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[Home](#) / [news](#) /

League of Women Voters' Brown: 'still work to do'

By Tucker Mitchell



The League of Women Voters of the Florence Area honored its past and its present Thursday night at its annual Women's Equality Day event at Florence Museum.

But no matter who was honored or why, everyone walked away with the same item: a League of Women Voters refrigerator magnet.

"This is really the big time," Florence chapter co-president Hannay Reig said.

Later, after presenting magnets to the women who founded the Florence chapter 40 years ago, Reig said, "Just imagine what you'll get if you stay around the League for 60 years."

The awards may have been gag gifts, but the sentiments were not. A gathering of about 50 men and

women offered genuine applause and feelings of gratitude to founders Dolores J. Miller, Patsy Schnibben Stone and Barbara Thornton Sylvester. The threesome founded the Florence chapter in 1970, just as a revived South Carolina League was starting to make some real gains in terms of equality.

That the League still has work to do in that area was the message of the evening's chief honoree, Florence's Peggy Brown. A member of the Florence chapter since 2004, Brown was recognized for service she's soon to provide as co-president of the statewide League of Women Voters. She's the first Florentine to serve in that post.

Brown told her audience that while she's humbled to be included on a program with local pioneers like Miller, Stone and Sylvester, it's clear "that we still have work to do."

She pointed to South Carolina's paucity of female elected officials. There are no female state senators, and in all of history, only four women have been elected to statewide office, including current Gov. Nikki Haley.

The South Carolina League, Brown said, will be looking to find capable women who can both train new candidates and become candidates themselves.

Brown, a Chicago native who moved to Florence 36 years ago, was an unlikely candidate for the League presidency as recently as a decade ago. She became involved in local politics through neighborhood opposition to the Beltline Drive Walmart SuperCenter and later, to a proposed Florence County coal plant in Kingsburg.

Those are some pretty good activist credentials, but Brown didn't take the role easily.

"When the neighborhood was rising up against the Walmart, I was all ready to just move and go somewhere else," Brown said. "But a young mom in the neighborhood said, 'Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Brown, won't you come to just one meeting?'"

Brown wound up going to several. She noticed the League was at all of them, and one thing led to another.

"I really never intended to do this," she said. "But when they asked me to serve as co-president, I had to do it. The League had always been there for me."

The League meets monthly and membership is open to men and women of all ages. The group's next meeting is Sept. 26 at Central United Methodist Church in downtown Florence.

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