

Sun-Sentinel

Sunday February 29, 2004
West Palm Beach, FL

Film casts personal light on vote fiasco

By Anthony Man
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The faces made famous by the 2000 presidential election are all there: then-County Commissioner Carol Roberts, Judge Charles Burton, Elections Supervisor Theresa LePore. And it wouldn't be a documentary without the obligatory video of then-Secretary of State Katherine Harris, hero to Republicans and villain to Democrats for her role in George W. Bush's victory.

But *Trouble in Paradise*, which premieres this week, doesn't dwell on the usual suspects of politics. It offers a more personal perspective on the 2000 election and its aftermath. Producer and director Laurel Greenberg tells the story through the lives of five regular Floridians, most from Palm Beach County. It's less a journalistic account than a story of individual changed lives. "I was trying to follow the stories of people who got drawn into politics," she said. "Something in election 2000 had catalyzed them to do something different."

One was Deidre Newton. The West Palm Beach real estate broker's first big political involvement came on Election Day 2000, when she lent her office phones for an Al Gore get-out-the-vote effort. Within days, she joined the Democratic protesters during the election recount. By 2002 she had become an activist, serving on the county Democratic Executive Committee and working on the gubernatorial campaign of Bill McBride.

"I'm somebody who's obviously alert and awake at the wheel now," she said. "I don't want to call myself an activist. I guess that's why she [Greenberg] called me a reluctant activist."

Larry Winawer had a tutoring business and was a Democrat, but was not active in the official party structure. Like Newton, he spent part of the recount protesting, and turned into an activist, serving as president of the Palm Beach County Young Democrats, a member of the Democratic Executive Committee and now a paid staff member for the National Alliance of Retired Americans, a politically active organization. In 2002, he ran unsuccessfully for the Palm Beach County Commission and is running this year for county clerk.

A central focus of the documentary is the state's efforts to purge the voter rolls of felons not legally entitled to vote, and the mistakes surrounding that effort that prevented some legitimate voters from casting ballots. Greenberg's decision to make a documentary emerged more slowly than her subjects' conversion to activism. Greenberg, who does freelance video and editing work in Boston, had just finished a documentary about the

relationship between her father and grandmother at the end of her life, and wasn't sure she wanted to start another too soon.

Still, her interest was piqued by what was going on in Palm Beach County because her parents live on Singer Island. By last year, after seven trips each lasting a week to 10 days, Greenberg had shot about 60 hours and had another five hours of stock footage. It wasn't easy to shape *Trouble* into a 73-minute package. "It took me over a year," she said. "It was a very hard film to edit because there were so many stories and so many characters." Greenberg said she thinks her work is not as partisan as some other election documentaries, though she acknowledged it is sympathetic toward the losing, "Democrats were more changed and affected and in a turmoil over this whole thing and I thought they had more of a story to tell," she said. "The Republicans were more OK. They won."

Fran Hancock concedes that much. She is in her 11th year as the county's state Republican committeewoman and was county organization chairwoman for Bush's 2000 campaign, a role she's filling again in 2004. She agreed to be interviewed even though she figured there would be a Democratic tilt. "I got the distinct feeling that it's not going to be terribly balanced," Hancock said. "[But] she felt like a person who would be fair and it felt like we should get some Republican viewpoints in there to be fair."

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