A Message from your Supervisor of Elections

The March 15th Presidential Preference Primary Election has concluded and the next election will be held on August 30th, which will be another primary election.

Voters often ask the Elections staff, “I want to vote in the primary. Do I have to be a Democrat or Republican?” Since Florida is a closed primary state, only voters who are registered members of the respective political party's candidates can vote for those candidate nominees in a primary election. Typically, that would be either one of the two major political parties (Republicans and Democrats), but it can also include minor political parties if they have candidates for an office on the primary election ballot.

There are two instances in which all registered voters may vote in a primary election. First, when all the candidates for an office have the same party affiliation and the winner of the primary election will not face any opposition in the general election. Second, if the race is a nonpartisan race such as judicial and school board offices, or nonpartisan special districts or local referendum questions.

Don’t wait until Election Day to check your party affiliation. By then, it is too late to make any changes to your party. All party changes must be submitted by the registration deadline, which is 29 days before Election Day. You can change your party affiliation with a signed, written notice or a voter registration application. The signed notice must include your date of birth or voter registration number.

Recap: Vote-By-Mail Ballot Drop Boxes

In our last newsletter, we announced the unveiling of vote-by-mail ballot drop boxes in Indian River County. Drop boxes were available at each of the three early voting sites during voting hours. Any vote-by-mail voter was provided the opportunity to deposit their voted ballots at the most convenient early voting location for them as opposed to sending them via mail to the Elections Office.

After a quick tally, we determined that 310 vote-by-mail ballots were deposited using the new drop boxes. The Elections Office received the most, with a total of 145 ballots. The IRC Main Library came in second with 92, and 73 ballots were collected from Sebastian City Hall Council Chambers. The daily average was 12.9 ballots. Not bad for the first time. Drop boxes will be offered during early voting for both the Primary and General Elections.

Offices up for Election

Secretary of State Ken Detzner has given notice that the following offices are up for election during the 2016 election cycle. Candidates filing to run for Federal, State, Multi-County and District offices must do so with the State. To obtain more information on candidates who file with the Florida Division of Elections, click here.

Candidates filing to run for County offices qualify with the local Supervisor of Elections Office. Offices up for election include all Constitutional Offices: Clerk of Circuit Court & Comptroller, Property Appraiser, Sheriff, Supervisor of Elections and Tax Collector; County Commissioner Districts 1, 3 and 5, School Board Districts 3 and 5; Hospital District Seats 1, 3, 5, 6 and 7; Soil & Water Conservation District, Seats 1, 2 and 4; Mosquito Control District, Seats 1 and 3. Find information for the aforementioned candidates at VoteIndianRiver.com.

Candidates filing to run for municipal offices qualify with the respective municipality. Municipal offices up for election include three city council seats for the City of Fellsmere and Vero Beach, two city council seats for the City of Sebastian, three town council seats for the Town of Indian River Shores and two town council seats for the Town of Orchid. To obtain more information about candidates running for municipal offices, contact the respective municipality.
The Elections Office wrapped up voting for Sunshine State Young Readers. 1,357 students, from 12 schools, grades K-8 participated. The program rewards students for reading by allowing students who read 3 or more books the opportunity to vote using official voting equipment. All students who voted received a pencil, a certificate and an “I Voted” sticker.

Supervisor Swan spoke to local high school students at the 2nd Make Your Voice Count symposium, created to make a connection between students and elected officials. She gave a brief description of her role as Supervisor of Elections for Indian River County and answered questions from students in the audience.

Election staff attended the Annual Sheriff’s Youth Ranch BBQ.
A big thank you to everyone who worked the Presidential Preference Primary Election. We truly appreciate all you do for our voters and we could not have outstanding elections without you. Interested in working the polls for the Primary & General Elections? Join us on June 8 for the next election worker orientation. It will be held at the Elections Office from 10am-noon. Training for the Primary Election will begin in late July.

Senate Bill 112 was approved by the Governor on March 10, 2016, replacing the term “absentee ballot” with “vote-by-mail”. The language change effective July 1, 2016 is meant to clarify that voting by mail is not just for those who might be out of town on Election Day. Historically, the term “absentee ballot” has been considered misleading, because in Florida, anyone can request a ballot by mail. Voters in many states traditionally have had to provide some type of justification to qualify for absentee voting.

Requesting a vote-by-mail ballot is easy. Call (772) 226-3440 or visit VoteIndianRiver.com to request your vote-by-mail ballot. When you receive your ballot, mark your choice(s), sign your certificate oath and return your voted ballot in the enclosed return envelope. Remember, the signature on your certificate oath must match the signature in your voter registration record. If your signature does not match, your vote-by-mail ballot may not be counted. To update your signature, complete a voter registration application and submit it to the Elections Office.
Please help us welcome Maureen Houssell. Maureen, a New Jersey native, joined the elections office in April. She recently received her Bachelor’s Degree in Political Science from the University of Central Florida. She started her elections career in Brevard County during the 2000 Presidential Election and brings with her 14 years of elections experience. Maureen’s responsibilities include coordinating the acquisition of the new voting system; overseeing document retention pursuant to Florida’s Public Records Law; compilation of election documents and statistics; assisting with Election Worker training; and other various special projects.

A few words from one of our voters

Dear Leslie:

I would like to share some thoughts and observations with you and your wonderful staff members.

Whenever I visit the Office of Supervisor of Elections, I am always impressed with the professionalism, organization, helpfulness, friendliness, and competency of your staff.

I had the pleasure of working several days with various staff members on absentee ballots. The scrutiny, precision, oversight, and checks and balances in place were very impressive. There is no doubt in my mind that the absentee voters of Indian River County can be assured that every absentee vote counts.

When an absentee ballot was completed improperly, the ballot was rejected by the computer scanner. The oversight committee enlisted several layers of checks and balances, reviewed the rejected ballot, and with scrutiny and precision determined the intent of the voter. A duplicate ballot was then properly completed and scanned by the computer with accuracy and absolute integrity. The intent of the voter was of utmost importance and concern. The goal was to make every vote count.

Leslie, I was very impressed that you not only knew the names of your temporary help, but that you knew the role of that worker for that particular day. You are the epitome of a “hands on” supervisor who oversees every aspect of the election process.

Success is measured by how many people respect you. You are certainly held in high esteem by your staff members and those of us who assisted in this past presidential primary.

You should be proud of your service and commitment to the citizens of Indian River County. I am thankful for the opportunity to work with such dedicated staff.

Very truly yours,

Kathleen Wooster

Introducing Mr. & Mrs. Hays

Lauren Swan, daughter of Supervisor of Elections Leslie Swan and Mike Swan, was married to Brandon Hays of Memphis, Tennessee on Saturday, April 16. The ceremony took place at First United Methodist Church, followed by a reception at Oak Harbor. The couple honeymooned in St. Lucia before returning home to West Palm Beach.