

Hillary and Rudy lead in local cafe's straw poll

By Ryan McMaster/Staff Writer

Seems it's never too early to start picking favorites for the 2008 presidential election. The nation has its Gallup polls, and now Lompoc has its own straw poll to gauge local interest in presidential politics.

After reading about the “me first” attitude of the Iowa caucuses, Steve Eittreim, who co-owns the Jalama Beach Cafe with his brother, Mike, launched the poll at the restaurant, declaring that “We want to be the first ones anywhere to do a straw poll.”

Eittreim distributed a flyer to customers declaring, “We'll go first, and then tell them who Lompocans like for ‘President.’”

All entries are being placed in a lock box then tallied later. Due to the overwhelming voters response, the brothers began counting the poll results every couple of days. By Monday, when the first results of the weekly results were posted, Steve Eittreim said that about 400 customers had voted.

The cafe's straw poll includes the 16 declared presidential candidates in the Republican and Democrat parties, as well as seven potential but unannounced candidates - some of whom did surprisingly well.

The weekly poll is open to diners 18 years of age or older, and excludes restaurant employees from participation.

“We have included (Michael) Bloomberg, Al Gore and Sen. (Fred) Thompson in the poll,” Steve Eittreim said. “If you want to nominate Mayor Dick DeWees, we have a write-in spot for that.”

In the first week's poll, Sen. Hillary Clinton led the Democrats, just as in the national polls, though by a smaller margin over Sen. Barack Obama, 22 percent to 11 percent.

“Hillary has been leading ... consistently,” Mike Eittreim said. “She's been leading from day one.”

Former Vice President Al Gore trailed Clinton and Obama with 6 percent; followed by former vice presidential candidate John Edwards at 4 percent; Sen. Joe Biden with 3 percent; Rep. Dennis Kucinich at 2 percent; and Sen. Christopher Dodd, Gov. Bill Richardson, former Sen. Mike Gravel, Gen. Wesley Clark and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg, each at 1 percent.

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani leads the Republican candidates with 12 percent, followed by former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and former Sen. Fred Thompson, at 9 percent each; Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, 8 percent; Sen. John McCain, 5 percent; Rep. Ron Paul, 3 percent; and Sen. Sam Brownback, Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, Rep. Duncan Hunter, Rep. Toni Tancredo, Sen. Chuck Hagel and former New York Gov. George Pataki, all at 1 percent.

Steve Eittreim said he found it interesting that Gingrich and Thompson, who have yet to declare a candidacy, received more votes than Mitt Romney, who led the Iowa caucuses.

“I like John McCain,” said customer Helen Barto. “I like that he has served our country and has POW experience. ... He's been my man the last couple times around. I am disappointed that he still hasn't made it.”

Customer Mark Morse said he offered a write-in candidate, his good friend, Dana Litzinger, who paints murals in town.

“We need an artistic person for president,” Morse said. “I think we will see how it (the straw poll) goes here, and then we will open it up to different places.”

Gov. Huckabee's conservatism attracted the vote of one diner.

“I like Huckabee, but he'll never win,” said Linda Eagon.

She said that none of the other Republicans are conservative enough for her, but that she will likely compromise her tastes for the actual election and vote for Giuliani.

Steve Eittreim said he hopes the straw poll will help educate voters about their choices in the 2008 election.

“I don't know which way Lompoc swings,” he said. “I will expect several thousand ballots by the time of the election. ... It will give us a feel for what customers want to see. ... We want to inspire friendly conversation and debate and have some fun with it.”

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