

THE INFORMED DEMOCRAT OF SWFL



Meet the Blue Gators

April 1, 2025

By Liz Matt

ACTION is the key characteristic of the group of Democrats in southern Lee County who call ourselves the Blue Gator Initiative. There are few “meetings.” Nevertheless, we get together constantly — using a growing email list — to find willing hands and support the nitty-gritty work of advancing Democratic policies and points of view. During the last election cycle, we were present at lots of door-to-door canvassing for Amendment 4 petitions and for our Democratic candidate slate. We crowdsourced funds to cover filing fees for Mitch Schlayer’s run for Tallahassee and Kizzie Fowler’s campaign for County Board of Commissioners. Our first foray into major fundraising brought in over \$12,000 early in Kari Lerner’s campaign. And we were with Kari to the last second as well, making sure her slate cards were handed out every hour that polls were open over a span of 12 days in North Naples.

In 2025, our work has shifted to significant support of our immigrant neighbors. As a group of voters, we mostly live in Bonita Springs, a city with a notable concentration of Hispanic immigrants. So we started fundraising early to pay for and distribute RED CARDS — the wallet-sized guides to civil rights available in Spanish and English and in Haitian Creole. Through private donations, we have taken this to the next step, creating detailed Spanish-language packets to prepare families for possible encounters with ICE. The packs include legal forms families can use and notarize to prepare guardians for American-born citizen children if the unimaginable — family separation — should occur.

Led by Dr. Sigfredo Hernandez, a university professor who retired in Bonita and is a native Spanish Speaker, the Blue Gators have been systematically canvassing the appropriate neighborhoods and delivering the packets. Local social service agencies have discovered our work and begun requesting packets, too, providing a highly effective method of reaching at-risk families.

This work has been accomplished through the generosity of our members, who have contributed funds amounting to approximately \$2500 since early February. There have been two big collating parties and lots of shoe-leather on the streets. As of this date, over 10,000 Red Cards and 2500 packets have been prepared, with 1000 packets already in circulation.

We have two more initiatives on the calendar in the coming months: a meeting at the Bonita Springs Library on April 2 at 4 pm to gain signatures for the Florida Clean Water amendment petition; on Easter Sunday, April 20, we will return to the historic Dunbar Easter Parade and support the future candidacy of Howard Sapp for US Congress.

ACTION. As for our name, like gators, we are just beneath the surface. We belong in Florida. AND we can be fierce. Reach us at BlueGatorInitiative@gmail.com.

Liz Matt along with Roxanne Levin are co-founders of the Blue Gators.