

A new, growing breed of citizens

More groups watch Brazos politics

By SUZANNE BLACK

Special to The Battalion
A growing breed of sturdy rain or shine citizens is watching local politics nowadays. They're a minority in the multitude of fair-weather observers, but they're changing the complexion of the political scene.
Usually, relatively few people or organizations seem to keep up with local government.
Bryan Mayor Richard Smith said most citizens are pretty naive about the local political situation.
Organized interest groups, with regular membership and meetings, aren't that significant," said College Station Mayor Lorence Bravenec. Brazos County Judge Bill Vance commented, "every year there's a different issue and a different group. No one group dominates."

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Some of that is changing, though. There are signs of growing community awareness and involvement in local government.

For example, the past May primary drew more private campaign contributions from Brazos County residents than the two previous primaries combined.

According to campaign contributions and expense reports at the Brazos County clerk's office, the candidates in the last May primary received money donations of at least \$5,560.

Only the primaries in 1974 and 1976 can be validly used for comparison because the requirements for reporting contributions were different in the years before. Total contributions for 1974 and 1976 can't be used either, because the reports are incomplete.

However, in individual races, the figures show contributions doubling from one election to the next. For example, contributions in 1974 and 1976 for Precinct 2 county commissioner candidates totaled \$1,830 and \$3,586, respectively. That's almost a 7,000 difference.

County attorney candidates also attracted a lot of money. Records of the 1976 and 1975 primaries involving that position show \$4,508 and \$9,360 were contributed. That's a 100 percent jump.

Although some of the dollars came from other areas, most of the money originated from pockets in Brazos County. What's inspiring these generous residents? Besides personal friendship with a particular candidate or official, many people are making political contact through their membership in various organizations.

The Bryan-College Station Area often extend equal offers to opposing political candidates to speak to the group.

"We like to keep well informed although we stay as neutral as possible as an organization," said Penny Mallard, president of the Area. "We do stay abreast of current events."

Bob Roepke, president of the Morning Lions Club, said that the club invites candidates to address the members and that there is good membership turnout for such events.



Newton Ellis, president of the Noon Lions Club, said, "in my ten years as a member, the club has never been addressed by a candidate strictly for campaign purposes. But we do normally invite the local state representative and senator to speak, usually to give a wrap-up at the end of a legislative session."

Typically, service organizations don't officially endorse or contribute to political candidates. However, of 11 representatives contacted, most agreed that their fellow members take the opportunity of meeting together to informally discuss their political opinions.

The president of the League of Women Voters, Penny Beaumont, said she more organizations will begin taking on political objectives and getting involved in politics publicly.

What's inspiring these generous residents in the county? Besides personal friendship with a particular candidate or official, many people are making political contact through their membership in various organizations.

The League of Women Voters never actually supports candidates, though it may support issues.

"We have a national reputation, so we're not as free to move," said Beaumont. "The league basically works for informed citizen participation. That's what the league is about," she said.

To fulfill that job, the league provide a voter service, which is also coordinated with the league's various study and action groups.

Two young organizations with similar purposes are the Brazos Valley Black Caucus and the Brazos County Mexican American Democrats. Although they are more outwardly active, their leaders say that communication of information is their primary function.

The caucus is almost two years old. Before the last primary, it hosted local, state and national office seekers in its first candidate's forum.

"We don't endorse candidates. Whenever we extend an invitation, we extend it to everyone," said Rosetta Keaton, president of the Brazos Valley Black Caucus.

"Support for candidates isn't talked about within the realm of the caucus meetings, but politicking is conducted on an individual basis. United support would be difficult because the minority communities aren't homogenous," she said.

Keaton thinks community involvement in government is increasing "because it's becoming an on-

going process, rather than being reactionary, as in the past. There's more follow through. It's very important that there's a continuity throughout the year."

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That kind of continuous involvement will definitely be promoted by the Brazos County Mexican American Democrats (MAD). Right now the local chapter is planning a series of seminars called "Leadership Brazos County" to prepare its members for more active roles in the community. The seminars will cover areas of local concern as well as different facet of government operation.

Daniel Hernandez, one of the MAD founders and its chairman, said a local chapter was started "out of a desire to become more politically aware and to give some political leverage to Mexican Americans here. We thought a state related organization would help us do this."

Membership in MAD is not restricted to Mexican Americans, but the four-month-old group is designed toward addressing Mexican American concerns and relating those concerns to Democrats, Hernandez said.

Such representation will be taken advantage of, said Pete Ramirez, president of the local council of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). "We'll probably be going through MAD so we'll be able to get involved more directly. We're (Mexican Americans) working as a unit now," he said.

Ramirez said the past political effects of LULAC were indirect since

the LULAC constitution doesn't allow official endorsements.

"There's no ax to grind, we're not forming to intimidate anyone," Hernandez said. "We're just going to hold politicians accountable for what they say and do. That's what an ideal citizen should be like."

The emergence of MAD and the Black Caucus, as well as the efforts of several organizations to become familiar with issues and candidates are indications to Neeley Lewis that the community's political awareness is broadening.

Lewis is the chairman of the Brazos County Democratic Party. He said this political awareness results in part from the fact that local politics are becoming more interesting. It also stems from the growth of the community itself.

As far as politics becoming more interesting, N.A. McNeil, chairman of the Brazos County Republican Party agrees.

"Since 1968, Democrats have controlled all the local offices and furnished most of the candidates," McNeil said. "Yet, in presidential

elections, the voters have gone Republican. Because of this record, Brazos County is receiving some attention as a place for viable Republican efforts," he said.

"This year the local party is offering Republican candidates equal in stature to the Democratic candidates. This hasn't been true in Brazos County before," McNeil said.

Just seeing candidates in pairs should make politics more interesting in a county where candidates have historically run unopposed. However, as Brazos County Clerk Frank Boriskie said, the excitement of county politics this year is unique since several appointments and vacated positions left an unusual number of positions open.

Considering the number of aspiring politicians who rose to the occasion, though, Boriskie said, "you can't tell, they may come back again next time and fight like dogs."

And the new breed of aspiring citizens will be watching them all the way.

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We're going to need another 17,000,000 jobs in this country by 1985. These days the average jobs costs \$45,300 to create. So a trillion dollars is more than the total current cost of creating 17,000,000 jobs.
Even if we had a trillion dollars, America couldn't satisfy its most extreme environmental demands already on the books. Air quality rules now lock important areas of the country out of any new industrial development. And water quality standards being applied to all bodies of water, no matter how they're used, will stymie even population growth in many parts of the U.S.
We all want clean air and water. We've been sensitized to pollution's dangers for years. But the fact is: America's air and water have been getting cleaner lately. We've obviously still got a lot to do. But as we do, we need to study carefully the costs and benefits, to keep environmentalism from tying America up in knots.

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Next time somebody says American industry ought to start cleaning up its act, you might like to point out that the clean-up is well on its way. The more extra environmental costs pile on, the fewer new jobs there may be.

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