

# PAYDAY AT THE POLLS

BY LAURA SAPPINGTON

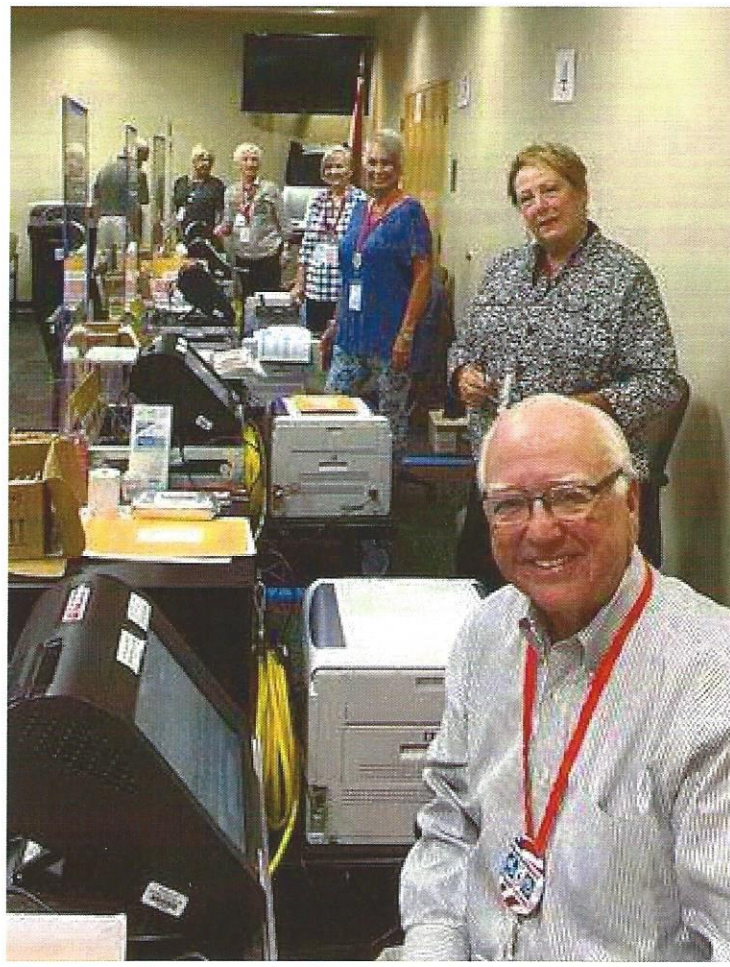
How does a Civitan club with less than 40 members raise almost \$45,000 during a pandemic? And how do they ensure that money comes back to benefit the local community?

Meet Hometown Civitan Club, founded in 2015 in The Villages, Florida, and the leaders behind the partnership that made it possible.

Like most fundraising success stories, this one is somewhat like a 3-legged stool: creating a vision to fulfill a mission, identifying unique opportunities, and forging relationships in the community to accomplish that mission.

Such an opportunity came to the Hometown Civitan Club in 2018, when they discovered the Adopt-a-Precinct program offered by election supervisors from around the state of Florida. In this program, area non-profits are offered the opportunity to provide a small army of poll workers during elections. In return, the supervisor of

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elections makes a donation to the charity for man hours worked at the polls.

An all-female club, Hometown's primary mission is to provide assistance to charities in the community focused on helping women and children. The club also supports organizations dedicated to helping people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, in line with the core mission of Civitan International. The club's leadership recognized the Adopt-a-Precinct program as the perfect opportunity to fulfill their collective mission.

Hometown fundraising project chair, Laura McLaughlin, approached Sumter County Supervisor of Elections, Bill Keen, about the opportunity and a partnership was born.

Knowing the elections commission would insist on writing the donation check to a 501(c)(3) organization, Laura contacted Civitan International for help. Through a fiscal agent agreement, Civitan is able to receive money from a partner organization and hold it until they are distributed to qualified organizations for charitable purposes. This was an ideal solution for Hometown, since using the money for good in their own community was a major priority.

The club adopted two precincts in their county for the 2018 mid-term elections and earned about \$8,000 that first year, which was then distributed by Civitan International as grants to several local 501(c)(3) organizations of the club's choosing.

It worked so well, that Laura McLaughlin and founding president Betty Rohan set their sights on a bigger goal.

“The days are exhausting and long, but time passes quickly. I have a feeling of accomplishment because most voters were very appreciative of our effort,” says Karen Goodman, Hometown club treasurer. “We all worked hard to keep the polling place sanitary and clean so voters felt comfortable voting in person during COVID.”

Why not work the polls during early voting in 2020, which would consist of the preferential primary, the primary and the general election? This would be a major undertaking, as it involved working 12 total days and many man hours. The next step was to get elections supervisor Bill Keen on board.

Mr. Keen listened. Because of the success of their 2018 partnership, and the fact that a significant amount of money would stay in the community, Keen decided to give it a shot. He saw it as a win-win for all involved.

“Because of Bill Keen’s faith in our club, we have been afforded an extraordinary opportunity,” says Laura. “Bill is the only supervisor of elections in the state of Florida that allowed a service club to participate in early voting through the Adopt-A-Precinct program.”

Betty adds, “By allowing our club to work the polls for early voting, the money Bill would have paid the poll workers now becomes a donation to charitable organizations in the tri-county area. Bill Keen is a genius!”

Once they had the green light, the club started planning for the 2020 elections. They partnered with Civitan International once again through the fiscal agent arrangement. Knowing this series of elections would bring in big money, the club’s leadership saw it as an opportunity to create a long-term plan for grant making in the community. Since big elections years don’t happen regularly, the club would be able to invest this large windfall and use it for future needs in the local community.



In addition, it would require a lot of planning as well as a larger army of helpers than before! How would they pull it off? Offers of help from friends and family came flooding in.

And back in 2019, who would have ever imagined this mammoth effort would happen during a pandemic? The club realized the need for implementing good COVID safety measures and ways to limit contact. They even used clothes pins to check IDs.

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December 1st is pay day for Hometown Civitan Club, when Bill Keen will present a check for almost \$45,000 to the club.

Laura McLaughlin reflects fondly on the efforts of all the club members and the payoff of this partnership. “At the end of the day, deserving nonprofits in our community are the big winners. I am so proud of our members, spouses, and friends who have stepped up to the plate.”

Betty adds, “When I started this club, never did I think I would get the support to provide services to the community in the form of monetary grants. This was a major event and our members rose to the task.”

