

Glen Ellyn League of Women Voters names contest winners

Glenbard Democracy Challenge debuts

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At the awards presentation are (from left) Sarah Allen, League of Women Voters of Glen Ellyn co-president; Michelle Thorsell, co-president; Emily Puchalski, Glenbard South High School winner; Valerie Swett and Laurel Swett, daughters of Charlotte Swett Walter, for whom the contest is named; and Angie Abraham, Glenbard West winner. (Photo provided by League of Women Voters of Glen Ellyn)

The League of Women Voters of Glen Ellyn announced the winners of the inaugural Glenbard Democracy Challenge: Angie Abraham, a sophomore at Glenbard West High School, and Emily Puchalski, a junior at Glenbard South High School.

Both students were awarded a \$500 prize for their efforts, according to a news release.

This year's theme was "In Defense of Democracy." The challenge asked students to portray the theme through music, photography, dance, creative writing, art, video or other genre.

The Glenbard Democracy Challenge is named for longtime Glen Ellyn resident and League member Charlotte Swett Walter, whose estate bequeathed funds to support LWVGE educational efforts. Her daughters, Valerie Swett of Andover, Massachusetts, and Laurel Swett of Wheaton, were in attendance at the LWVGE annual meeting, where the award announcement took place.

A League committee developed the competition and worked with government teachers at both schools to help communicate the new award. Entries were judged on creativity, originality, execution and how well the submission captured the theme.

Abraham submitted an original drawing titled "Everyone Has a Voice," depicting the Statue of Liberty embracing a bouquet of roses. In her submission entry, she said, "The Statue of Liberty symbolizes freedom and life, free from oppression."

Puchalski submitted a photo of the ceiling of the rotunda at the capitol building in Springfield, titled "Democracy: Fragile Like Glass." In her essay describing her photo and why it captures the theme, she wrote, "... the 9,000 pieces of stained glass ... and 24 marble columns supporting the dome, I view as a reflection of democracy, which is the foundation and support for the political system of the United States. Without these pillars, all of the fragile glass would fall and shatter."

"This award captures the creative spirit and passion for youth voter education of our League colleague Charlotte Swett Walter," League co-president Sarah Allen said in the release. "We were so excited to see the amazing entries and how engaged the students were in depicting the theme."

The students' works will be used in future get-out-the-vote communication efforts for the League of Women Voters of Glen Ellyn. The next Charlotte Swett Walter Democracy Challenge will take place in spring 2024 and will be open to sophomores, juniors and seniors at Glenbard South and Glenbard West. For information, visit lwvge.org/democrachallenge.

About Charlotte Swett Walter

Charlotte Swett Walter was born in 1921, just as women won the right to vote. She was an activist in Glen Ellyn, her home of 65 years, where she raised five children. Widowed early, she managed as a single parent while getting her MBA at the University of Chicago. She was an election judge, voter registrar and active in the Glen Ellyn Methodist Church, food pantry and historical society. One of her passions was encouraging young people to register and vote.