

ISSUE FORUMS

Issue Forums offer participants a venue to interact with respected community leaders and resource experts on issues of concern to Northeast Florida citizens. Participants explore issues critical to the community's growth, seek understanding of related problems, and come to consensus on proposed action plans implemented for positive change. Forward covered four topics during the 2007-08 program, a 4-week mini forum, an 8-week full forum and two one-night events. **Thank you to ALL the resource speakers, presenters, and supporters for donating their time and resources throughout the year.**

Election January 2008: Will YOU show up?

Over 4 weeks in October, this forum examined the stakes of the January 2008 election, explores recent voter turnout and asked what is needed to get you to the polls.

Key findings and needs:

- The more competitive the race, the higher the turnout and dialogue surrounding the candidates and issues to be determined by the election. The January election will generate higher interest and turnout with the inclusion of the property tax amendment on the ballot.
- A lack of trust in the system, the candidate and the information provided about the issues result in lower turnout. Tying issues personally to voters can improve interest but improving technology related to voting may not increase the number of votes cast.
- Duval County citizens face a shortage of trusted sources to get and provide education about the voting process and candidate statements. Candidates provide uniform marketing materials that target the "frequent voter." A lack of funds prevents more widespread information and new or non-voters from receiving candidate information.
- Each citizen has a personal responsibility to prepare for each election. No entity is charged with addressing the lack of voter commitment or voter apathy.
- The school system no longer provides formal civic training or civic education, thus creating a need to educate new and non-voters on the processes of voting.
- All those who are part of the system need to work together to improve trust in the system through greater transparency.

Action plan:

It was the consensus of the Forum committee members to proceed with the following plans for action:

- A letter of request will be drafted to JCCI to suggest the addition of a question on the next *Quality of Life* survey related to Duval County citizens' trust in the local voting process, and to suggest revisiting the 1988 *Local Election Process* study.
- A letter of request will be sent to the Supervisor of Elections Office suggesting that candidate profiles and sample ballots be created for all elections-- at least electronically available on the Supervisor of Elections website.
- A presentation, by committee members, to the League of Women Voters will be made in an effort to partner with existing organizations to improve attendance at local candidate forums and to educate local citizens.
- A presentation, by committee members, to the Supervisor of Elections office will be made in an effort to partner with existing organizations to get their new video on the voting process out to citizens to improve attendance and educate local citizens.

Community Resources:

Matt Corrigan, Professor of Political Science,
University of North Florida

Cleveland Ferguson III, Assistant Professor of Law,
Florida Coastal School of Law

Jerry Holland, Supervisor of Elections, City of
Jacksonville

Adam Hollingsworth, Chief of Strategic Initiatives,
Office of the Mayor

Paul McCormick, Principal, McCormick Agency Inc.

Ginny Myrick, Senior Policy Advisor, Holland & Knight

Committee Members: Fionnuala Geoghegan (chair), Marcus Haile (co-chair), John Allmand, Mickee Brown, Susan Burroughs, Joan Carver, Shannon Clarke, Irvin Cohen, Garrett Dennis, Leah Donelan, Leslie Goller, Fatima Hussein, Debra Jahns-Nelsen, Jennifer Mansfield, Heather McEachen, Jim Minion, Samantha Minton, Cheryl Murphy, Lashun Parker, Lee Poechmann, Marvin Reese, Patt Sher, Scott Shine, Jessica Smith, Kelly Smith, Jim Varian, Ben Warner, Dick Weber and Ken Wilson *Staff: Michelle Simkulet*

Thank You to the Florida Coastal School of Law for supporting this Forum!