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young voters perez

Edward Lea

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Julissa Perez, 21, of Northfield, whose parents were born in the Dominican Republic, said she plans to register to vote but just hasn't yet found the time.

Voter registration information

The deadline to register for the November election is Oct. 16.

In New Jersey, a person must be a U.S. citizen, at least 18 years old by the next election and a resident of the county for 30 days before the election.

To register, a person can download and complete a voter-registration application and/or a party affiliation form, which can be found at the New Jersey Department of State, Division of Elections website, www.njelections.org/voting-information.html

The voter-registration application and party affiliation forms can be mailed or delivered to the commissioner of registration or superintendent of elections for your county.

Registration application forms also are available from the Division of Elections, your county Commissioners of Registration Office, your municipal Clerk's Office or Motor Vehicle Commission offices.

You also can register to vote at the same time you are applying for assistance or service at the following agencies: Work First N.J. Programs; Division of Developmental Disabilities; and the N.J. Medical Assistance & Health Services Program.

South Jersey voting statistics from the November 2011 election

Atlantic County population as of 2010: 274,549

Numbered of registered voters in November 2011: 166,248

Number of voters of cast ballots in November 2011: 56,240

Cape May County population as of 2010: 97,265

Number of registered voters in November 2011: 68,330

Number of voters who cast ballots in November 2011: 25,918

Cumberland County population as of 2010: 156, 898

Number of registered voters in 2011: 89,994

Number of people who cast ballots in November 2011: 24,523

Ocean County population as of 2010: 576,567

Number of registered voters as of August: 373,259

Number of people who cast ballots in November 2011: 111,771

Source: County Boards of Elections and Clerk's Offices

Julissa Perez, of Northfield, was too young to vote four years ago during the presidential election.

She's 21 now, old enough to vote, yet she still has not registered, even though the presidential election is a little more than two months away.

"I just haven't had the time to do it yet," said Perez, who is Hispanic. "My mom actually said something to me about this the other day. She said, 'When are you going to register?' I told her I was going to do it soon."

Perez represents two groups — minorities and young people — that are under-represented at the polls. As election day approaches, people of those groups are going to be targeted as both political parties and nonpartisan groups mount voter-registration campaigns.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the turnout rate of citizens age 18 to 29 was 51.1 percent in the 2008 presidential election. The younger generation doesn't take registering and voting as seriously across the board, said Robert Jackson, past president of the NAACP, Cape May County Chapter. In middle- to lower-income households, there seems to be an attitude of "what's the use?" Jackson said.

"There is this attitude that voting is a wasted period of time," Jackson said. "Education seems to be the solution to most things, but with something like this, I don't know if education is enough because a lot of kids we are talking about don't even avail themselves of that."

A decrease in registered voters normally takes place between a presidential election and a mid-term election year. The number of registered blacks and Hispanics across the country declined by 2 million from 2008 to late 2010, according to the most recent data available from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey.

African Americans and Hispanics vote at lower levels than whites, said Daniel J. Douglas, director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey.

"Even though the Hispanic population is exploding, their registration is not keeping up with their growth in population," Douglas said.

For Latinos, one of the big reasons their registering and voting lags behind is that slightly less than half of their

total population in the country is eligible to vote, said Michael Rodriguez, associate professor of political science at Stockton. Almost one-third of the population is below the voting age, and between 20 and 25 percent are undocumented workers, Rodriguez said.

One group looking to increase the percentage of registered voters is the nonpartisan League of Women Voters. Mary Conley, president of the League of Women Voters of Cape May County, said her organization will do voter registration at the end of September in area high schools. For the group, going into schools is an effective way of boosting the voting rolls.

“We find that we have more success in registering people in the high schools and the junior college, Atlantic Cape Community College, than we do sitting in front of Walmart or something like that,” Conley said. The group also visits elementary schools, where they are able to register parents of the young children.

Atlantic and Cumberland County Democratic campaign worker Marcus Wilson has been working during the summer to encourage more minority voters to register.

Wilson held two registration events in August, a community-based event in Millville and the Cumberland County barbers and stylists “We Have His Back” luncheon on Aug. 20. During that event, Wilson gave the barbers and stylists a presentation on voter registration and encouraged them to participate in a program that would have them help their customers register.

“Some people tell you, ‘I only vote in the presidential election.’ That’s not the most important elections. The most important elections to you are the ones held in your community,” Wilson said.

Atlantic County Democrats hope to have a voter-registration campaign that shifts into high gear in September, said Jim Schroeder, chairman of the Atlantic County Democratic Committee. They will be trying to register everyone, but certain things will be done to target the registering of the young, blacks, Latinos and people of Southeast Asian descent, Schroeder said.

An NBC/Wall Street Journal poll in August found practically no support for Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney among blacks, but the Latino vote is a little bit more in play as President Barack Obama leads Romney 2-to-1 in the same poll. Hispanics are both the largest minority and the fastest-growing population in the country.

Atlantic County Republican Chairman Keith Davis said his party will not focus on any one specific age group or racial demographic, but he said efforts will be made to register Latino voters as it is a growing ethnic group in Atlantic County.

“We have many key leaders in our organization who are networking to the Latino community, and we plan on speaking to Latino voters directly, those who are registered and to encourage those who are not registered to register to vote,” Davis said.

The Cumberland County Republicans have Bill Gonzalez, who is the Cumberland County chairman on the Republican National Hispanic Assembly of New Jersey. The group’s mission is to empower young people to register to vote and to learn about their community. Both Democrats and Republicans have to do a better job at educating and inspiring minorities to vote, Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez said he will visit church and civic groups and encourage their leadership to assist him in registering people to vote.

A young Republicans group exists in Cumberland County, and outreach will continue into the youth community, said Robert Greco, chairman of the Cumberland County Republican Organization.

“It’s going to be very important that young Americans understand the choices they make. Back in the last presidential cycle, the Obama organization was able to energize young first-time voters with the idea of hope and change,” said Greco, who added voter-registration and voter-outreach discussions started in August.

Voter-registration efforts are already under way by the Democrats in Cumberland County. About 75 new voters are being registered daily, said Robert Balicki, chairman of the Democratic Party for Cumberland County.

Voter registration forms are being brought to events, such as meetings and barbecues. They have someone visiting all the minority beauty parlors, which help to register people there. They have people knocking on doors and have young people on staff who are in touch with the colleges, such as Cumberland County College, Balicki said.

“Things are too important to sit on the sidelines and complain,” Balicki said.

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