

Live election updates: Doggies may outnumber voters outside one precinct, but Collier just broke its turnout record

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3:39 p.m. | 'Gave their lives'

At Peace Lutheran Church, volunteer Sandy Johnson handed out guides from the Collier County Republicans to would-be voters heading in to vote at Precinct 304.

Voter traffic has been slow since her 1 p.m. arrival, Johnson told reporter Andrew Atkins.

“I believe that so many people gave their lives for what we have, and I don’t want to change it,” Johnson said. “I hope no matter who wins, the chaos in the country dies down.”

Peace Lutheran’s Senior Pastor Mike Duchene, said his church serving as a polling location is a natural extension of its mission.

“The whole reason we are here in the community is to proclaim the Gospel and serve the community, and this is serving the community,” he said. “We should be thankful for the wonderful life that this country gives us.”

He may also end up with many more potential parishioners situated in one of Collier's hottest growth areas on Immokalee Road, east of Collier Boulevard.

3:11 p.m. | Collier makes history

County reporter Patrick Riley just shouted it from the mountaintops.

Actually he was on Twitter.

"Collier is now at 87.06% voter turnout, eclipsing its 2016 total of 86.94%, at the time the highest rate in Florida. Polls are still open for 4 more hours," Riley said at 3:01 p.m.

Regardless of whether any of your candidates win, you can still put on your pandemic party hats and celebrate. If you haven't voted yet and want to be part of history, and yes, yes, do your civic duty, you have until 7 p.m.

3:04 p.m. | 'Longest line' in the Isles

Reporter Omar Rodriguez Ortiz had to wander over to the Isles of Capri Community Center's Precinct 142 to find the most activity he's seen in nearly five hours.

"It’s probably the longest line I’ve seen since 10 a.m.," he said, even though when he first arrived, he saw no voters.

Then suddenly there they were including Sandy Hurley, who voted for President Trump because she feels he can repair our divided nation.

"We need to come together as one," Hurley said.

2:26 p.m. | Anybody home?

When reporter Jake Allen visited North Collier Regional Park's Precinct 203 on the first morning of early voting on Oct. 19, citizens waited up to an hour to cast ballots.

Today: Nada.

There was such little activity that a resident walked up to him and asked if the precinct was still open.

Indeed it is. Until the darkness of 7 p.m.

And you might have a chance at being part of history.

As of 2:20 p.m., 86.56% of those eligible have voted, according to public records.

"It's clear the voter turnout record of 87% from 2016 will be broken in Collier County, but I wonder by how much," Allen said.

1:29 p.m. | 'Civility, honesty & respect'

Reporter Omar Rodríguez Ortiz has been making his way along the Collier County coast.

With so many voting early, he found it pretty quiet outside two Marco Island churches that serve as precincts, the way it normally might be on a weekday versus a Sunday.

He didn't see much traffic at Marco Presbyterian Church's Precinct 190 and Marco Lutheran Church's Precinct 194.

No lines or people holding signs at the Goodland Community Center's Precinct 189 either as of about 1:15 p.m.

"There has been a steady coming and going of voters in the last 15 minutes," Rodríguez Ortiz said.

He spoke there with resident David McDonald, 66, who called today the most important election of his life.

"I feel like the country needs a fundamental change in the direction we are going now," he said.

Mary McDonald, who was with David, agreed:

"We need to return to civility, honesty and respect."

1:12 p.m. | More doggies than voters

Just before 1 p.m. Tuesday, more dogs trotted between the chain link fence at the nearby Rover Run dog park than voters waited in line outside Precinct 258 at Veterans Community Park in North Naples.

That is to say: there was no line, according to my colleague Andrew Atkins.

There were no signs, either, nor protestors or campaigners of any sort. A handful of voters made their way in and out, few and far between.

The voting location for Precinct 258 shares space with a child care facility, and kids paraded out, peeling masks off and holding hands with the parents who had come to pick them up.

Like their canine counterparts, the children also outnumbered the voters who had come to cast their ballot.

12:35 p.m. | 'No more wars'

Joseph Fontana, a Collier resident of 22 years, campaigned outside Precinct 462 at St. John's Episcopal Church in Naples.

Fontana voted early at Cambier Park in this year's election. He's supporting Trump because of the president's economic and foreign policy policies, Fontana said.

"No more wars. No more 18-year foolish wars and dead Americans," Fontana said. "He's done well with the economy, and I like his appointment of conservative judges."

Morgan Stanley, Moody's, Oxford Economics and Trump's alma mater Penn Wharton have all said a Biden presidency would be better for the economy, jobs and the stock market. However, the libertarian Cato Institute's Chris Edwards says he prefers Trump because the wealthy wouldn't have to pick up as much of the bill in taxes.

"Overall, I think Trump will be better for the U.S. economy," Edwards, an economist Chris .

12:16 p.m. | Handing out masks

Some voters are continuing to be rather shy today about talking publicly and providing their names during the most volatile U.S. election of their lifetimes as we try to interview them.

But Carole Flegel, a 20-year resident of Collier County, accommodated us outside Precinct 462 at St. John's Episcopal Church in Naples.

She was campaigning for Joe Biden for president as well as Sara McFadden for State House.

Flegel previously voted by mail in the election and said she was motivated to campaign Tuesday in part to make sure voters were safe from COVID-19. She brought with her a box of masks in case any voters needed one, she told reporter Jake Allen.

"It's time for a change. Biden is the right man for the times, and Trump botched the response to the coronavirus and both of these candidates (Biden and McFadden) are much stronger environmentally," Flegel said.

11:27 a.m. | 'Lot of chaos'

Nicole Burmeister, 31, who has lived in Collier for five years, voted at Precinct 251 Tuesday morning.

"I like election day," Burmeister told reporter Jake Allen. "I think just about being a female and how women have not always been able to vote. This day is bigger than early voting to me, being able to show my support for the country and to use my vote to try to change things in the government."

Burmeister said she was in and out of the precinct in less than 10 minutes and did not have to wait in line to vote. She's curious about what the results of the election will mean for the country going forward.

"I think it'll be interesting," Burmeister said. "It's going to be interesting to see how people react to the results. I don't think anybody is going to lay down, so I hope it all ends well, but I have a feeling it's going to be a lot of chaos."

11:11 a.m. | Slight buzz at the library

Reporter Jake Allen has encountered slightly higher buzz at Precinct 251 than he has seen at other spots so far this morning.

"There's a little bit more activity than other precincts," Allen said of Collier's library headquarters. "We have a couple folks here campaigning for Biden and four campaigning for Trump outside the polling location."

By about 11 a.m., 174 had rolled in to vote, with an overall total of 5,031, according to elections data.

The county now has an 83.58% turnout, with eight hours to go to beat the 87% record mark.

10:50 a.m. | Motivated Marco

My colleague Omar Rodríguez Ortiz swung by the United Church of Marco Island and found no lines outside the building where Precinct 193 is located.

Some candidates and supporters though were hanging out, holding signs.

Marco resident Nicole Brotzman, 21, walked by them as she made her way to vote for the first time in a general election. Some family members had discouraged her from supporting Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden because Collier is overwhelmingly Republican, she said.

"If we listen to that, our vote is not going to matter," Brotzman said. "It's finally nice to have my voice heard."

Her locale had drawn 319 voters as of about 10:40 a.m. and an overall total including early voting and mail of 5,143, according to county records.

Nearby Precinct 194 at Marco Lutheran Church has 3,397 cast, with 151 showing up today so far.

10:13 a.m. | Not much campaigning

As my colleague Jake Allen wanders Collier County this morning, he's noted a trend so far at the precincts he's hit.

Fewer folks campaigning outside the polling places. In fact, he didn't see any at Precinct 475 in the city of Naples Utilities Administration Building, where he encountered them at previous elections including several primaries and in the 2018 general.

"I'm assuming it's because most voters have already cast their ballots or due to COVID-19 concerns," Allen said.

Yet more evidence that this isn't your typical Election Day, like pretty much everything else about 2020.

As far as voters? None of those either in the several minutes he was there around 10 a.m.

9:51 a.m. | Weather's not an obstacle

Weather won't be playing a role in turnout today unless you have heliophobia or suffer other ill effects from sunshine, lower humidity and temperatures largely in the 70s.

No precipitation is in the forecast, and even if somehow a sprinkle develops, you shouldn't be stuck in a long line getting wet when you go to vote.

The Weather Channel is calling for a sunny morning, with clouds starting to appear after lunch or so. The high should reach around 79 at 2 p.m. Northeast winds of 18 mph are expected for most of the day.

Remember, it gets dark earlier with the weekend time change so be extra careful in those parking lots if you hit the polls later since it's harder to see as dusk arrives. Sunset: 5:43 p.m.

9:34 a.m. | Longer lines in Estero

While we've found generally shorter lines in Collier so far this morning, we came across a few longer ones just north of the county line in Estero.

About 75 citizens waited patiently in line just moments before workers unlocked the doors at precincts 60 and 69 at the Estero Community Center recreation building, according to my colleague Michael Braun.

Voter Scott Raynor told Braun his hope was that the day ends just as mellow as it started.

"The process has gone on for hundreds of years," he said. "It works really well. It just comes down to agreeing to disagree."

Still, Raynor said he could not understand the actions of those who would cause chaos or so confusion on a day like today.

"If you look around the world, we're very fortunate," he said.

9:16 a.m. | A record 90% turnout?

As of 9 a.m., 80.65% of eligible voters had cast their ballots in Collier, according to the Supervisor of Elections office.

That's pretty much an indicator that a new record will likely be set, surpassing 2016's 87%, the agency's Trish Robertson told our Jake Allen.

"We anticipate it." Robertson said. "We just aren't sure where we are going to land at. If I were to guess, I'd guess we were going land right around 90% or a little bit higher. At least that's what we are hoping for."

No election day issues at polling sites had been reported in the first two hours of voting today, she said.

Voters across the county are benefiting from short lines as most ballots have already been cast in the election. Some are still dropping off their vote-by-mail ballots at the supervisor of elections office, she said.

8:49 a.m. | 'The people have spoken'

Having attended St. Francis Xavier in Fort Myers, our fierce rival was St. Ann in Naples, and that meant some fun, rough and tumble middle school soccer games.

So I was happy that it was Jake Allen who drew the straw today to check out the election action there where Precinct 477 can be found at the adjacent St. Ann Rooney Hall on the edge of downtown.

But again, no lines, at about 8:45 a.m. He came across a few voters including Elizabeth Murray, a local resident for six years.

"I'm so glad I waited until today," Murray told him. "It was awesome. I walked right up and voted, and I was out."

She chose to wait to vote until Election Day to cast her ballot as opposed to early voting or vote-by-mail because she predicted there wouldn't be long lines.

"I watched how people were voting in our county and saw that about 75% of people already voted," Murray said. "I figured I'd breeze in and out."

Murray said she votes in every election.

"I always vote. It's your patriotic duty to vote if you are an American," Murray said. "It's your voice. It's been interesting 2020, and I know a lot of us would just almost like to pretend it didn't happen."

No matter who wins the presidential election, Murray said she hopes the results are respected.

"I would hope people act like adults and stop this ridiculousness," Murray said. "Grow up. The people have spoken now; you just move forward and make it work."

Still, Murray said she's not sure what to expect after the election.

"I'll just be glad when we hit 2021," Murray said. "I'm hoping we move forward really quick and do what we've got to do."

8:17 a.m. | Free food on election day

Haven't voted yet? Need incentive to get out of the house on the first truly cool morning of the fall and get to the ballot box?

Would free food help?

It's National Sandwich Day. And all types of specials tied somewhat to the elections can be found [if you check out this link](#) that goes beyond just meat stuffed between two slices of bread.

Go vote and then reward yourself with the Florida sunshine and something yummy even if it appears the cheap eats are loaded with those darn carbs.

7:38 a.m. | No lines in East Naples

More than 78% of eligible voters in Collier have already cast their ballots so it may be a slow day at most polling locations, according to my teammate Jake Allen, who's roving the region and started his day in East Naples.

Shortly after dawn, he was at the Salvation Army Child Care Center, AKA Precinct 430 today, and found no lines.

That being said, 2,783 citizens had already braved the 63-degree "cold" temperatures and voted in the first 36 minutes after the doors had opened in the county.

7 a.m. | The polls are now open

The sun's come up, and that important Tuesday you've been waiting for is finally here on the kind of cool morning that helps remind us one reason we call this home.

You've found the best space to follow what is going with the elections throughout the day, particularly in Collier County and Southwest Florida.

With the help of Jake Allen, Andrew Atkins and other colleagues across the region, I'll be publishing updates in this blog as folks cast their ballots.

I also welcome you to reach out to me at pfernandez@gannett.com to share what you're seeing out there, whether it's short or long lines, how long you had to wait, how traffic was or whatever it might be that you've observed.

Stay safe, and keep checking back.