New FKCC class focuses on primary elections

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If you can eat lunch and talk politics at the same time, there's a Florida Keys Community College course for you.

Veteran Washington political handler Henry Woods – who most recently ran Jimmy Weekley's losing mayoral campaign against Morgan McPherson – will teach "Political Campaign '08" to political junkies or novices who can't make sense of the chaos and intrigue surrounding this year's presidential primaries.

The course little resembles other college fare; instead of meeting in front of a blackboard on campus, the class meets twice a week for lunch at Alice's Key West Restaurant on Duval Street.

"The idea is to monitor the primary season, one primary at a time and discuss what it all means," Woods said. "We'll examine the candidates, their spouses, hot issues, and the hardest aspects to understand, mainly the dynamics state-by-state as the process unfolds."

If some doubt his abilities after his defeat in the mayoral race, Woods has a serious political resume that tracks from Little Rock, Ark., to Washington, D.C.

Politics attracted Woods long before he ran five of Weekley's campaigns in Key West; while boys his own age were watching the Mickey Mouse Club, Woods was glued to political conventions on the television screen.

"I was always interested in politics growing up," Woods said. "I liked the pomp and circumstance. I like polls."

While at Jones Elementary School in Hot Springs, Ark., Woods ran for and won the post of fifth-grade class president. It was in Hot Springs that Woods met the future President Bill Clinton. "He moved from Hope to Hot Springs when he was 5," Woods remembered.

Clinton was comfortable enough with Woods to hire him to help out during Clinton's 1973 run for Arkansas' 3rd Congressional District.

In 1992, he was reunited with Clinton when Woods signed on as part of a group of staffers on the Hill who hit the campaign trail on weekends to stump for Clinton.

"We called ourselves Arkansas Travelers," Woods said. "I would grab up the Arkansas staffers on the Hill — most of us were single — and we'd pile into a van and hit the road."

Much like a passenger deciding at the last minute not to board a doomed flight, Woods said he turned down an opportunity to manage interns at the White House under Bill Clinton.

"I thought to myself, 'I've been in Washington for 19 years,'" Woods remembered. "I'm not going to work 90 hours. I took another job on the Hill instead."

He retired to Key West from full-time politics after 26 years. He has told The Citizen he may run for supervisor of elections in Monroe County, but has not officially declared his intentions.

As an adjunct political science professor at Florida Keys Community College since 2005, Woods teaches what he learned about politics to rookies and experienced campaign-watchers alike. During twice-weekly classes at Alice's, Woods will lecture on the upcoming primaries, candidate strategies, polling, campaign organizations and other inside-track information.

Each student will track a candidate throughout the primary season while class is in session.

He has signed up 42 people so far, some of whom have taken other classes he has taught, such as courses on civil liberties and civil rights. The class appeals to senior citizens and snowbirds, people who can spend about two hours eating lunch in the middle of the day. He invites students and "political junkies of all persuasions."

The bipartisan course won't favor one candidate over another and doesn't have a hidden agenda, Woods said, though he was raised in the New Deal tradition.

"My father said he'd go to Franklin D. Roosevelt when he dies," Woods said.

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