

**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF SOUTH CAROLINA**  
**30<sup>TH</sup> BIENNIAL CONVENTION BANQUET**  
*May 14, 2011*  
*Quality Inn Hotel, Sumter, South Carolina*

*At state League Convention we present the Spirit of Democracy award to honor South Carolinians who have made significant contributions to the active and informed participation of all citizens in their government. In 2011 Spirit of Democracy awards will be presented to two League members and a non-member who are champions of democracy in our state.*

*Recipients of this Convention's Spirit of Democracy Awards are:*

- ❖ South Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Ernest A. Finney, Jr., (Ret.), South Carolina's first African-American Supreme Court Justice since Reconstruction, is being honored for his commitment to advancing racial justice and to a fair and impartial judiciary in South Carolina.*
- ❖ Sarah Leverette, one of South Carolina's first women lawyers is being honored for more than 50 years of inspiring leadership in the League of Women Voters and for her advocacy on behalf of a diverse and independent state judiciary.*
- ❖ Mary Ann Washington Deku, an exemplary LWV of Spartanburg County leader, is being honored for her advocacy to engage Spartanburg County citizens in democracy since the 1970s.*

*Awards for Sarah E. Leverette e³ Mary Ann Washington Deku will be presented at noon on Sunday, May 15.*

*6:00 p.m. WINE e³ HORS D'OEUVRES RECEPTION*  
*Honoring Chief Justice Ruth McGregor e³ Spirit of Democracy Award Recipients*

*Hosted by LWV of Sumter County*

*7:00 p.m. SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY AWARD PRESENTATION e³ BANQUET*  
*South Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Ernest A. Finney, Jr., Retired*  
*By Barbara Zia, LWVSC President*

**GUEST SPEAKER**

*The Honorable Ruth V. McGregor, Chief Justice of the Arizona Supreme Court, retired*  
*"A national perspective on judicial independence and diversity"*

*Introduction by Sarah Leverette, LWVSC Board Director*

**GUEST SPEAKER**

*Chief Justice Ruth V. McGregor (Ret.) served on the Arizona Supreme Court from February 1998 until June 30, 2009. She was the Court's Chief Justice from June 2005 until her retirement. She was also a member of the Arizona Court of Appeals from 1989 until 1998, where she served as Chief Judge from 1995 to 1997. Before her appointment to the bench, Justice McGregor engaged in the private practice of law as a member of the Fennemore Craig law firm in Phoenix, Arizona. She served as law clerk to Justice Sandra Day O'Connor during Justice O'Connor's first term on the United States Supreme Court.*

*Justice McGregor received a Bachelor of Arts degree, summa cum laude, and a Master of Arts degree from the University of Iowa. She received her Doctor of Jurisprudence degree, summa cum laude, from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona, and a Master of Laws in the Judicial Process from the University of Virginia.*

*Justice McGregor has participated extensively in professional activities and in organizations dedicated to assuring a fair and impartial judiciary. She speaks often about judicial selection and evaluation, as well as domestic violence, human trafficking, and women in leadership. Among other activities, she has served as an officer and a member of the Board of Trustees for the American Inns of Court Foundation, as an officer and*

Board member for the National Association of Women Judges, as a board member of the Conference of Chief Justices, and on the Legal Council of the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admission to the Bar, which is the accrediting body for American law schools.

Justice McGregor currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Center for the Future of Arizona and of Justice At Stake; as section delegate for the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admission to the Bar; and as Special Advisor to the O'Connor Judicial Selection Initiative of the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System.

### ***2011 SPIRIT OF DEMOCRACY AWARD RECIPIENTS***

***South Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Ernest A. Finney, Jr. (Ret.)***, was born in Smithfield, Virginia. After his mother's death when he was ten days old, he was raised by his father, Dr. Ernest A. Finney, Sr., a dedicated educator who instilled in his son an appreciation of the importance of a good education.

Justice Finney earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Claflin College in 1952, and a law degree from South Carolina State College School of Law in 1954.

After graduating from law school, Justice Finney found it difficult to earn a living from legal work, so he supplemented his salary by teaching school in Conway and waiting tables. Ironically, the young lawyer attended his first meeting of the South Carolina Bar as a waiter serving other members of the Bar. At that time, African-Americans were not allowed membership in the state lawyers' association.

In 1960, Justice Finney moved his family to Sumter County and devoted himself to the fulltime practice of law. He defended more than 6,000 clients who were arrested for participating in sit-ins, freedom rides, and demonstrations. Because the South Carolina legal system protected segregation, he lost almost every case that went to trial, but won all but two on appeal. "I have never known abject poverty, but I have known segregation in its worst form," he said. "I therefore believe the law is absolutely necessary to protect the rights of all citizens."

Justice Finney has always shown tremendous concern for young people, saying, "I think one of the heartaches I have as an individual is to see so many of our young people who get turned off by the system or turn away from applying their best efforts and just waste their lives. That is tragic."

In 1963, Justice Finney served as chairman of the South Carolina Commission on Civil Rights. After serving in the vanguard of the movement to advance the cause of racial justice, he was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1972. He was appointed a member of the House Judiciary Committee, making him the first African-American to serve on that key committee in modern times. Justice Finney was one of the founders of the Legislative Black Caucus and served as charter Chairperson from 1973-1975.

In 1976, Justice Finney was elected and qualified as Judge of the Third Judicial Circuit, becoming South Carolina's first black circuit judge. In 1985, he was elected as an Associate Justice to the South Carolina Supreme Court. In 1994, the South Carolina General Assembly elected Ernest Finney to the position of Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court, making him the first African-American Chief Justice of South Carolina since Reconstruction. He served as the state's Chief Judicial Officer until he retired in 2000.

Justice Finney's many other accomplishments include: National College of State Trial Judges, 1977; Honorary Doctor of Laws Degree, The Citadel & Johnson C. Smith University, 1995; Doctor of Humane Letters, South Carolina State University, 1996; Doctor of Laws, Morris College, 1996; Doctorate, Claflin University; Honoree, S.C. Trial Lawyers Association, 1993. He has also studied at New York University. He was named interim president of S.C. State University in 2002.

***Mary Ann Washington Deku***, in the words of Linda Bilanchone, the League of Women Voters of Spartanburg County member who nominated her for the Spirit of Democracy award, "has been a very, very special extremely hard-working president who has brought all her lifetime expertise in organization and leadership to the Spartanburg League. We have benefited greatly from her willingness to serve and to challenge us to bring more and better service to the community."

Born in Gastonia, North Carolina, Mary was raised in St. Matthews, South Carolina. She graduated from South Carolina State College and earned advanced degrees. She worked as a public school educator and counselor until retirement from Spartanburg District 7 in 2005.

Elected president of the LWV of Spartanburg County in April 2009, Mary leads her League in an exemplary way. Under her leadership, the local League became an official U.S. Census Complete Count Committee and

received \$6,000 in grant funding for the project. She worked tirelessly as volunteer coordinator for the 2010 Census for Spartanburg County.

According to Linda, the League gave an extraordinary year to the Census, but Mary's commitment to the League continues at the same level. While this year's work has not involved money, it has involved addressing numerous community concerns and being certain that the League is present wherever citizens gather --from the Heritage Parade, to the Spring Fling, to the Mt. Moriah Health Fair. Mary is not happy unless the League is represented at every meeting of governmental bodies. She addresses the county legislative delegation, and works hard to get League observers to county council and city council meetings.

Mary Deku's name has been synonymous with voter registration drives in Spartanburg since the 1970s. She started a citywide registration drive with eight Greek sororities and fraternities. Thousands of voters have been registered through this annual drive. In the early 90s, she expanded the registration drives to focus on young people. As NAACP Political Action Chair, she started the "Adopt-A-High-School" Voter Registration drive and included sororities, fraternities, the NAACP, the League of Women Voters, churches and individuals.

Mary is committed to registering every high school senior in the county. High school staff all know her and await her call to set up a schedule to register seniors and demonstrate the voting machines. She and Helen Bennett have developed a citizenship class that is now being requested by high school staff in addition to the voter registration. Mary's focus for voter registration is definitely young people, but she'll also stop people on the street to see if they're registered and give them an application if they're not. In addition, she works through several churches to ensure that they have what they need to register the members of their congregations. When necessary, Mary will go door to door to find more people who are unregistered.

Recently, Mary has communicated with African-American sororities and fraternities and two NAACP chapters to suggest "good citizen" activities, such as organizing observer corps for the city, county and legislative delegation, registering voters, and recruiting poll managers.

Most of Mary's community service activities have been carried on while she was teaching in the public school and doing her share of church work and aiding needy individuals. She is known for giving birthday parties for people who have no family (which she says is her favorite activity).

Mary's energy and dedication to making democracy work are boundless. Honors for her professional and community service include: 2004 Wal-Mart Teacher of the Year; 2005 Leadership Spartanburg Class; 2006 Humanitarian Award for Spartanburg Branch of the NAACP; 2006 Citizen of the Year –Epsilon Nu Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.; 2007 Mary L. Thomas Civic Leadership and Community Change Award; 2007 Upstate Woman of Distinction presented by SC State University; 2010 Cluster VIII–Community Service and Program Award at Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Cluster Meeting; 2010 Community Weaver, from City of Spartanburg and the Spartanburg Regional History Museum.

The theme that Mary chose for her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration encapsulates her life: "If I can help somebody, then my living will not be in vain."

**Sarah E. Leverette** is an outstanding attorney, educator and community leader. She joined the League of Women Voters over 50 years ago and has served South Carolina's local and state Leagues in leadership roles ever since. She has taught and mentored countless League members and women lawyers, inspiring and leading them in the fight for social justice, women's rights, and judicial diversity and independence.

She was born in the Upstate town of Iva in 1920, the same year the League of Women Voters was founded. She has often said she and the League grew up together. A year before her birth, the South Carolina Supreme Court had admitted the first woman to the practice of law, and women won the right to vote. She attended the University of South Carolina and graduated *magna cum laude* from USC School of Law in 1943. She was admitted to the South Carolina Bar in 1943 and has been a member ever since.

One of the state's first women lawyers, Sarah found that having a law degree did not ensure women the opportunity of practicing law. Instead, she began a long career in legal research, starting at the South Carolina Department of Labor. Following her post-graduate work at Columbia University, she returned to the University of South Carolina School of Law as a librarian and instructor, becoming the first female faculty member at the law school, where she taught from 1947 to 1972. During her pioneering tenure there, she was appointed by Governor John C. West to serve on the Committee to Revise the Constitution of South Carolina and wrote the procedural outline for the current method of amending our state Constitution.

Sarah was described in her friend Ruth Cupp's 2003 book on South Carolina's first female lawyers as having

had the greatest influence on legal writing in this state in the 20th century. In *Portia Steps Up to the Bar*, Cupp noted that Sarah taught every law student at USC for a quarter century.

Sarah left the university in the 1970s to serve as commissioner and chairman of the South Carolina Industrial Commission, from which she retired in the 1980s.

Her strong volunteer commitment and leadership includes involvement with a number of community organizations in addition to the League of Women Voters, such as South Carolina Women Lawyers Association, Common Cause of South Carolina, the Community Relations Luncheon Club, Richland Foundation, American Association of University Women, and Education First. She was presented with the Planned Parenthood Barbara W. Moxon Award, which recognizes those dedicated to advocacy in 2010.

Sarah has received many additional honors for her service, among them the South Carolina Women Lawyers Association's highest honor, the 2001 Jean Galloway Bissell Award; Girl Scouts of Congaree Area Women of Distinction Award; and South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs Consumer Spirit Award for Excellence in Consumer Advocacy.



*A special focus of Convention 2011 is the League of Women Voters of South Carolina's Initiative on Ensuring Independence and Increasing Diversity in South Carolina's Courts. Judicial-related events are supported in part by a grant from the League of Women Voters Education Fund and the Transparency and Integrity Fund of the Open Society Institute.*

*The League of Women Voters continues to work to promote the importance of fair and impartial courts nationwide. Since October 2009, the League has been focusing on promoting diversity at all levels of the state judiciary to enhance the legitimacy of our system of justice in the eyes of an increasingly diverse public. A continuation of the status quo will affect the way citizens look at the role courts play in their communities, erode the trust in the courts, question the right of equality under the law, and negatively affect the perception of the judiciary as fair and impartial.*