



Pulitzer Prize winner
2016

CHARLOTTE SUN

Friday
October 21, 2016



VOL. 124 | NO. 295

www.yoursun.com

AMERICA'S BEST COMMUNITY DAILY

\$1.00

AN EDITION OF THE SUN

Mail ballots signal record election turnout

By **BILL JONES**
SUN CORRESPONDENT

If the request for absentee ballots is an indication, the spirited Nov. 8 presidential election could see a record voter turnout in Charlotte and Sarasota counties.

According to the Supervisor of Elections office in Sarasota, 56,000 mail ballots initially were sent out, but the number of requests is now 80,000 and counting.

That represents more than a quarter of the county's 300,000 registered voters. Some 29,500 votes already have been mailed in.

In Charlotte County, voters have requested 40,000 mail ballots — 31 percent of the county's 128,000 registered

voters — and the number is climbing with the Nov. 2 deadline still two weeks away.

More than 15,000 ballots have already been processed, according to elections supervisor Paul Stamoulis, with some 1,000 a day being processed in the past week.

The ultimate number this year, he said, would likely surpass the 2012 presidential election, when 33,000 of the 85,000 votes were cast by mail.

The county has 56,378 registered Republican voters, 36,161 Democrat, and 35,668 "others" for a total of 128,207, with 850 of those registered in the past week after U.S. District Judge Mark Walker extended the state's registration deadline from Oct. 11 to Oct. 18 to accommodate East Coast

voters affected by Hurricane Matthew.

Stamoulis said Charlotte County is ready to implement Judge Walker's other decision, affecting ballots whose signatures don't match voters' registration documents.

The judge ruled that when election officials find ballots with mismatched signatures, it is their duty to allow the voters to correct the problem before, not after the election. He said those voters have the same corrective rights as voters have had who didn't sign their mail ballots at all.

"We're ready," Stamoulis said. "We saw it coming." In February, he had every member of his staff certified in handwriting analysis by a forensic

BALLOTS | 6

Our Town Page 6 E/N/C

www.yoursun.com

FROM PAGE ONE

The Sun /Friday, October 21, 2016

BALLOTS

FROM PAGE 1

document examiner.

But even under the old law, when ballots with mismatched signatures were not counted, Stamoulis said it has not been a major problem in Charlotte County. "We err on the side of counting the vote," he said. It had

to be a "definite mismatch," not just somewhat of a differentiation in handwriting, for the vote not to be counted.

In the primary election this year, he said, just 17 ballots out of 17,000 were affected. That's one-tenth of one percent.

The procedure has a two-step process. When an elections office staff member finds a possible mismatch, the ballot

goes to Stamoulis, who submits it for review to an election canvassing board, consisting of himself, a county judge and the chairman of the County Commission.

Now, if the panel finds a major mismatch, the voter — like the voter who hasn't signed a ballot — is notified that he or she can correct the situation — before the election — by signing an

affidavit and submitting with it a verifiable form of identification.

Even though the correction procedure for non-signed ballots wasn't required by law, Stamoulis said his office always notified the non-signer of his or her right to correct prior to the election. So now the procedure will be added for mismatched signatures as well.

Stamoulis said early

voting in Charlotte County will be conducted from Oct. 24 to Nov. 6, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., at the Supervisor of Elections office in the Historic Courthouse, 226 Taylor St., Punta Gorda; the San Casa West Village Administration Center, 6865 San Casa Drive, Englewood, and The Mid-County Regional Library, 2050 Forrest Nelson Blvd., Port Charlotte.

In Sarasota County, early voting sites will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily, Oct. 24 to Nov. 5. They include the county Supervisor of Elections office, 2001 Adams Lane, Sarasota; the Supervisor of Elections office in Biscayne Plaza, 13640 Tamiami Trail, North Port, and the Supervisor of Elections office, 4000 Tamiami Trail South, Room 114, Venice.