



## Grassroots Efforts Key to Political Success

By Jennifer Wake



Precinct Coordinator Carol MacNulty and Precinct Outreach Worker Dick Immel turn in "Turn Moraga Blue" door hangers to Lamorinda Democratic Club Town Co-coordinator Karen Couric. Photo Jennifer Wake

**F**ormer Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis spoke to more than 200 attendees on Feb. 25 at Saint Mary's College, describing presidential elections on a whole as "becoming like a movie – a bad one."

"We sit on our cans and only half of us go out to vote," Dukakis said. He believes the answer to who will win the democratic nomination and ultimately who wins the presidency will depend upon grassroots efforts. "My party has forgotten how to do precinct-based grassroots organizing."

But he likely had not met the members of the Lamorinda Democratic Club.

Since last fall, The Lamorinda Democratic Club's precinct outreach program, the first of its

kind in Lamorinda, has spent countless hours reaching out to Moraga Democrats and Independents with a goal to "turn Moraga blue."

Moraga residents Marie Kahn and Karen Couric, along with John Hall and Laura Winslow of Lafayette began a steering committee in early 2007 to get outreach workers in every precinct in Moraga, and recently began outreach efforts in Lafayette and Orinda as well.

"We started in Moraga because it was more of a Republican town and we wanted to get over the stigma in Moraga that it was almost impolite to talk about politics," Kahn said. "A lot of progressive voters in the area had the mistaken impression that they were the only ones."

Since the program started, the membership has built to 131

volunteers who spend nights and weekends knocking on doors of registered Democratic voters in Moraga to discuss issues like International relations and healthcare. And their outreach is working. Just prior to Super Tuesday, on Feb. 5, the Contra Costa County list of registered voters showed 60 more Democrats than Republicans in the former Republican bastion, with 4,019 Democrats (39.24%) and 3,959 Republicans (38.65%) among Moraga's approximately 10,200 registered voters, according to the club.

"We went about it to build community: To have one-on-one talks about politics on the doorstep," Kahn said.

In addition to the precinct volunteers in Moraga, the program has expanded to 64 volunteers in Lafayette (with a goal to have 300 by the fall), and 15 volunteers in Orinda (with a goal to expand their circle to 250).

So far, Kahn said the response from residents has been one of polite interest. "We've been surprised at how pleased people are to talk openly about political issues," she said. "They know they are talking to kindred spirits."

Governor Dukakis said that if we go out ringing doorbells, once we get involved in the process, we stay involved. "If anybody does this kind of work, they win elections," he said.

When a Saint Mary's stu-

dent asked why more campaigns don't do more grassroots organizing, he explained, "Most campaign consultants have never rung a doorbell in their lives. Obama lost New Hampshire because he had a lousy grassroots organization, and [Senator Clinton] out-organized him. If the Democratic party doesn't get involved, it's going to lose again."

Kahn is happy with the precinct program's success. "We've shown people that they can become involved in the political process, and what we do at the grassroots level does matter," she said. "The stakes are so high we need to make our voices heard in as many ways as we can."

The Lamorinda Democratic Club plans to expand its outreach program through November to further increase registration. Volunteers can join the effort on the Club website: [www.lamorindademoclub.org](http://www.lamorindademoclub.org).