

One week before final day of voting

Not long ago, campaigns rolled along to one specific date when voters went off to the polls and marked their ballots.

It's different now. Well over half of all votes are expected to come in mail-in ballots or early voting this year. Nov. 2 is simply the final day of many "voting days" in this General Election.

This is a reminder that any registered voter is able to cast a ballot this week. Call the Charlotte County Supervisor of Elections Office at 941-743-1387 in Murdock or 941-833-5400 in Punta Gorda if you have any questions.

Better yet, go online to the supervisor's website (www.charlottevotes.com) to get information on your own. The site is very easy to navigate and has interesting supplementary information, like candidates' financial reports. If you are unsure where to vote on Election Day, you also can locate your polling site on the county website by typing in your street.

Elections Supervisor Paul Stamoulis has been urging people to use mail-in ballots this year, and you can still request a ballot this week. An "absentee" ballot only costs 61 cents, and it's very convenient.

Also remember, just because you ask for a mail-in ballot doesn't mean you have to use it. You can still vote by traditional balloting during early voting or on Election Day. Feel free to get a mail-in ballot, fill it in at home and bring it with you if you decide to vote early at one of the central voting centers, or on Tuesday, Nov. 2, at your designated polling place. Use the mail-in ballot as a crib sheet; this year's ballot is long and you may find it confusing, especially with the statewide amendments at the end of the ballot.

Early voting runs until Sunday, Oct. 31. Charlotte has three offices open for voting: the Mid-County Regional Library, 2050 Forrest Nelson Blvd., in Port Charlotte; the Supervisor of Election's Office at the Historic Courthouse, 226 Taylor St., in Punta Gorda; and the West County Administration Center on San Casa Drive in Englewood. Anyone registered to vote in Charlotte County can vote at any of those locations. Just make sure to bring identification with a valid signature and photo.

The early-voting polls will be open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday, and 9 a.m.-1 p.m. next Saturday and Sunday.

The following are the Sun's recommendations for the local races.

- Charlotte County Commission District 1: Chris Constance would bring considerable energy, intelligence and passion to the commission's Punta Gorda seat. We were impressed with his longrange vision and believe he has the team-building skills necessary to keep Charlotte County moving in a positive direction. We recommend Chris Constance.
- Charlotte County school tax referendum: In the face of dramatically lower property tax revenue and cuts in state school funding, the Legislature has allowed local school districts to levy an additional quarter mill to fund school operations. The referendum authorizes the Charlotte County School Board to continue collecting the 0.25-mill levy, as they have been doing for the past two years. The quality of our school system depends on it. We recommend a "yes" vote.
- Charlotte County Charter Amendments: There are eight proposed charter changes on the ballot and not one that would remotely improve the operation of county government. The choice is simple on this

one: "No" to all.

- Punta Gorda City Council District 1: The City Council has a clear vision and conducts business in a respectful and collegial manner. Charles Wallace is a valuable voice for the business community and the historic district. We recommend Charles Wallace.

- State Representative District 71: His opponent is running nothing more than a spoof campaign, so this is really no contest. We recommend Ken Roberson.

- U.S. Congress, District 13: Rep. Vern Buchanan was in the right place on oil drilling off the Gulf and has managed to retain some independent tendencies in a difficult political climate. We recommend Vern Buchanan.