

Pollworker power

Through changes and challenges, pollworkers do their part to make sure every vote is counted



FAST AND FRIENDLY: Pollworkers help thousands of voters at an early voting site. Even when the lines were long, pollworkers' patience and expertise kept voters in good spirits.

For many decades, they have been waking up before the sun rises and staying until after the last voter leaves. But until the 2000 presidential election, many people never thought about the quiet dedication of Miami-Dade County's pollworkers - and their essential role in carrying out every election, big and small.

These days, people around the world are familiar with Miami-Dade's elections, and from leadership to equipment, a lot has changed in the past five years. But one thing hasn't changed: the devoted "army" of people who greet their neighbors, answer questions and do whatever is necessary to ensure that all ballots make it to the Elections Department so that they can

ultimately be counted that night.

"Many times, those of us in leadership roles get most of the attention," Supervisor of Elections Lester Sola said. "But the truth is, our pollworkers deserve much of the credit. I am so impressed by their consistent professionalism, whether they are helping us run an election to choose the president of the United States - or to choose the leaders of Miami-Dade's smallest towns and villages."

While many residents may think elections are events that only happen every two or four years, pollworkers know that in Miami-Dade, approximately 30 elections take place each year! As many as 8,000 clerks, assistant clerks, inspectors and poll deputies serve the department during the largest

elections, such as in November 2004, while fewer than a dozen may work to get the job done in an election such as the upcoming Sept. 13 contest in Virginia Gardens. No matter the size of the election, the Elections Department does everything it can to make sure it is a success, and so do the pollworkers.

And while pollworkers might be best known for their ability to communicate important information to voters, the

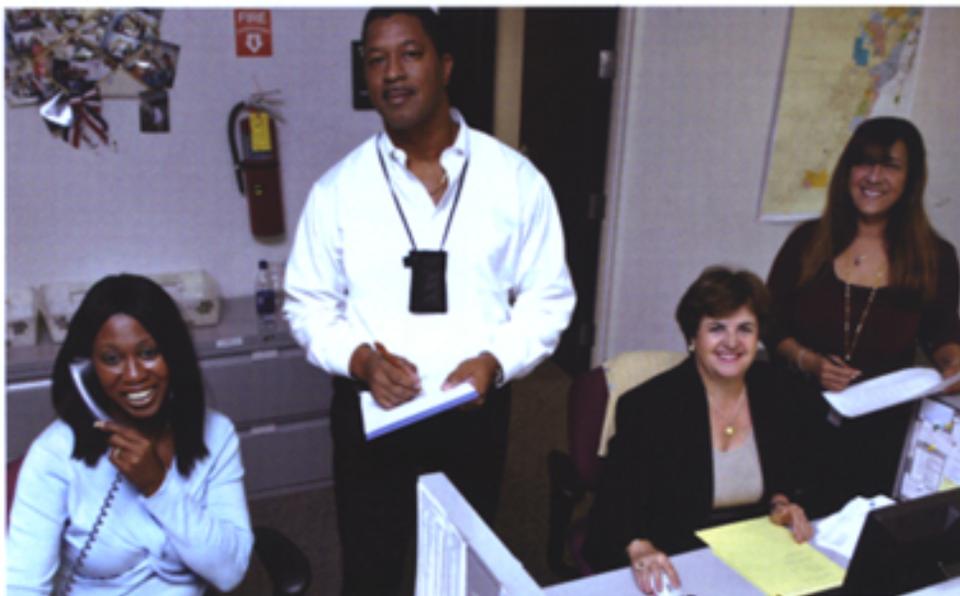
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Your link to the Elections Department

Meet the people behind the friendly voices in the Pollworker Section



YOUR ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT FAMILY: Dorothy Mincey and Angie Martinez (sitting, front) pause briefly from speaking with pollworkers to smile for the camera. They are joined by Deputy Supervisor of Elections Milton Collins and Pollworker Section Supervisor Lisset Hernandez (standing, rear).

How can someone who you might not have ever met in person be a longtime friend? That's how many pollworkers feel about the people in the Elections Department's Pollworker Section.

"We have some pollworkers who have been serving the people of Miami-Dade County for decades," said Deputy Supervisor of Elections Milton Collins, who oversees the department's pollworker recruitment and training functions. "They are extremely important members of the Elections Department family."

Even with thousands of pollworkers throughout the county, department employees know many of them by name - and they know why each one of them is so special to the voters who they encounter.

"My colleagues and I have been working with some of our pollworkers for many years," said Lisset Hernandez, who supervises

the Pollworker Section. "We really know them and all their special talents. We know about their election experience, about the languages they speak... and we try to assign them to polling places that are both convenient for them and where they can best serve our voters."

The department does everything it can to show its appreciation for pollworkers.

"After the March special countywide election, some of our pollworkers called to thank us for getting their paychecks out more quickly than in the past," Collins said. "We know how hard they work and how dedicated they are, and that's why we're doing everything possible to make sure they're compensated as quickly as possible."

Collins said that despite having to process paychecks for more than

By the numbers: Miami-Dade Elections

- Number of registered voters: 1,076,570
- Number of full-time Elections Department staff members: 102
- Number of pollworkers who worked November 2004 election: 8,001
- Number of precincts in Miami-Dade: 749
- Number of iVotronic units: 7,200
- Number of Miami-Dade municipalities (cities, towns and villages): 34

What's new

You might have heard that the Florida legislature voted to change some rules that affect elections in general - and polling places in particular. **Most changes don't take effect until Jan. 1, 2006.** If you are assigned to work an election this fall, you might notice a few changes, such as friendlier forms that the Elections Department has designed to make your job easier. Our trainers will always communicate any important changes to you before an election. Until then, **don't assume that anything has changed.** Keep following the procedures that you have learned in training, and rest assured that we will keep you informed when any of those procedures have changed. We'll also highlight some of the upcoming legislative changes in our next edition of Pollworker Pulse this winter.

The Elections Department is also expecting some improvements to our iVotronic units. Once our electronic voting equipment is upgraded, you will notice that voting terminals will open more quickly and will be easier to use - and you'll see some visual enhancements to the image on the screen, too. Our trainers will also inform you once these changes take effect.

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information exchange is actually a two-way street. When voters or pollworkers have ideas about how to improve our elections, the pollworkers take those suggestions back to the department.

"Pollworkers really are our eyes and ears in the community," Sola said. "When voters notice that something has improved from one election to the next, many times, they can thank a pollworker for delivering the idea." ➤

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Close on a high note

Help bring a long day to a successful close by closing your precinct properly

By the end of a long day, we are all tired and look forward to finally getting some rest. But it's important to make sure that a successful election remains a success by closing the precinct properly - and, specifically, by filling out all forms correctly. One of those important forms is Certificate No. 2.

"Certificate number two is not just another form," Supervisor of Elections Lester Sola said. "It's an important tool to help us verify that

the number of ballots cast matches the number of voters. Taking a little time to accurately count the signatures in your precinct register helps us confirm that everything went well in your precinct - and avoids us having to



Lester Sola, Supervisor of Elections

take more of your time later by calling you at home to ask about any issues with the numbers."

Sola said the department is currently finalizing a third way to confirm numbers: ballot accountability slips that voters will deposit after voting, which will later be counted. As always, trainers will inform you of any procedural changes prior to an election. ➔

Words to live by

Test your election knowledge with the Miami-Dade Elections crossword puzzle



ACROSS

2. Two precincts voting in one location
3. Workers call here when they have questions or issues, or just to report that everything is okay
7. Chief member of the precinct election board
8. General term describing clerks, assistant clerks, inspectors and poll deputies
9. Maintains order outside polling place
10. Cartridge that activates the ballot
12. Number of ballot languages available in Miami-Dade
13. Voters sign this before voting

DOWN

1. Popular new way to vote before election day
4. Voters who want to vote from home can use this kind of ballot
5. Election in which parties select their candidates for an upcoming general election
6. Voters who aren't sure how to use electronic units can request this
11. Polls open at this time, a.m., and close at this time, p.m.

ANSWERS
ACROSS
2. same board, 3. Election Central, 7. clerk, 8. pollworker, 9. deputy, 10. PEB, 12. three, 13. register
DOWN
1. early voting, 4. absentee, 5. primary, 6. demonstration, 11. seven

Spread the word!

Do your friends, family members or neighbors want to become pollworkers? The Elections Department is always looking for qualified pollworkers. If your friends, neighbors or members of your family want to help serve the community while earning some money, tell them to call our Pollworker Section at 305-499-8448. Remember that to be a pollworker you must be a registered voter in Miami-Dade County, and you must be able to read and write English.

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6,000 pollworkers in that election, most of them received their checks within just over two weeks after Election Day. He said that whenever possible, mailing checks quickly - along with other measures, such as trying to assign pollworkers to polling places near their homes -

Upcoming elections - remainder of 2005*

- Sept. 13 - Virginia Gardens (general)
- Oct. 4 - Homestead (primary)
- Nov. 1 - Hialeah (primary), Homestead (general), Key Biscayne (special), Miami (primary) and Miami Beach (general)
- Nov. 8 - Sunny Isles Beach (general)
- Nov. 15 - Hialeah (general), Miami Beach (run-off), Miami (general)
- Dec. 6 - Sunny Isles Beach (run-off), Biscayne Park (general)

*subject to change at any time

shows pollworkers that the department values their role in every election.

"They go out of their way for us, and most importantly, for our voters," he said. "And in turn, we try to go out of our way for them."

Contact information

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Carlos Alvarez
Mayor

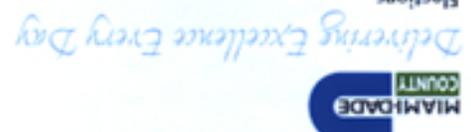
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