

2009 Professional Practices Program

Long Lines? Don't Wait. Vote by Mail in 2008!

Martin County, Florida

Submitted by:

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Research/Situation: Why is there a history of lower voter participation for absentee voting in Martin County and how can that statistic be reversed? During 2007, local data gathered from Elections Center voter software and staff developed focus groups identified a common thread – voters want a convenient, quick method in which to vote and they lacked knowledge about the absentee ballot voting process. With the 2008 Presidential election expecting to surpass any other election with voter turnout, the elections office had to find a way to encourage citizens to an alternative way of voting to prevent long lines on Election Day. As a result of that information the Vote By Mail campaign was born.

Statement of Objectives: To educate voters about absentee ballot voting, and as a result, increase voter turnout, four goals were established: (1) Increase absentee ballot voting by a minimum of 25% based on comparisons of the 2004 Presidential Election; (2) Increase total voter turnout based on comparisons of the 2004 Presidential Election; (3) Increase methods of media utilized for voter education by 50% as compared to 2004 Presidential Election; (4) Remain within a budget of \$35,000.

Implementation: Phase one of the campaign included developing a budget and determining how to maximize media impact to reach 102,000 registered voters in Martin County. In past elections radio and newspaper (print and online) were the only means of advertising used to capture voters' attention. Brainstorming sessions resulted in identifying new and different forms of media. A Vote By Mail tri-fold was produced and mailed to every registered household; "VOTE" street pole banners were displayed throughout downtown Stuart; television and cinema commercials were created and a roving billboard truck displayed a vote message throughout Martin County.

The second phase of the campaign focused on community outreach and education. Florida is a "no excuse" state; therefore, eligible voters may request an absentee ballot without needing an excuse or reason. Many Martin County residents were unaware they could vote by mail for no other reason than convenience. From October 2007 through 2008, the Community Outreach Coordinator provided voter registration/awareness drives and Vote By Mail presentations. Venues included nursing homes, assisted living facilities, school open houses, bank branches, special events, restaurants, town halls, and chamber

of commerce meetings. The Coordinator also spearheaded a door-to-door voter registration/Vote By Mail drive and a partnership with the local Association of Realtors that included the distribution of voter registration and Vote By Mail information to new residents of Martin County. A partnership was also formed with the local NAACP and the Republican and Democratic Parties of Martin County to promote Vote By Mail to all residents, these groups also wore "Vote By Mail" buttons to create awareness throughout the county.

Evaluation: The Vote By Mail campaign overwhelmingly achieved its objectives. (1) In Martin County, the 2004 Presidential Election generated 16,584 absentee ballots, whereas the 2008 Presidential Election received a record breaking 25,847 absentee ballots showing a 36% increase! (2) In 2004, the total Martin County voter turnout for the Presidential Election was 74% and in 2008 the turnout jumped to 78%. (3) Election advertising was boosted by 50% through implementation of six new, creative approaches to reach the voting public. (4) The campaign effectively remained below budget.

Budget: Regal Cinema commercials - \$5,620; Street pole banners - \$3,500; Vote By Mail Tri-fold (includes design, printing, postage) - \$18,525; Bullzi roving billboard truck - \$2,550; Comcast cable commercials - \$3,004; Promotional items - \$ 1,000. Total cost of campaign = \$34,199 - a cost of .36 per eligible voter!



Vicki Davis, Martin County Supervisor of Elections, standing next to street pole banner reminding residents to vote.

LONG LINES? DON'T WAIT. VOTE BY MAIL IN 2008!

Do you know how important your signature and address is?

Please make sure your signature is up-to-date.

Each signature on a Vote By Mail Ballot is verified with the signature on file with the Elections Center.

If you need to update your signature or address, contact the Elections Center at 288-5637, or visit our website at www.MartinVotes.com

Vote By Mail Ballots cannot be forwarded.

To receive your ballot, please make sure your Martin County residential address is up-to-date.



Dates to Remember >>

Presidential Preference Primary: **January 29, 2008**
 Primary Election: **August 26, 2008**
 General Election: **November 4, 2008**



Thank you for taking the time to vote and for making democracy possible.

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Vote By Mail Buttons that were worn by elections staff members and the Republican and Democratic Parties in Martin County. ¶