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Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida

Newsletter

April-June 2019

Bay County Disaster Recovery



Democratic National Chair Tom Perez and Florida Democratic Chair Terrie Rizzo speak with a Lynn Haven resident on June 5 about Hurricane Michael damage and recovery in his neighborhood.

Hurricane Michael blasted ashore near Mexico Beach, Florida on Oct 10, 2018, carrying winds of 150 miles per hour. Michael left a path of destruction as it continued through the southeast and throughout its path across the eastern US. Lives were changed forever.

Bay County has several Democratic organizations working on various projects throughout the region. Most projects concern voter registration, mobilization and education. There are many programs and projects assisting the underserved in the community. Hurricane Michael altered the plans of all especially with a national election on the horizon in November. Thankfully, the people in the organizations we know didn't sustain any major injuries or death. Our prayers are with those that lost life and sustained major injuries. Many of the member's homes sustained serious damage. As we all know, "houses and things can be replaced." As veterans, many of us had to return to the usage of "our deployed or alternate location." The normal before October 10 will never be the normal again in Bay County. As recovery continues, members had to return to taking care of pre-Michael business, family and friends, deliverables for civic groups and all those things we maintain to be ourselves.

This area will never be the same. The beautiful pines that dotted the landscape are gone. Many buildings and landmarks are gone. Mounds of trash are being taken care of to be sent to its proper resting place. Workers from all over the

country do the work. Many are veterans of Irma and Katrina. As Bay County residents recover, many have heard the words from experienced hurricane recovery experts, "I didn't know it was this bad until I got here." Others say that "Bay County is experiencing the same problems as New Orleans with hurricane Katrina."

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Community Recovery Center (CRC) set up in the Bay County Library public meeting room. As FEMA finishes its role, the CRC is taking over that role.

An organization called Rebuild Bay County has formed to help citizens with unmet needs during the recovery from the hurricane. The CRC is operating at the Bay County Library to help citizens with applications to FEMA, the Small Business Administration (SBA) and local organizations that might be able to provide help. The persons running the CRC are transitioning from FEMA to personnel from local organizations. Veterans are offered help near the CRC with the deployment of a mobile veterans van at least one day a week.

Democratic organizations in Bay County are the Democratic Executive Committee (DEC), Veterans Caucus, Black Caucus, the Women's Club and the Young Democrats. All organizations had members who sustained severe damage to their homes. Many are still in "alternate locations" until the work on their houses are finished. Many took a severe hit but we are down but not out. Most organizations started back meeting in March or April. We are being reminded that 2020 is another national election year. Work will be especially hard since many of the communities that were severely hit were underserved communities already and many had Democratic voters. Many voters have left the area because many lost their house and job. Bay County Democrats are going to have to look for ways to identify those that are displaced while trying to recover themselves. We also look to help those who still need help. We thank everyone for their thoughts and prayers.

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Mark Lipton

We are all saddened by the death of Mark Lipton. Mark died on December 28 in England on a honeymoon with his new wife, Candace. Mark apparently fell ill on the plane trip there and died shortly thereafter. The trip was a honeymoon and chance to meet the family of his new bride. Mark was a strong Democrat and a lawyer. Mark was an advocate for all people, he wanted to work to expand Medicaid, healthcare for all and to secure Social Security.

Mark Lipton was born in Detroit and moved to California at the age of 14. He went to college and law school and the University of California. He was admitted to the Bar in several states and also the District of Columbia Circuit Court and United States Supreme Court. He moved to Florida in 2010 where he became active with the Democratic Party, chairing the Bay County Democratic Executive Committee for two years and to founded the Bay County Democratic Veterans Caucus. He supported a Therapeutic Justice Court

where veterans charged with certain crimes could be diverted from the criminal justice system to a community program providing housing, medical treatment, and jobs. Although not a veteran himself, Mark was a strong advocate for veterans and veterans support services. Mark was a Diamond Sponsor for the 2018 Democratic Veterans Caucus of Florida Retreat at the Mission Inn Resort in Howey-in-the-Hills, Florida.

Mark Lipton moved to Lee County in 2016 and ran for the Florida State House District 79 Seat in 2018. He didn't win this race. Just days before his death he posted a Facebook picture of himself in California, where he visited his children and grandchildren, on the bluffs overlooking the Pacific. Lipton worked 46 years as an attorney for labor unions and as an advocate for the disabled. Lipton had been a member of the Board of Directors for the North Fort Myers Civic Association, writing a regular column in the North Fort Myers Neighbor and working on getting the organization its 501 c 3 status. Lipton was also Treasurer for the Lee County Arts Center, where he successfully got it 501 c 3 status and was able to convince the owners of Hancock Bridge Square Shopping Center to hold the first Art Walks there.

The Democratic Party, the State of Florida and the legal profession lost a great advocate and promoter. We have all lost a good friend in Mark Lipton.



John Bruce

The Bay County Democratic Veterans Caucus (BCDVC) celebrates the life of Mr. John Bruce, Sr. Mr. Bruce passed on December 2, 2018 after a long illness. He, along with his wife Mary had been active at many levels in the Democratic Party in Bay County Florida. Mr. Bruce began his illustrious 35- year teaching career in Milton, Florida after graduating from Alabama State University in Montgomery, Alabama. After moving to Panama City in 1965, he taught at Rosenwald Senior High School, AD Harris Elementary School, Shaw Adult Center and Rutherford High School. He taught at Rutherford for 26 years. After retiring from teaching, Mr. Bruce volunteered as a recruiter to help increase the number

of African-American teachers in Bay County. During his tenure from 1995 to 2003, the numbers of African-American teachers doubled in the county from three percent to six percent.

Mr. Bruce was a notable figure in Panama City's civil rights movement. He volunteered as a Court Mediator for the 14th Judicial Circuit from 2007 until 2015. He also served on the Panama City Housing Authority Board from 1995 until 2018. Oscar Patterson Elementary School is a predominantly African-American School in Panama City. Mr. Bruce was on the Patterson Elementary School Oversight Board which ensured that Patterson kept the number of students it was supposed to have and also

DVCF Leadership

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maintain a quality curriculum as the other schools in the area. John was a founding member of the Advisory Committee for Urban Revitalization Equity (ACURE). Under his leadership of ACURE, Panama City's electoral process was changed from "At-Large" voting to "Single-Member District" voting which resulted in Panama City electing its first African-American City Commissioner in 1985. Another milestone that took place under John's leadership, was the recognition of the late Dr. Martin L. King Jr's birthday as a county-wide holiday. This brought about the annual Martin L. King Jr. festival celebration in Bay County.

Mr. Bruce enlisted in the US Army during the Korean War. He was a member of the BCDVC and was active with many Democratic activities. He helped encourage and register people to vote and campaigned for many Democratic candidates. Throughout his distinguished career, he inspired and mentored countless students, colleagues, fellow activists and members of the community.

Mr. Bruce is survived by his wife, Mary, a former teacher, who is also active in Democratic politics in the county. He is also survived by two sons and a daughter, three grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Disabled Veterans eligible for free National Park Service Lifetime Access Pass



Good for entry into 400+ National Parks and over 2,000 recreation sites across the country

May 22, 2019

Vantage Point Official Blog of the US Department of Veterans Affairs

Spring flowers are blooming, the summer travel season quickly approaches and Veterans are joining the 330-million yearly visitors enjoying U.S. National Parks. Many Veterans, with a service connected disability rating, are entering Federal recreation lands and national parks for free with an America the Beautiful-the National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands lifetime Access Pass through an interagency partnership between the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation. Good for entry into thousands of federally managed recreation sites across the country, the Lifetime Access Pass is another way a grateful nation says thank you for the service and sacrifices of U. S. Veterans with disabilities.

The Access Pass admits the pass owner and any passengers

in a single, private vehicle (non-commercial) at per-vehicle entrance and day use fee areas; or, the pass owner plus three additional adults where per-person fees are charged. In addition to free entry at participating sites, the Access Pass includes discounts on some expanded amenity fees such as camping. Sites recommend that pass owners check with each site before visiting for details about Access Pass entry and discounts.

Veterans who have been medically determined to have a permanent disability that severely limits one or more major life activities (e.g., VA disability rating of 10 percent or higher) are eligible for the Lifetime Access Pass—with three options for obtaining the pass: First, Veterans with disability documentation can order the Access Pass online for a \$10 processing fee which includes standard shipping. Documentation required includes:

- Proof of residency
- VA disability award letter, VA summary of benefits, or proof of SSDI income

Second, the Interagency Access Pass may be obtained through the mail. Download a paper application from <https://store.usgs.gov/access-pass>. Follow the instructions on the website and pay the document processing fee of \$10. Once the application package is received by USGS, the documentation will be verified and a pass imprinted with the pass owner's name will be mailed to the applicant. Passes ordered online or

Upcoming Events

DVCF Florida 2020 Retreat
Feb 21-23, 2020

Orlando Marriott Lake Mary
1501 International Parkway
Lake Mary, FL 32746

through the mail will be delivered 3 to 4 weeks after receipt of documentation and processing payment.

A third option is for disabled Veterans to visit a participating federal recreation site where interagency passes are issued, present photo identification (e.g., Driver's license, State ID, birth certificate, Passport, or permanent resident card), provide documentation of permanent disability, or read and sign a Statement of Permanent Disability affidavit. That's it. The Pass is free and issued at the time of entry.

Make sure to have photo ID available when using your Lifetime Access Pass and enjoy the majestic scenery and abundant recreational opportunities our National Parks provide. For additional questions regarding the pass, please check out the Frequently Asked Questions.

Steven Clipp Author

Steve Clipp joined VA in 2017 with the White House/VA Hotline and is currently on detail as a communications specialist with the Veteran Experience Office. Steve, a Navy Veteran, served as an electronics technician in Fighter Squadron 31 (VF 31-F/14s) on-board the USS Abraham Lincoln. Using the GI Bill, he graduated from Shepherd University in Shepherdstown, West Virginia in 2015 with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications.



Terrie Rizzo spends a Day of Service in Bay County on April 6 along with other Democratic volunteers from around the state of Florida helping clear debris from the house of a local resident.



Tom Perez speaks with local media personnel in Bay County.

DVCF Business Notes

The DVCF Quarterly meeting was held at Leadership Blue from June 7 – 9 at the Disney World Yacht Resort in Orlando. At this meeting, Seminole, Bay, Lake, and Volusia County Veterans Caucuses were re-certified. Pasco and Charlotte counties received new certifications.

The next certification will take place at the Florida Democratic Party Convention. The deadline for caucuses to submit certification documents for this convention is August 16, 2019.

Reported by Certification/ Membership Chair Marian Williams



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