

THE INFORMED DEMOCRAT OF SWFL



LeeCountyDems.org

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF LEE COUNTY

Volunteers of the Month: Mr. Inside/Ms. Outside August 1, 2025

This month our spotlight is on two outstanding volunteers. One, Renard Biltgen, works largely behind the scenes with data, while the other, Liz Matt, a talented organizer, enjoys being out front.

Dave Waks, DEC Executive Secretary, writes that “Renard Biltgen has brought many years of professional software development to the task of electing Democrats. For more than five years, he has been developing data-driven tools to help elect Democrats - first in Lee County and then more broadly in Florida. He comes up with great ideas, creates pilot projects, and then scales them so they can work anywhere in Florida. His Voter Analysis Tool (VAT) is used by DEC’s in many counties to contact new voters and was used last year to send customized slate cards to Democrats throughout the state. His EMS system makes texting more effective. He supports Democratic parties and candidates across the state and never stops looking for ways to make his tools more effective.”

Renard describes his work this way: “The man behind the curtain. That’s me! You will not find me outdoors knocking or making phone bank calls. I will be at my desk behind my computer. Developing and maintaining the tools we use is a near full-time job. Maintaining/enhancing the systems that provide monthly New/Voter lists and Birthday lists for postcards (thank you, Nancy Terreri) consumes some of my time. Developing new tools to support new techniques (Deep Canvass and canvassing unregistered voters) adds a bit more. And developing totally new technologies for integrating our tools directly with VAN - more than full time. But I believe that all these activities help us move forward. I hope they provide you with the best tools, the best knowledge available - that’s my goal.”

Liz Matt is the co-founder of the Blue Gators. Under her leadership, the Blue Gators have grown in 5 years to a movement of more than 300 Southwest Florida volunteers.

Sig Hernandez describes Liz as “a great leader whose passion and enthusiasm for justice causes are contagious! She motivates hundreds of volunteers into meaningful action. She is strongly committed to fighting injustice, advancing democracy, and supporting and promoting Democratic candidates.

He adds, “She is a great communicator and not by accident! From 1984 to 1995, Liz was the co-host and the co-producer of Philadelphia’s longest running, award-winning morning show, AM Philadelphia. Because of it, she is a key resource for advice on the use of the media to convey an effective message.”

Kizzie Fowler first met Liz during her run for County Commissioner. When Kizzie complained about the high candidate filing fee, Liz let her know that the Blue Gators would help her get the money to continue the campaign. Kizzie writes: “Liz Matt and the Blue Gators reached out as far as the state of Pennsylvania, in raising money to help me with my candidate filing fees, and within 10 days, the challenge that Liz sponsored was met by more amazing people like

her. Liz is someone who helps define what true advocacy is through her amazing work of showing passion, hope, empathy, integrity, inspiration, and drive to fight for the dignity and rights of the people in our communities. Liz is a great writer and through her writings, she brings the power of true advocacy to life. I am really grateful to have met Liz, and hope that the relationship we have built bringing change to our community continues in the future world of politics.”

As Liz sees it, “Florida Democrats each have skills, talents and regional perspectives that are so valuable right now, as our state is clearly the Beta-Test for leaching away social justice. And for crushing compassion. In leading The Blue Gator Initiative in southern Lee County, I tap into gifts for coordinating and communicating that I used for decades as a TV broadcaster in Philadelphia and NJ. Organizing collective energy is natural for me. Not easy. Not convenient. But I can’t think of a better use of my time. It’s all about my grandkids.”

Be like Renard and Liz. Whatever your talents and interests, there’s a place for you with Lee County Democrats. Check out the volunteer page on our website:

<https://leecountydems.org/volunteer/>.