



FROM THE MANATEE COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTY

November 2023

## Former Teacher Felton Seeks School Board Seat



*By Wil Clapper*

For Heather Felton, public education in Manatee County is all about student growth, learning, and of course, safety.

The former teacher is running for the Manatee County School Board's District 1 seat, which is held by Gina Messenger. But Messenger has not filed to run for reelection. Mark Stanoch, a registered Republican, also filed to run for the seat.

School board positions are non-partisan and take place during the August primaries. If no candidate receives a majority of votes, a run-off election between the top two candidates is contested on the November ballot.

"We have strong public schools in Manatee County, but we can do more," Felton said. "I'm running to ensure that our schools continue to be both safe and welcoming, where learning and growth are the focus. I have the skills and expertise to make a real difference on the Board. It has the responsibility to support our students, teachers, and staff, and that is my whole focus. How can I show and provide support?"

Felton has lived in Manatee County since 1997 when she was a reporter at the Bradenton Herald. She became a teacher and for nine years taught English in middle school and at Southeast High School in Bradenton. Her two children grew up in the Manatee County school system. She left teaching in May because of Florida's restrictive education laws.

Felton said the "anti-woke" laws limited and prevented her from giving students what they needed. Since May, Felton has volunteered and worked as a private tutor.

Felton said her goal will be to ensure teachers and staff have the resources they need to assist and guide children along their educational journey and to make sure students are embraced for who they are.

“I look forward to connecting with our community, hearing feedback and working together to create a brighter future for our students. Please, join me on this journey and let’s make a positive impact on our schools,” Felton said.

To learn more about Heather Felton and her campaign, visit:

<https://HeatherForManatee.com/>

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## Shoemaker Challenges Commission’s Status Quo

**By William Clapper**

Diana Shoemaker is taking on a current county commissioner because she is confident most people in Manatee County want significant changes in local government. She is challenging the current Chairman of the Board of County Commissioners, Kevin Van Ostenbridge, who represents District 3 as a Republican.



“I’m having conversations with people and it’s all about getting rid of these commissioners,” she said at the monthly meeting of the **Anna Maria Island and West Manatee Democratic Club**. “People are frustrated there isn’t an alternative. We need to share our story with others and make a louder voice.”

Shoemaker, running as a Democrat, said Manatee residents are facing non-partisan issues. She is building a coalition of individuals and organizations outraged by the current commission’s ignoring constituents’ voices.

“(Residents) are educated about the issues – the environment, traffic, affordable housing. They know all about those things. What I’m hearing, it’s no longer about the issues. They want a change. I will do the job my constituents elect me to do. Rebuild confidence that our voices will be heard. I’ll ask questions and challenge the status quo.”

Shoemaker’s 25 years of community and educational program development and services gives her the knowledge and hands-on experience Manatee County needs to move forward.

She is currently the executive director of the Elder Action Network. Prior to that she served as president and CEO of Manatee Habitat for Humanity and was the first director for Family Promise of Manatee County, a non-profit providing shelter and resources to families experiencing homelessness.

Shoemaker and her husband Mark have lived in Manatee County's District 3 for 24 years. They have two children.

In the two months her campaign has been active, Shoemaker has raised about \$9,000. Contributors are individuals giving amounts ranging from \$25 to \$100. "Not a dollar from developers," she said. That is in contrast to Van Ostenbridge who reported contributions of \$170,000 from organizations and companies that are engaged in construction and development.

"This is a grassroots campaign and I'm listening to you," she said. "We need a lot of volunteer support. I will hold my own community meetings. We need to have open, transparent conversations. I'm ready to do neighborhood meet and greets."

To learn more about the Shoemaker campaign, visit:

[ElectShoemaker.com](https://ElectShoemaker.com)

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## Manatee Democrats Meet With 2024 Candidates



Debbie Macarsel-Powell and Diana Shoemaker

**By Kathern Groulx**

More than 60 local Democrats gathered at the IHOP on State Road 64 near Interstate 75 to greet two of the first announced candidates for the 2024 election. The event was standing room only.

[Read the Rest on Our Blog](#)

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## Deadline Looms for Amendment Petitions

**By Nancy Hughes**

No one said getting constitutional amendments on the ballot to protect reproductive healthcare and ensure clean water would be easy. The deadline for collecting petition signatures supporting the amendments is weeks away.



Now is the time for all Democrats to rally behind **Floridians Protecting Freedom** and **Right to Clean Water** and join the final push to get these amendments before

voters in 2024.

There is a two-step process for getting a constitutional amendment on the ballot.

First, the campaign sponsor must collect 222,881 verified petition signatures statewide to trigger a judicial and financial impact review.

As of **November 2**:

- Just under 491,600 signatures have been verified by the Florida Division of Elections for the abortion petition. Attorney General Ashley Moody has announced she will oppose placing the amendment on the ballot. (<https://news.yahoo.com/florida-attorney-general-vows-challenge-092527584.html>)
- Just over 79,000 verified signatures have been collected for the clean water amendment.

Second, the campaign must collect a total of 891,523 verified petition signatures by Feb. 1, 2024, and the petition signatures must be collected proportionally around the state. The signatures must come from at least 8 percent of the number of voters in each of at least 14 congressional districts.

- For the abortion petition, only one congressional district as of November 2 has reached the 8 percent threshold. Ten additional districts have collected at least 60 percent of the required petition signatures, including Congressional District 16, made up of Manatee County and part of Hillsborough County. Four more counties have collected 50 percent of the required signatures.

What will it take to push these initiatives over the threshold?

- **Your Signature.** If you haven't already done so, print off the abortion petition and the clean water petition. Fill them in carefully and mail them to the respective address on the petition. Also, share the petitions with friends, family members and neighbors and encourage them to sign.

**Print Abortion  
Petition**

**Print Clean Water  
Petition**

- **Your Donations.** Getting an amendment on the ballot isn't cheap. In addition to administrative costs and publicity, there is a required review fee paid to the counties to verify every petition signature. Floridians Protecting Freedom is now also facing a Supreme Court battle against Attorney General Moody. Visit the [Floridians Protecting Freedom](#) and [Right to Clean Water](#) websites to donate.

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## Oyster Restoration Offers Hope of Healthier Manatee Waters

*By Diana Hines*

Previous Board of County Commission (BOCC) recognized the value of



adequate buffer zones around the county's wetlands and crafted comprehensive plans to protect these buffers. However, the current BOCC has voted to shrink these buffers to the state's bare minimum of 15 feet, despite overwhelming citizen support for maintaining the county's minimum of 50 feet adjacent to construction.

Even though the BOCC—with the exception of George Kruse—lacks anything resembling a conscience and a vision for the county's environmental future, some restoration efforts seem poised to mitigate the loss of buffer zones and offer a wisp of hope for the county's water quality, once the current board is voted out.

One such effort is the work of Damon Moore, a restoration ecologist who develops large-scale oyster restoration projects in the Manatee River. On Oct. 12 the **Manatee Democratic Environmental Caucus** hosted a Zoom presentation featuring Moore, who runs Oyster River Ecology, a nonprofit creating large-scale habitat restoration projects.

"Oysters are a primary focus area because they're crucial to water health. The animals filter and clean water, attract fish, serve as barriers to storms and tides and provide food," said Moore.

To this end, he mapped 400 to 500 acres of potential oyster restoration areas in the Manatee River. Even though oysters take generations to get established, he asserts that these systems can be rebuilt.

To demonstrate, he displayed photographs of boxes of clean oyster shells he placed at two-mile intervals along the bottom of the Manatee River. Fifteen months later, he found that they were encrusted with river life: fish, mussels, snails and oyster larvae had attached to the clean shells.

Moore reasoned that if a single adult oyster filters 30 to 50 gallons of water per day, then the entire Manatee River could be filtered in less than one week at maximized restoration.

Putting the history of oyster decline in historical perspective, Moore presented documents and newspapers from the late 1700s through the 1800s that reported on the declining water quality in the River from massive dredging of oyster beds and heavy harvesting. By 1900, newspapers declared the beds had officially been destroyed.

Moore's vision of reviving the oyster population presents one avenue for improving water quality in Manatee's waterways. He is seeking volunteers, interns and donations. For more information about his work and to find out how you can become involved in his visionary project, visit:

**Oyster River  
Ecology**

# Step Up and Volunteer for Advisory Board Positions

**By Vicki Waters**

Democrats can affect change in Manatee County government, schools and services by volunteering for openings on advisory boards. Residents who volunteer for these boards bring knowledge, expertise, a fresh point of view and help balance representation of the boards.

To learn more about each of the county's advisory boards and qualifications for applicants, call 941-745-3700 or email [advisoryboards@mymanatee.org](mailto:advisoryboards@mymanatee.org) or go to [www.mymanatee.org/government/advisory\\_boards](http://www.mymanatee.org/government/advisory_boards).

Currently there are two advisory board opening:

**School District Audit Committee** – Submit your resume and pertinent information that shows your qualifications to Laura E. Cox, [cox3l@manateeschool.net](mailto:cox3l@manateeschool.net). Phone 941-708-8770 ext. 41155, for more information. To learn more about the committee visit <https://www.manateeschools.net/Page/4761>.

**Children's Services Advisory Board (CSAB)** – Manatee County is accepting applications for a seat on the Children's Services Advisory Board (CSAB), which makes recommendations to the Board of County Commissioners about priorities and expenditures for children's services. The vacant position is a remainder of a three-year term that will end Sept. 30, 2025. To qualify for consideration, visit [Application & Supplemental Questionnaire](#). For more information, call 941 748-4501, ext. 3485, or email [Kristi.Hagen@mymanatee.org](mailto:Kristi.Hagen@mymanatee.org).

For board or committee vacancies in Manatee County cities, go to their respective web pages for more information:

City of Bradenton: <https://cityofbradenton.com/boards>

City of Palmetto: <https://www.palmettofl.org/>

City of Anna Maria:

[https://www.cityofannamaria.com/government/boards\\_and\\_committees/index.php](https://www.cityofannamaria.com/government/boards_and_committees/index.php)

City of Holmes Beach: [holmesbeachfl.org](http://holmesbeachfl.org)

City of Bradenton Beach: <https://www.cityofbradentonbeach.com/191/Advisory-Boards>

Town of Longboat Key: <https://www.longboatkey.org/town-government/boards-and-committees>

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## Democratic Office Closes for Holidays

The Manatee Democratic Party offices, at 435 Cortez Road W, Bradenton, will close Nov. 19 to 26 and Dec. 17 to Jan. 1 in celebration of the holidays. On days the office

is open regular hours are Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday noon to 4 p.m and Saturday 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.



The Manatee County Democratic Party is a **100% volunteer organization**. All contributions of any size are appreciated.

**Get involved!** Check out the many area Democratic clubs and caucuses. Meet like-minded people at fun events!

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## Resource Links

[Florida Democratic Party](#)

[The Florida Channel](#)

[National Democratic Party](#)

[Manatee County Board of Commissioners](#)

## Headquarters Office

435 Cortez Road W, Bradenton, Florida  
34207, United States  
(941) 301-4336  
[info@manateecountydemocrats.com](mailto:info@manateecountydemocrats.com)



## Hours

Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays,  
Noon to 4 p.m.  
Saturdays 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Contact us to schedule a meeting

[Visit our Website](#)

Manatee County Democratic Party | 435 Cortez Road W, Bradenton, FL 34207

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