

Vote Port Chester Registration Event Brings Animated Party to Garcia's

The last day to register in time for the midterm elections is October 12th

By Sarah Wolpoff

Thursday, October 4, 2018



At the voting registration booth, Village Green resident Gregg Hamilton (right) chats with his friend, Parkway Drive resident Robert Kiggins at the Vote Port Chester party at Garcia's at 145 Westchester Ave. on Sunday, Sept. 30. Sarah Wolpoff|Westmore News



Sustainable Port Chester Alliance Executive Director Joan Grangenois-Thomas poised herself on the stage at Garcia's on Westchester Avenue in front of a lively crowd of attentive patrons.

"When I say 'Port Chester,' you say vote," she yelled. "Port Chester—"

"Vote!" they replied.

"When I say 'get out the,' you say vote. Get out the..."

"Vote!"

Sustainable Port Chester Alliance Executive Director Joan Grangenois-Thomas suggests trivia games to patrons in between musical groups. Sarah Wolpoff|Westmore News

"Get out the..."

"Vote!" The chants continued.



Sustainable Port Chester Alliance member Phyllis Maguire (right) quizzes her shocked mother Carol Schiro on some Port Chester and New York voting statistics. Both South Regent St. residents have raised families in Port Chester for generations. Sarah Wolpoff|Westmore News



PC-based rap group Hunnit Band Fam hypes up the crowd with some hip-hop. Sarah Wolpoff|Westmore News

More than a hundred people drifted in and out of Garcia's on Sunday, Sept. 30, for the Vote Port Chester event sponsored by the alliance and The Capitol Theatre. The Sustainable Port Chester Alliance is comprised of community members, labor unions, religious groups and activist organizations, and is dedicated to civil rights activism in the community.

With live Port Chester music and information booths about the upcoming referendum, elections and voting statistics, the purpose of the night was to establish a high energy, informational event people would want to attend—and in the meantime register to vote.

"We were inspired by some of the other 'Get Out the Vote' efforts and voter registration efforts," Grangenois-Thomas said, referring to the grassroots campaign to increase voter turnout. "Sept. 25 was National Voter Registration Day, so we wanted to do something around that. We have a few important things coming up, so this is really about just making sure folks who can vote are registered to vote."

She referred to two important votes approaching in the next month. On Wednesday, Oct. 10, Port Chester residents will cast their ballots regarding cumulative voting, the proposed election system for village trustees. On a simple "yes" or "no" ballot, residents will decide whether they want to continue the practice used for the past



After the Alma Solana Dance Troupe performed, around 25 people mingle around the stage at Garcia's, waiting for the next act. Sarah Wolpoff|Westmore News

nine years that involves all trustees being up for election in the same year while each resident gets six votes to use however they choose.

Nov. 6 marks the midterm elections where New York residents will be able to give their input into deciding who will hold numerous seats, such as the U.S. Senate, the Attorney General and the Governor.

"This event is all about informing, arming and just recognizing that if you're living here, you're impacted by things that happen," Grangenois-Thomas said. "You should have a say in what goes on. We want people to know there's a dotted line between the changes they see and whether they voted or not."

As Garcia's patrons engaged with Port Chester-based entertainment and musicians, such as rap group Hunnit Band Fam, the Alma Solana Dance Troupe and several Port Chester High School graduate performers, they also played trivia games revealing surprising statistics about voting in the village.

In the last midterm election, in 2014, New York State ranked 48 out of the 50 states in voter turnout, according to Politifact.com. So, the Sustainable Port Chester Alliance was being generous when they claimed the state ranks 47 in the trivia game.

Out of the 12,596 registered voters in Port Chester, in the 2014 November election only 3,790 voted. That's only a 30 percent turnout.



Representing different labor unions, Craig Guilfoyle (right) and Terence Grady man the Sustainable Port Chester Alliance merchandise table and sell raffle tickets for a Starbucks basket. Sarah Wolpoff|Westmore News

“What’s really crazy is in that same election, only 32 voters aged 18 to 24 came out,” explained South Regent Street resident Phyllis Maguire, an alliance member who was volunteering at one of the trivia booths. “The seniors have a 75 percent voter turnout. So what’s happening is everything is being decided by residents 65 and up.”

That devastatingly low number of seemingly apathetic young adult voters is exactly why the Vote Port Chester event intended to create a party-like ambiance, explained Cottage Street resident Zeltzyn Sanchez.

“It’s hard to get people interested and excited about voter registration, so we had to make this into something people really wanted to come to,” the Sustainable Port Chester Alliance member said, while gazing upon the packed bar of cheering visitors. “I personally can’t vote, I’m a DACA recipient, so it’s especially important to me to get people in the community to come out.”

The voter registration deadline for the cumulative voting referendum has already passed, but it’s not too late to register in time for the midterms. New York residents have until October 12 and can easily register online at www.ny/gov, www.dmv.org or www.vote411.org. They can also register in person by visiting the Westchester County Board of Elections office at 25 Quarropas St. in White Plains.