

Democratic voters on the decline

on, are switching over.

Separating from the Democratic party?

"People have, for the past thirty or forty years, been married to the Democratic party but we're starting to say, maybe that's not the answer." explains Thomas Stith, minority affairs director for the state Republican party. "We're finding ourselves in dismal situations, and finding that following blindly hasn't served our best interest. You only have to walk through our neighborhoods to see we need a change in strategy."

Black republicans are still a rarity in Forsyth County: of 29,654 black voters, 94 percent are Democrat. Republicans can only claim three percent of registered black voters, and the remaining three percent are unaffiliated.

Clearly, the stereotype of the African-American democrat is hard to change. Stith says his Republican

Republican voter registration drive, but doesn't trust either party.

"One party can't call the other party guilty of anything, because they both do the same thing. In both parties you have good people, but they're outnumbered by the others," says Kay.

Gary Jackson, chairman of the Forsyth County Democratic Party, laments a smart move the Republicans made at their last executive meeting: they opened up their primary to unaffiliated voters. An unaffiliated voter can now vote in the Republican primary, but not in the Democratic primary.

"We've lost our grass roots contact," admits Jackson, who says that the local party will survey those who come to Democratic precinct meetings in March. "We're asking voters: what's the party doing right, what issues are important to you? We'll also have a presidential straw poll."

istered with the party during a Democrats: yet neither has a Democratic party organization in place.

A steady decline

Eleven years ago, 68 percent of all voters in Forsyth County were Democrats: today that number has dropped to 57 percent. In North Carolina, 71 percent of all voters were Democrat in 1980: today only 63 percent are Democrat.

The local Republican party has grown from 26 percent to 31 percent of all voters in the past eleven years.

According to Charles Wallschleger, chairman of the local Republican party, 64 percent of newly registered voters in Forsyth County signed up as Republican, 27 percent unaffiliated, and Democrats got only nine percent. Kathie Cooper, Forsyth County elections supervisor, says her office doesn't keep statistics that would back up Wallschleger's claim. However, the board of elections does show that At two of the largest black last year the Democrats lost one percent of all voters, (from 58 percent to 57 percent), and half of that

Black voters

Forsyth county has a higher percent of black voters than the state. Since 1980, local black voters have remained at 20 percent of all voters. In the state, the percent of black voters has increased from 16 to 18 percent of all voters, yet the percent of blacks in the state population has remained at 22 percent. Most are still registering and voting Democratic.

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Dr. Charles Prysby, UNC-G political^oscience professor, predicts the Democrats will not lose many African-Americans to the Republican party. "They have not been successful in appealing to blacks. I don't think there'll be a large increase."

Nonetheless, the Republican party wants to be poised to catch the fallout from the Democratic party, says Charles Wallschleger.

"The Democratic party takes the black vote for granted. The

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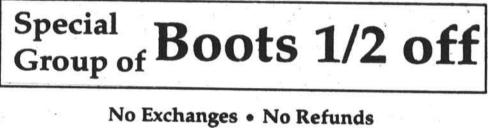
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father ran for Congress as a Democrat, and his mother registered Democrat but voted Republican.

Leon Kay, one of the county's 849 black republicans, says he reg-

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precincts, Martin Luther King Recreation Center and Happy Hill Recreation Center, all but 137 of the (1.790 voters) went to the Republi-3,040 black voters are registered can party.

Republican party says, we can't even get it, so what's the point? But we welcome their participation."

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