

**PARTY ANIMAL
FORMER UNION ORGANIZER AIMS TO RALLY 23,000
REGISTERED DEMOCRATS IN MIRAMAR BY FORMING GRASS-
ROOTS DEMOCRATIC CLUB**

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Sheila Lewis saw a need and stepped in to fill it.

The need was to rally Miramar's Democrats to be better informed about political issues and get out the vote for Democratic candidates in upcoming elections.

Her solution was to help form a Democratic Club in her area.

"There are 23,000 registered Democrats in Miramar and only five percent of them voted in the last election," Lewis said. "People need to know what is going on and how to assist the Democratic party."

For the past two years, Miramar Democrats were encouraged to attend the Pembroke Pines/Miramar Democratic Club, but few drove the distance. "The Pembroke Pines club welcomed us warmly, but it just wasn't working," Lewis explained.

One problem was that a club based in Pembroke Pines could not adequately address issues particular to Miramar or the election of officials there.

Recently the Miramar resident set out to see if area residents were interested in their own club and "they responded like wildfire," Lewis said.

Thirty-seven people attended the first meeting and Lewis added that she has received over a dozen calls from other people who couldn't attend but want to join.

The club joins 43 other community-based Democratic Clubs in Broward County according to John Coleman who serves as President of the Council of Presidents of Democratic Clubs in Broward County.

"There are county-wide and city-wide organized Democratic organizations," Coleman explained, "but the 43 Democratic Clubs are grass roots organizations."

Coleman, who lives in Hollywood, said that some of the Democratic Clubs count as many as 1,000 members, while others are as small as 30.

In addition, other broader based clubs serve special interest groups county wide, including the Young Democrats and the Black Caucus.

"Anybody can attend their local Democratic club, but to be a member they need to pay \$5 per year," Coleman said. "These local groups put out newsletters, place ads in newspapers and do other local work."

Coleman said that the average local club has a yearly budget of between \$2 and \$3,000 dollars.

Lewis said that the new Miramar group plans to hold forums where presentations are made on issues and people can ask questions.

“We want to increase the number of people voting,” Lewis explained.

“One of the goals of the Democratic clubs is to get new registered democrats,” Coleman said. “We help to get the vote out through phone calls, walking the streets and putting flyers on people’s doors.”

Reflecting Miramar’s large Jamaican population, Lewis said that her intention is to get more people involved in the democratic process. “While I was born in Jamaica and came here in 1996, I consider myself to be an American, not a Jamaican-American,” she explained. “I’m excited about what is happening in Miramar.”

Lewis said that while most of the elected officials in Miramar are Democrats, she is disturbed that no one stepped forward to organize a grass roots organization in the community for many years.

“Why is that?” she asked. “Is it because most of Miramar’s residents are Caribbean? We work hard, many of us holding two and three jobs”

Lewis said that her phone has “been ringing off the hook,” since the group’s first meeting. “People are hungry to be a part of something,” she reported.

The Miramar club elected Lewis as President, with Harry White and Edgar Gentles as Vice Presidents, Ruby Hunter as Secretary and Cecil and Claudette Wray as members of the board of directors.

The club’s next meeting will be held at 11 a.m., Saturday, February 8 at the home of a member.

For more information on the Miramar Democratic Club, call Sheila Lewis at 954-441-3581.

**FORMER UNION ORGANIZER FORMING GRASS-ROOTS
DEMOCRATIC CLUB IN MIRAMAR, *South Florida Sun-Sentinel*, Feb
7, 2003**