

NEWS RELEASE

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Democracy Award Given to Three Local Women

LAS CRUCES---The first annual *Making Democracy Work* (MDW) Award by the League of Women Voters of Southern New Mexico (LWVSNM) was recently presented to three women leaders who were instrumental in a project that contributed to strengthening democracy.

Jamie Patterson and Josie Miller, academic content specialists from the Las Cruces Public Schools (LCPS), and Jamey Rickman, community engagement manager for the City of Las Cruces, are the first recipients of the annual MDW Award. Each received an engraved Nambé tray and were recognized during meetings of the LWVSNM and the LCPS Board of Education.

LWVSNM Co-president Eileen VanWie said the three community leaders were instrumental in the success of the LWVSNM project “Know Your Local Government” which involved area high school students in research, tours, discussions and presentations about government, policy and civic engagement.

“Our local league wanted to bring this important national campaign to Las Cruces and these three women are very deserving of the award,” VanWie said.



Teams of high school students presented their solutions on real-world dilemmas to a panel of judges at City Hall during the “Know Your Local Government” campaign by the League of Women Voters of Southern New Mexico.

The League of Women Voters of the United States (LWVUS) began the “Making Democracy Work” campaign in the late 1990s, to maintain the strength of our representative

democracy in the hands of the people at every level of government. It focused on five key indicators of a healthy democracy: voter participation, campaign finance reform, diversity of representation, civic education and knowledge, and civic participation. Recently, the LWVUS has advocated for comprehensive democracy reform, where everyone participates.

Patterson and Miller guided the development of learning experiences that involved high school teachers and their students, VanWie said. For the capstone part of the project, LCPS transported students from six high schools to City Hall to meet with department representatives to learn about real city problems and to help create solutions. Rickman coordinated arrangements at City Hall.

“What happened at City Hall demonstrated the core values of a democracy in action,” VanWie said.

In February 2020, the students were welcomed by Mayor Pro Tem Kasandra Gandara at City Hall where the students attended four 20-minute presentations about affordable housing, the sustainability issue of urban “heat islands,” recreational services that appeal to youth, and keeping Las Cruces clean. After listening to the four dilemmas, students were randomly placed in four teams to research one of the problems and develop a presentation describing solutions. A panel of judges was to select the “winning team” which would present their solutions at a City Council meeting in April 2020. League officials said all of the teams had such innovative solutions that the judges decided each team would present their ideas to the City Council.

“Unfortunately, COVID hit before the students could complete their final part of the project, but there are intentions for the project to happen on an annual basis,” said Erika Graf-Webster, LWVSNM Youth Engagement Director who has spearheaded several youth engagement projects over the years between the League and LCPS, NMSU and other organizations.

Nominations for the 2022 MDW award will be requested at the end of this year. Graf-Webster said “the intention is to recognize a project and honorees which exemplify a healthy

democracy and to celebrate those achievements on February 14, the anniversary date of the League of Women Voters which began in 1920.”

For more information about the LWVSNM, see <https://www.lwvsnm.org/> or call 575-524-VOTE (8683).