

# More youth heading to polls

by Lori Aratani  
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Georgy Russell, 27, made headlines across the country in the fall for selling thong underwear to finance her campaign for governor in California's recall contest. She persuaded 2,216 people to support her, but she still can't persuade her younger sister, Sophie, to tune in to politics.

Such is the dilemma of the youth vote. While the potential payoff is immense - about one in 5 eligible voters is younger than 30, according to the University of Maryland's Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement - getting those voters to turn out can be difficult, even when they're related to the candidate.

Young voters are notoriously hard to turn out at the polls. In presidential election years from 1972 to 2000, the turnout rate declined by 13 percentage points among voters 18-24 years old, according to the University of Maryland. In 2000, 42 percent of voters 18-24 years old voted, while 70 percent of citizens 25 and older did.

If recent surveys are any indication, however, 2004 could be the year that younger voters make an impact. More young people say they plan to vote in this year's presidential contest than four years ago. And a new series of initiatives spearheaded by such diverse players as Hollywood producer Norman Lear to wrestling superstar Bradshaw are focused on making it happen.

A recent MTV poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates found that four out of 10 of the 18- to-24-year-olds surveyed said they will "definitely vote" in the next presidential election up nearly 30 percent from 2000. A survey by Harvard University's Institute of

Politics found two-thirds of college students were registered to vote and 82 percent of those said they planned to vote this year.

"It's clear that there's a lot of young interest this year," said Ara Khachatourian, the media director for MTV's Rock the Vote campaign, which is entering its 14th year. "The economy and, of course, 9/11 and war in Iraq have really engaged folks. This year they're pausing and looking at issues outside of their immediate realm."

Early signs are promising: Exit polls taken during the Iowa caucuses in mid-January showed voter turnout among those younger than 30 almost doubled to 17 percent, from 9 percent in 2000. The number of voters younger than 30 was higher than that of the 30- to 44-year-old crowd.

Even so, young voters aren't a sure bet.

Former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean was among the first of the 2004 field to use the Internet to reach college students and other young people. His Web site includes a separate section targeted at younger voters, called Generation Dean. But the early buzz on college campuses hasn't been enough to help him win a primary or caucus.

Four years ago, Nima Niakan, a 28-year-old Silicon Valley techie, was like many young professionals with good civic intentions. He registered to vote and planned to support Al Gore. But when Election Day rolled around, he was busy and never made it to the polls. At the time it wasn't a priority.

Four years later, things had changed. Niakan's still busy - but he's also grown increasingly disenchanted with the Bush administration.

"I don't like the 'We're going to do it our way' approach," he said. "I'm a per-



PHOTOGRAPH BY EROS HOAGLAND/KRT

Nima Niakan, the San Francisco Bay-Area coordinator for Wesley Clark's C Company, is trying to attract younger voters to the 2004 presidential campaign.

son who's traveled to 10 or 15 countries over the last three years, and I've found that that policy reflects back on me. I get subjected to questions about what Bush does."

This year he vowed to do more than just vote; he was going to participate. Niakan became the San Francisco coordinator for C Company, the Wesley Clark effort to attract young professionals. C Company campaigned for Clark through e-mail and the popular Craig's List Web site. Gatherings were held at apartments or hip nightspots.

Other nonpartisan efforts are joining forces to reach out to young voters in 2004.

Producer Lear's initiative, "Declare Yourself," includes tours of 18 different college campuses. The group has also linked with Friendster, the popular Web networking site to launch "voter parties" featuring cast members from MTV's "The Real World."

"We're really trying to reach young people where they live, work and using popular culture," said Declare Yourself spokeswoman Christy Salcido.

"Research shows it's important to get them early."

World Wide Entertainment's effort - "Smackdown Your Vote" - includes voter registration drives at wrestling events. The drive will culminate at WrestleMania XX in New York next month.

Russell, who's mulling a run for city council in Mountain View, Calif., if she doesn't get into business school, said getting young people's attention can be difficult, but it can be done. The key is talking to them, she said, not at them.

3-week session  
May 12-June 2  
7-week session  
June 14-August 3  
Late summer  
3-week session  
August 9-26

For a complete course listing visit  
<http://soc.our.psu.edu>

For information, call or e-mail the Registrar's Office:  
898-6104  
meb5@psu.edu



[www.pennstatebehrend.psu.edu](http://www.pennstatebehrend.psu.edu)



Large 1-Topping Pizza



Single Order of Breadsticks

Pizza & 'Stix Student Combo

# \$6.99

with coupon

Reg. \$14.98 - SAVE '8

4402 Buffalo Road, Erie • 899-2313  
2007 E. 38<sup>th</sup> Street, Erie • 825-7872

Dine-in, Carryout & Delivery



Large 1-Topping Pizza and a Single Order of Breadsticks

# \$6.99



Offer available on Pan and Thin 'n Crispy crust. Offer available on dine-in, carryout, or delivery orders. Up to 4 orders per person. \$1.00 delivery charge may apply. Limited time offer valid only with current student ID.

Large 1-Topping Pizza and a Single Order of Breadsticks

# \$6.99



Offer available on Pan and Thin 'n Crispy crust. Offer available on dine-in, carryout, or delivery orders. Up to 4 orders per person. \$1.00 delivery charge may apply. Limited time offer valid only with current student ID.

Large 1-Topping Pizza and a Single Order of Breadsticks

# \$6.99



Offer available on Pan and Thin 'n Crispy crust. Offer available on dine-in, carryout, or delivery orders. Up to 4 orders per person. \$1.00 delivery charge may apply. Limited time offer valid only with current student ID.

Large 1-Topping Pizza and a Single Order of Breadsticks

# \$6.99



Offer available on Pan and Thin 'n Crispy crust. Offer available on dine-in, carryout, or delivery orders. Up to 4 orders per person. \$1.00 delivery charge may apply. Limited time offer valid only with current student ID.