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Grass-root Efforts in Lamorinda: Making Change at the National Level

By Sophie Braccini



Nick Gerber hands out a reusable bag with his name on it at the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival Photo Sophie Braccini

Metro in Lafayette rarely sees tens of customers sitting in its dining room, each with a cell phone at their ear and just a cup of coffee on the table. The unusual call center was created by the restaurant's Erika Pringsheim-Moore as part of the Move On Obama campaign. Moore is but one of the many Lamorindans, both Democrats and Republicans, who feel that they can make a difference at the national level and will continue to campaign until the November election.

"I was raised in a home where talking politics was a family sport," says Pringsheim-Moore, whose father was a political science professor, "so today, even if I do not have a lot of time with two jobs and two young children, I can't fathom not acting and trying to effect change." The objective at Metro on Sunday the 21st was to call Oregon Move On members to get them to get involved in the race in their State.

David Finkbeiner, an Orinda resident, also believes that actions at the individual level can effect change. Finkbeiner invited about thirty people to his home that same afternoon. Move On, a movement that's celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, is a progressive effort that believes in the power of individuals, as long as there are enough of them who are motivated. Meetings, petitioning and fund raising are usually initiated by internet messaging. "They have become quite sophisticated," says Finkbeiner, "the approach is targeted and they can mobilize an impressive number of people in a very short time."

Under the Republican Women's canopy at the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival, the volunteers were just as fired-up. The Sarah Palin life-size stand-up poster had not arrived yet, but the excitement about the vice-presidential candidate on the Republican ticket was palpable in the booth.

Club President Phyllis Stout said, "We are part of the National Republican Women Federation. Our mission is to educate the public and support our candidates." Much of this is achieved by hosting luncheons with invited speakers. At the fair, the objective was to get as many people as possible registered to vote.

Volunteers, like Stout or Tracy Ragnall Lloyd, have done their share this year of door-to-door campaigning. "We go where the people are," says Lloyd, "we target a specific group, like the "decline to state" and we bring them literature." Most of the time the women, who do not want to intrude on people's lives, leave the documents by the front door.

But where are the Republican men? "We have an associate membership for them," says Stout,

who obviously welcomes them. She says that many of them work with the Republican Central Committee in Walnut Creek.

However, some Republic men put their nose to the grindstone when it gets personal. Moraga resident Nicholas Gerber is one of these motivated, tireless politicians. He is running for the Congressional seat in District 11, presently held by Ellen Tauscher. The manager of his own campaign, Gerber has invested \$50,000 of his own money in his dream of going to Washington. The rest of Gerber's campaign financing comes largely from individual donations because, according to him, "The Republican party endorses me and supports me with their good wishes and prayers," but this has not translated into much hard cash. For a year and a half Gerber has been determinedly pacing his district and personally shaking thousands of hands. His "Go Gerber" sign can be seen all over.

Obtaining funding is one of the major goals of all these local efforts. Some are completely individual and spontaneous. Jim and Jill Larsen, Orinda residents who believes that small streams create large rivers, are organizing a barbecue at their home to fundraise for Barack Obama. No big names are invited, there will be no media coverage (except in your friendly neighborhood newspaper) - just a simple gathering of friends and acquaintances who will watch the Vice-Presidential debate together and make a donation in whatever amount they are comfortable with. The Larsen's objective is to raise \$2,000.

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