

Battlefield teachers inspiring students to register, vote as soon as eligible

By BARBARA NORKUS
Observer Staff

America is known for its freedoms and its inalienable rights, including the right to vote. Battlefield High School seniors who turn 18 by Election Day will be able to vote for the first time, if they registered in time.

Chris Newman actually registered to vote when he was 17; he will be 18 by Nov. 6. Chris said being able to vote "makes me feel a little more responsible, a little more grown up." Of course, in his spirit-day costume Chris admitted he didn't look grown up.

Chris is serious, though, about his voting privilege. "We talked about it in government class and [Mr. Whichurch] gave us a slip to register to vote. He said, if you want to register to vote, you can do it through us. I thought it was a good idea." Chris is looking forward to the presidential election next year but admitted, "I haven't thought that far ahead."

Brian Whichurch, Chris' U.S. and Virginia government teacher, is in his first, full year as a high school teacher. He checked into Virginia's requirements for voter registration and shared the information with his students. He told his students they could actually



Battlefield High School senior James McLain turned 18 in May. He plans to vote in what he thinks will be a historical election.

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register to vote as 17 year olds, as long as they turned 18 before the Nov. 6 election day.

Whichurch, who is not from Virginia, said he checked the

are used to having so much accessibility via the Internet, but there's no online registration available." That's why he decided to make the voter registration slips available to students who could then send them in.

"In a way," he said, "it's sort of scary to think that, to a certain degree, I have these students and try to teach them why they should be good citizens. It's kind of daunting, and I look forward to the challenge."

Whichurch is one of several government teachers at Battlefield High. Shane Jernigan, who also teaches at the Haymarket high school, confessed he loves politics. "I think it's great. I'm so excited," he said talking about the election and the new voters at Battlefield. "One [student] came up and showed me his voter card he just got in the mail," he shared enthusiastically.

Jernigan knows that it's a politician's job to get elected. He realizes new teen voters don't vote en masse enough to draw the politicians' attention.

He hopes he can inspire his students with the desire to vote as soon as they're eligible. He does that by keeping his students updated on election events. "In the classroom, we just started our lo-

cal and state unit. They are bringing in mailers (from politicians) from home. We analyze what they say and why they do what they do," he said.

Jernigan is watching the state senate race between incumbent Chuck Colgan (D-29) and Bob FitzSimmonds; he thinks it will be especially interesting. "I have [the students] check out their Web site and see what their message is and what their issues are," he shared. Before election day, he will have the students participate in a mock vote to see how their results match the election's outcome.

The class will keep a close eye on the general election and what the results mean for the state house and senate. "Probably at the end of November, early December we will start looking at presidential race," Jernigan said.

Senior James McLain registered to vote in August; he turned 18 in May. He's looking forward to the 2008 presidential election. "I think this [election] is important because it's a presidential. I was at the DMV and thought I would register," he said.

James is excited about the coming election. "There's a lot of different people running. I think it's going to be a historical election," he said. James said no one specifically encouraged him to vote. "I was at the DMV, and they asked me if I had registered to vote, and I hadn't; so I did."

Re-Elect John Stirrup

Students seem anxious to get involved in election process and cast ballots

continued from page 5

Amanda Paris is also looking forward to the election and was glad when Whichurch offered to help her register to vote.

"I like current events so I get excited when I get to have my say in them," she shared, adding, "I knew when I turned 18 that that was one of my privileges."

As far as the candidates running, Amanda acknowledged, "I don't know anybody. The Republican primary hasn't gone on yet. I don't know all the candidates yet." She hopes to learn a lot more before the election. "We're going to do a project in government, but I'm probably going to watch the Republican primary," Amanda remarked.

Stephanie Potter is 18 but has not registered to vote. Stephanie had planned to register to vote but didn't realize the deadline had passed. She will definitely register before the presidential election next year, she declared.

According to the Virginia Voter Registration Application, to

be eligible to register to vote in Virginia a person must be a resident of Virginia (a person who has come to Virginia for temporary purposes and intends to return to another state is not considered a resident for voting purposes); be a U. S. citizen; be 18 years old (any person who is 17 years old who will be 18 at the next general election will be permitted to register); does not claim the right to vote in any other state; not currently declared mentally incompetent by a court of law; and, if convicted of a felony, the right to vote must have been restored.

Sue Flatequal, deputy registrar in the Prince William County Voter Registration office, explained 17 year olds are allowed to register before an election because "the books are closed 29 days in advance of the elections so we can print poll books out in time."

Eligible residents, who will turn 18 before the 2008 general election, she added, can register after the 2007 general election and vote in a primary election in or any other special elections in 2008.

Flatequal noted her office is still looking for election officers to work the polls on election day in the western end of the county. "They do get paid," Flatequal said with a chuckle. Any one interested in helping should contact the voter registration office.

According to Virginia State Board of Elections Web site, residents may get voter applications at a number of locations, including the local voter registration office; online; at state or local government offices; public libraries; the state board of elections office; the De-

partment of Motor Vehicles offices; and at voter registration drives.

For more information on the right to vote, contact the Prince William County Voter Registration Office, located at 9252 Lee Ave. in Manassas, or call 703-792-6470.



Adopt a Soldier

Local Realtor needs donations for "Care Packages for our Wounded Vets"

This week I had the distinct privilege of meeting John Miska "Big John", the Commander of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 8208. I was at Kirkpatrick's Restaurant in Haymarket, VA and noticed about 20 very, very young Marines having a great time at dinner, singing and enjoying themselves. As I looked closer, I could tell the group seemed to have a few noticeable injuries. It turned out the Commander, "Big John", drives from Ruckersville, VA (2 hours) several times a week to Walter Reed Hospital where his Post's Handicapped Accessible bus is parked. This bus is available to the wounded veterans and their families so they can get out of the hospital for a short time to enjoy what most of us take for granted. Any vet and 16 of their friends can go for a quick trip to McDonalds, Taco Bell or even an airport run to pick up family members whenever the bus is not booked for an event. He also brines

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