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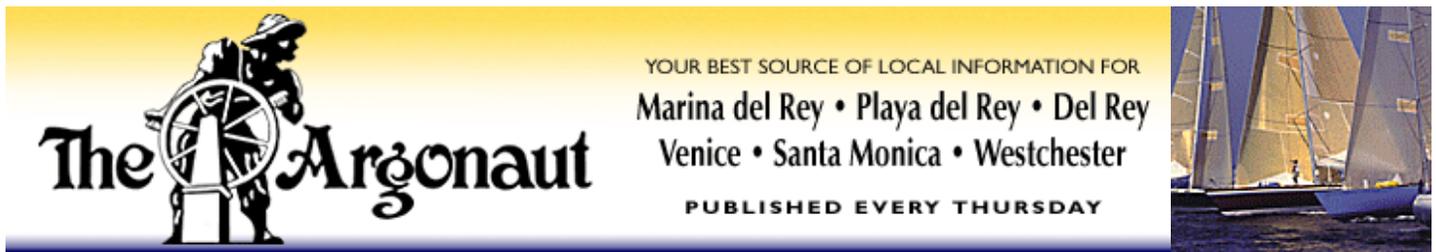
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At 90, Sylvia Levin is still registering voters

BY VINCE ECHAVARIA

Even on her 90th birthday, Sylvia Levin wouldn't take a break from giving yet another California resident the opportunity to vote.

For 34 years the Santa Monica resident has set up a table six days a week at various locations in the Los Angeles area to register voters.

Friday, September 14th, her 90th birthday, was no different. She registered another seven voters that special day at her regularly scheduled Friday location in front of the Malibu post office.

"The Malibuites don't know it's Friday until they see me," said Levin, referring to the reason she chose to register voters on her birthday. "On Fridays that's where I go."

To date Levin has registered more than 46,700 voters, setting a record for one person in California and likely a national record, according to her son Chuck Levin, a political consultant who has also registered voters for over 30 years.

In her more than three decades of volunteering, it is estimated that Levin has spoken to more than 460,000 people.

Before heading off to Malibu on her birthday, Levin was honored with a commendation from the Los Angeles City Council that recognized her record as a registrar and her service over the years.

Levin, who called the City Council commendation "very exciting," said it has been her privilege to volunteer and provide that service to the voters.

"It gives me the pleasure and the honor to give them that service," said Levin, who grew up in New Jersey but has lived in Santa Monica since 1972. "Democracy rests on our

involvement and constant participation."

City Councilman Bill Rosendahl recalled meeting Levin for the first time 30 years ago in Venice and he said her contributions as a volunteer have been "immense."

"What Sylvia has been is a backbone of making democracy work," Rosendahl said. "She doesn't care if you're a Democrat or Republican; what she cares about is that every American should register and participate in the process."

The councilman also pointed out that Levin has achieved her record-setting numbers for voter registration while either walking or taking the bus to the locations where she sets up her table.

Levin vows that she has never had a car, and says she makes her regularly scheduled trips each week without getting paid simply for the pleasure of giving people the opportunity to vote.

"I'm giving the voter a chance to get out there and vote," she said. "I want to see everyone who is a citizen of the U.S. take the next step and register to vote."

Other than her typical Friday stops in Malibu, Levin has regularly-scheduled registrations in front of a Westwood post office on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Saturdays she sets up on Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice and on Sundays she's at the Westwood Farmers Market. Businesses at each of these locations allow her to store her table and chairs inside.

When Levin first began registering voters she averaged about 20 registrations a day, but today she says she averages about four people a day. Her record for most registrations in a day is 60.

Levin's individual figures for getting voters to register are unrivalled, according to Bob Weiner, a former White House senior staff member and chief of staff of the House Aging Committee.

"I've never seen anything like her," Weiner said. "She's a walking cannon of voter registration power.

"She is Los Angeles's Aunt Sam — regardless of party, she wants you."

The key to Levin's unique ability to draw citizens to register is her enthusiasm for the political process, Weiner said.

But Levin offered a different interpretation of her skill. She referred to a time when a man walked by her who wasn't registered because he said no one had ever asked him.

"I ask everybody," Levin said.

Levin, who has two children, said she was first influenced to register voters by her son Chuck, who was helping to register voters in the early 1970s after the age requirement was lowered to 18.

"My mother's volunteer spirit and her accomplishment is another example of how an individual's devotion to a good cause benefits the entire community," Chuck Levin said.

Not only has Levin continued to pursue more registrations at the age of 90, but she has battled and overcome serious physical obstacles, including a stroke, colon cancer and several broken bones. She attributes the recovery to medical staff, as well as her physical activity over the years.

"I think what did it was all the years of walking," she said.

Rosendahl sees Levin as someone who is able to inspire others.

"She's been a role model and an inspiration for everybody," Rosendahl said.

For Levin, the thing that keeps her encouraging people to sign up to vote is the "appreciation" she receives.

"The people I have met have been exceptional," Levin said.

That appreciation was evident in the scores of visitors who came to wish her a happy birthday the day after the occasion, at her table on Abbot Kinney Boulevard.

Levin has been proud to spread the voting spirit throughout the local communities and she doesn't see herself giving it up anytime soon.

"It has given me something to do that not many people have done," she said of her registration service. "I think it's been an honor to do it for the people."