled that it is unconstitutional for Pennsylvania to reject mail-in ballots just because the voter did not write an accurate date on the return envelope. The decision by the 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was unanimous in upholding the decision earlier this year by a federal judge in Pittsburgh.

On September 26, in a 4-to-3 decision, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that the state's voters must be notified if county election officials are going to reject their mail-in ballots because of an error such as a missing signature or an incorrect date on the return envelope. In a previous ruling shortly before the 2024 presidential election, Pennsylvania's Supreme Court had ruled that if a county rejects a voter's mail ballot, they must count a valid provisional ballot if the voter casts one at the polls on Election Day. However, that ruling did not require counties to notify voters if their mailed ballots were rejected. Without this notice, these voters had no understanding that they could cast a provisional vote in person.

Together, these rulings allow voters across the state some ways to exercise their rights if their mail-in ballots are rejected. In addition, some states and some Pennsylvania counties allow voters to correct errors on the outer envelopes of their ballots, comparable to an in-person voter being able to receive a fresh ballot if making a mistake at a polling place.

In 2024 the Indiana County Board of Elections voted unanimously to notify voters of mistakes on the envelopes of mailed ballots and offer the option to come to the election office at the county courthouse before Election Day to correct envelope errors.

## Your vote is your voice! Your voice is loudest in local elections.

Think your vote isn't as important in a municipal election as in a presidential election year? Many of the officials you elect on November 4 will have a direct impact on you and your family. Learn about the candidates on your ballot, and VOTE.



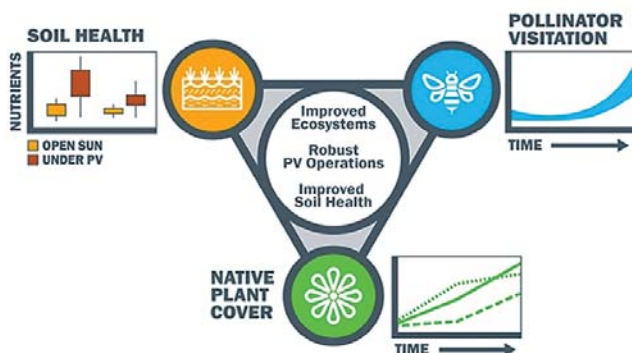
# Utility-Scale Solar Fields Can Foster Abundant Biodiversity

by Ellen Chinn

Electricity generated from solar energy is a plentiful resource for public and private organizations, small groups, and individuals seeking to control energy costs, reduce their carbon footprint and meet their sustainability goals. This has led to the advent of utility-scale solar farms where photovoltaic solar panels (PV) are installed over large areas. These can be located on brownfields or landfill property unsuitable for other uses, but other times they might be on open or agricultural land offering a way for landowners and farmers to earn additional income.

In the past, little was done with the land beneath the panels, which caused concern and criticism about land use. However, the land is increasingly being utilized to graze livestock and grow crops (*agrivoltaics*). Also, ecologically-beneficial planting practices are implemented that support wildlife, pollinators and soil health (*ecovoltaics*).

Ecovoltaic studies funded by the U.S. DOE Solar Energy Technologies Office and managed by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), Argonne National Laboratory, and other research partners have looked at three large solar fields in Minnesota, seeking to find the most beneficial ways to utilize the area beneath the panels. These studies have shown that it is possible to utilize the land effectively and advantageously, addressing prior criticisms. Articles reporting the results of these studies have been published in scientific journals.



Graphic by Thomas Hickey, NREL



Harvesting beans at Jack's Solar Garden, a five-acre, community solar farm in Longmont, Colorado (Photo by Werner Slocum, NREL)

## Study results:

- Prairie restoration can be successfully established beneath solar panels.
- Soil health is improved with well-planned prairie restoration.
- When prairie is established, pollinators use the site as much as dedicated conservation land, evidenced through an increased abundance and diversity in both vegetation and pollinators.
- Planting pollinator habitat and native vegetation mitigates some of the environmental damage done to the soil and habitat when solar installations are built.
- Pollinator visitation and native plant cover increase over time.

Research is ongoing. For a short *Science News* video and other information on this subject, go to:

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/solar-agriculture-farming-agrivoltaic>

<https://www.ameresco.com/solution-solar-power/>

<https://www.nrel.gov/news/detail/program/2024/utility-scale-solar-fields-can-foster-abundant-biodiversity>

# LWVIC Co-Sponsoring 2025 Sustainability Summit VIII

**Friday, October 24, 2025**

**8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

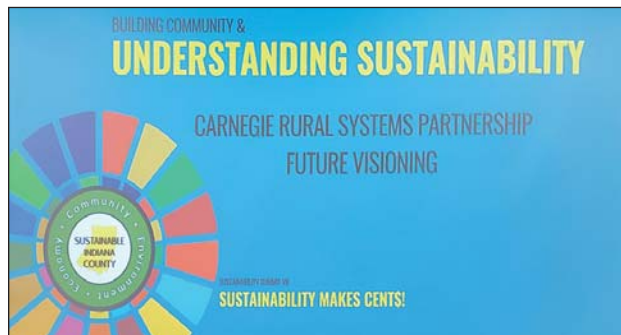
**Kovalchick Convention and Athletic Complex  
711 Pratt Drive, Indiana PA 15705**

On October 24, a day of presentations at the Kovalchick Convention and Athletic Complex will continue exploring the advantages of sustainability-oriented development. Co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters of Indiana County, this and past summits have examined how such development can spur significant cost savings for local governments, area businesses, county agencies, and homeowners.

Sustainable Indiana County's mission: To identify new opportunities in economic development, education, and job training (workforce development) in the renewable energy sector, agriculture, building construction, and environmental restoration and stewardship.

More information about Summit VIII will be available soon. Meanwhile, you can register now using the form in this link:

<https://sustainableindianacounty.org/summit-viii-2025/>



## LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF INDIANA COUNTY • BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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## MONTHLY BOARD MEETINGS

The LWVIC hosts board meetings on the third Monday of each month at 7:00 p.m. LWVIC members are welcome to participate. To request the meeting location and agenda, please send an email to: [lwvindianacounty@gmail.com](mailto:lwvindianacounty@gmail.com)

## LWVIC Fall Calendar

### October 7 – “Election Education” with Whole Unity Inc. and LWVIC

6:00 p.m., Horace Mann Elementary School  
Gym, Indiana. See page 6 for pre-registration.

**October 20 – Deadline to register to vote** or  
to update registration ([www.vote.pa.gov](http://www.vote.pa.gov))

### October 20 – LWVIC Board Meeting

7:00 p.m. All members may attend. To request  
the meeting location and agenda, please send  
an email to: [lwvindianacounty@gmail.com](mailto:lwvindianacounty@gmail.com)

### October 24 – Sustainability Summit VIII

8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Kovalchick Convention  
and Athletic Complex, IUP

[www.sustainableindianacounty.org/summit-viii-2025/](https://sustainableindianacounty.org/summit-viii-2025/)

### October 25 – LWVIC Fall Membership Luncheon Meeting and Workshop

“Difficult Conversations: How to Talk  
with People on the Other Side of the  
Divide,” 12:00 noon-2:30 p.m.,

First Unitarian Universalist Church, White  
Township

**October 28 – Last day to apply for a mail-  
in ballot** ([www.vote.pa.gov](http://www.vote.pa.gov))

### November 4 – General Election

7:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m., polls are open. Mail-in  
and absentee ballots must be received by the  
Indiana County Board of Elections Office  
by 8:00 p.m.