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n.	12 p.m.	3 p.m.	6 p.m.	9 p.m.
	74°	78°	74°	65°

RYAN WEISS ON NBA | B1
James Harden could bring the 76ers to the forefront of the Eastern Conference.

The president hopes to speed supply chains and lower drug prices.

Elections Offices Launch Efforts to Find Poll Workers

PREPARING FOR 2022 BALLOTING

Voting doesn't start until summer, but agencies in the region are already making sure they will be staffed.

BY LEAH SCHWARTING | Daily Sun Specialty Editor

Two thousand. That's about how many poll workers it takes to run county-wide elections in Lake, Marion and Sumter.

Tri-county elections offices are working on recruiting and training poll workers to staff voting locations this year. It's an ongoing and necessary process for supervisors leading up to an election.

"We can't operate without them," said Bill Keen, Sumter County supervisor of elections. "They're pretty much 100% essential for us. Without the poll workers, elections just don't take place."



While Sumter County poll worker positions are filled, Marion and Lake counties are still accepting applications.

Please See POLLING, A5

bine raising



Laura McLaughlin of Hometown Civitan Club

from the front page

POLLING

Continued from A1

The need for poll, or election, workers, was brought into sharp focus during the 2020 election. The pandemic resulted in poll worker shortages across the nation, causing polling locations to open late or understaffed and long lines to form.

That wasn't the case in the tri-county area, but elections offices still need to recruit workers even for elections taking place in more normal circumstances.

To start with, all three counties have core groups of poll workers who return year after year.

"We have been blessed with a good, very good group of core workers," said Alan Hays, Lake County's supervisor of elections. "And they're good in the sense of the numbers of them and also in the quality of the work and their dedication to excellence."

Recruiting new poll workers still is part of the process though, and it starts early. For some supervisors the recruitment effort never stops, and the office is always on the lookout and maintains waiting lists.

Offices use various methods to recruit workers. For example, the Lake County elections office sent mailers to 650 people who indicated they were interested around the beginning of the year.

Then there's word-of-mouth. Poll workers often bring in their friends, said Wesley Wilcox, Marion County elections supervisor and Florida Supervisors of Elections association

president.

Lake and Sumter counties also have Adopt-A-Precinct programs. The programs are part of a statewide initiative that allows organizations to staff voting locations. The wages earned by the organization's poll workers are donated to charitable causes.

Hometown Civitan will staff a location this year in Sumter County, just like they have every year since the Adopt-A-Precinct began in 2018.

"Although Adopt-A-Precinct is a big undertaking, the club agrees generally that it's probably one of the most lucrative and effective fundraisers that we've ever had," said Laura McLaughlin, Hometown Civitan's 2022 Adopt-A-Precinct team leader.

During the 2020 election, the club was the only Sumter participant that staffed an early voting site. The group earned more than \$43,000, money that went to local groups including Center Hill Children's Mission, LovExtension and Young Performing Artists Inc.

Because of a recent expansion, about half of Sumter's election day polling sites will be staffed through the Adopt-A-Precinct program. One of the five new organizations planning to participate is the Rotary Club of The Villages — Evening.

The club got involved for two reasons, said Julie Schmied, club president. It is an excellent fundraiser and a great way to get involved in the democratic election process.

"We'll perform an important civic function by providing the poll workers that are

needed to make an election go smoothly," said Schmied, of Village La Reynalda.

Schmied said poll workers can make voting a great experience. Their goal, she said, is to make sure when a voter leaves, they feel that the process went well and their vote was counted and appreciated.

But beyond the pay or possible fundraising possibilities, being a poll worker also gives citizens a look at the voting process. They get more than just the 10-minute view they receive while voting, Wilcox said.

Poll workers get to see the security used, the chain of custody and other processes, like how voters are checked in. McLaughlin said she learned a lot during her time working the polls in Sumter County.

"My eyes are open because of the lengths Supervisor of Elections Bill Keen and his staff go to, to make sure that every vote is counted and the election process is honest and fair," said McLaughlin, of the Village of Collier.

Once poll workers are recruited, they also need to be trained. The training varies depending on a poll worker's job and experience level, but everyone is trained before every election.

When the August primary arrives, some workers will staff long-established polling locations. Wilcox said he tries to place people as close to their

homes as possible. The result of that is, when someone goes in to vote, the polls most likely will be staffed by their neighbors.

Other poll workers may go to brand new polling locations created because of redistricting or voter population growth. Because of recent growth, some Sumter County voters will cast their ballot this year at new polling stations at Everglades Regional Recreation Complex.

Keen isn't concerned about staffing, though.

"It works out pretty good for us because we average over 1,000 people that are waiting to be a poll worker," he said. "It allows us some more spots to put people in and let them do their part. We're very fortunate here in Sumter County in terms of poll workers."

To apply to become a poll worker in Marion or Lake counties, or for more information, visit votemarion.gov or lakevotes.gov. While most Sumter County positions are filled, people still can apply at sumterelections.org.

Sumter County's Adopt-A-Precinct program no longer is taking applications, but Lake County's is. For more information, or to sign up for Lake County's Adopt-A-Precinct program, visit lakevotes.gov.

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