

Decision **2022**




Sumter County Civitan members, from left to right, philanthropy chair Arlene Kaplan, of the Village of St. Charles; secretary Judi Higbee, of the Village of Belvedere; and past president Karen Schwering, of the Village of Collier, stand in front of The Villages Sumter County Service Center. *India Pantin*

Volunteers Prepare to Staff the Polls

By **LEAH SCHWARTING** | *Daily Sun Specialty Editor*

When residents vote in the primary, many of the poll workers they meet won't just be staffing a precinct — they'll also be fundraising through the Adopt-A-Precinct program. And they're ready for it. For several months, the Sumter County elections office has been preparing poll workers for the primary, including Adopt-A-Precinct participants. The county's program is part of a statewide initiative that allows organizations and clubs to staff voting locations. Afterward, the wages they earn are donated to charitable causes. Sumter County's program has been popular since it began in 2018, and has gradually expanded. What election day polling locations open Aug. 23, about half will be

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staffed by Adopt-A-Precinct volunteers.

"I think it's great because the bulk of the money will all go back to the community to their charitable causes, groups or scholarships," said Bill Keen, Sumter elections supervisor. "It's great to see it spent back here."

But, before local organizations can head to the polls, they have had to complete a number of steps, including recruiting club members willing to participate way in advance of the election. It's something ordinary poll workers don't have to think about.

"These groups have to go out and recruit their members," Keen said. "So we try to give them as much advance notice as they possibly can so they can generate their team."

Everyone who staffs a precinct must be a Sumter County resident, which can complicate matters. The Sophisticated Gents of Florida, for instance, have many members who live outside Sumter.

"Recruiting was a challenge, but we were able to meet that challenge," said Otis Lane, Sophisticated Gents vice president.

The Sophisticated Gents, who are staffing Colony Cottage Recreation Complex, have participated in the program since 2018. In 2020, they raised about \$6,000.

Lane was a poll worker in 2020 and is returning this year. He said it's important because it's his constitutional right to vote, but volunteering as a citizen has also been enlightening.

"To actually be there and be a participant and see for yourself, I think that has really been a benefit for me individually," said Lane, of the Village of Charlotte.



Cindy Skop | Daily Sun

Laura McLaughlin is serving as Hometown Civitan's 2022 Adopt-A-Precinct team leader.

When the Rotary Club of The Villages asked for volunteers, Wendy Weaver said yes, despite never having worked the polls before. It's her club's first time, too.

She was motivated by a friend in Virginia who was a poll worker. Because of her, Weaver thought it was a great thing to do for the community and country.

The fundraising aspect appealed as well, she said.

After group members step forward, they have to train. By statute every poll worker has to undergo training before each election, Keen said, even if they worked the last election.

Not all poll workers went to the same sessions, though.

Everyone has different levels of experience, and not everyone is filling the same position.

Karen Schwering, past president of Hometown Civitan, is responsible for duties including greeting voters and printing out their ballots.

"Not one of them leaves without saying thank you," she said. "I can't think of a time when somebody was terribly rude. They just really appreciate what we're doing, and they're very thankful and always say so."

Because she's worked the polls before with Hometown Civitan, which has been part of the program since 2018, she trained virtually.

"It was good to just be in my

den on the computer," said Schwering, of the Village of Collier.

Anyone training for the first time, however, goes to the Bushnell elections office. That way they can train on the actual machines, Keen said.

Weaver was one of those who trained in Bushnell, and her duties involve working with the voting machines. For example, if a paper ballot gets jammed inside, it's her responsibility to fix it.

"I've unjammed a lot of printers in my day, but this is really serious business to me, voting," said Weaver, of the Village Hacienda.

It made her feel better to be able to work with the machines

KEY ELECTION INFORMATION

Vote early: Early voting for the Aug. 23 primary election starts on Aug. 11 in Lake County, and on Aug. 13 in Sumter and Marion counties. To vote in person, find an early voting polling place by going to your county's supervisor of elections website. To vote from home, request a vote-by-mail ballot by Aug. 13. Those ballots can also be taken to secure drop-boxes at early voting sites or to your elections office.

Mail Ballots: The deadline to request a vote-by-mail ballot for the August primary is Aug. 13. To do so, make a request by faxing, emailing, mailing, calling or visiting your elections office or the office's website. For more information, go to lakevotes.com, sumterelections.org, or votemarion.gov.

Closed Primaries: Florida is a closed primary state. That means voters can only vote for the candidates or nominees of the party they're registered with. The last day to register to vote or change your party affiliation before the primary was July 25.

Vote on Election Day: Polls are open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Aug. 23. Find your polling place by going to your supervisor of elections' website. Because of redistricting, your polling location may have changed since 2020.

Register to vote: Oct. 11 is the last day to register to vote in Florida's Nov. 8 general election. To register online, visit registertovoteflorida.gov/home. To register via mail, go to tinyurl.com/s4caat8u for the form. You can also register in person at your county's elections office, or other locations such as tax collectors' offices.

before the big day, she said.

When Aug. 23 rolls around, Weaver will help staff Riverbend Recreation Center.

Schwering, however, will be at The Villages Sumter County Service Center on Aug. 13. Hometown Civitan is the only group staffing an early voting site in Sumter County, and, according to Keen, the only ones in the state.

They also worked early voting in 2020, and raised more than \$43,000.

"When you get right down to it, there's not really a lot of ways to raise money that's unique because of so many clubs in The Villages that are raising money," said Laura McLaughlin,

Hometown Civitan's 2022 Adopt-A-Precinct team leader.

When you hold a golf tournament, you have to have a golf course, an awards ceremony and so forth, she said.

"It's a lot of work to do that as well, but we feel like this is a good place for our club," said McLaughlin, of the Village of Collier.

Now, they just have to wait until Aug. 13.

"Everybody's been trained and we're good to go," McLaughlin said.

Specialty Editor Leah Schwarting can be reached at 352-753-1119, ext. 5375, or leah.schwarting@thevillagesmedia.com.