



Poverty fake, but reaction is real

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six, the Young Leaders simulated families that had to move around the conference room at the YMCA to navigate an imaginary city to attempt to provide the basic necessities for each family. The city services the makeshift families were expected to interact with were a bank, food pantry, general employer, a pawn broker, a grocery store, welfare office, police station, utilities and rent payment centers.

Heather Griffith of the Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority observed young

leaders, who range from 25 to 40 years old, struggling to survive under the conditions created by the exercise.

"My job is to be the police officer, but I can see how they're struggling to make ends meet, and knowing how to provide care for their children while they go off to work," Griffith said.

Kristen Davis with Charlotte Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health felt the simulation would give middle-class whites a chance to identify with poverty.

"It's very important for individuals across the board

because it gives a real depiction of what's going on in communities with the individuals we serve," Davis said. "I know specifically for me in the position I'm in we service a lot of low income individuals, and it's easiest to give service to someone when you understand what they are truly dealing with."

Ronnie Devine, who declined to say where he is employed, believes the simulation can benefit everyone in corporate America.

"This is very powerful and there should be some corporate CEOs in here because it's dealing with trying to bal-

ance paying utilities, mortgage, and having food for your kids," he said. "If an individual is not getting paid the right amount of money, it's very difficult to survive."

The simulation made an impact on Tracey Davis of Vanguard, who wanted to see her company grow by being exposed to the exercise.

"I'm looking to bring it to Vanguard because I think it's a great way to make everyone aware of what's happening," Davis said. "I think it would be awesome to bring to our group, we're sheltered, we don't think it could happen to us."

For 53 years, precinct judge has been on job

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courthouse.

"There were no polling places in the black neighborhoods," Bryant said. He later registered 720 black voters to create the Burton School precinct southeast of downtown.

"I've been the continuous chief judge at this precinct ever since," he said, a slight but unmistakable trace of pride in his voice.

County Elections Director Mike Ashe said his army of precinct officials ranged in age from 21 on up to Bryant and came from across the spectrum of society.

"I got some of everything," he said. It can take as many as 600 poll workers to run a presidential election in Durham and a large chunk of Ashe's election-season workforce is currently in the midst of required training ahead of next month's primary.

"It's a good civic service, you know that?" Bryant said. Despite serving through tumultuous times, especially during the Civil Rights struggles of the 1960s, Bryant said his service wasn't character-

ized by racial tension, despite serving white voters.

"In fact, we had some white precinct workers," he said.

Bryant, who retired in 1981 as an insurance officer after 37 years with N.C. Mutual Life, has seen several presidents come and go at the polls. He's also seen a lot of change in the way votes are counted, with machines — which he said he adapted to well — replacing the hand counts that used to stretch into the next day, which caused a conflict back when elections were held on Saturday.

"People were going to Sunday school and we're still at the precinct counting ballots," he said.

Having half a century of experience comes in handy for a precinct judge, especially one who signed up most of the voters to begin with.

"I knew people in the community, so I knew if someone was voting who wasn't in the precinct — or trying to, anyway," Bryant said.

At almost 90, he's thought about stepping down, "but since I have the time, I use

it," Bryant said.

"There's something really beautiful about being a part of democracy," said Nicole Rowan, who at 32 is one of the youngest chief judges. "It's a really nice feeling to be part of something that determines our everyday lives — it's important."

Rowan became a poll worker when she moved to Durham from Oregon seven years ago as a way of getting to know people. Since starting as an assistant, she's now chief judge in Precinct 8 and

has gotten to know the voters who cast ballots at Montessori Magnet School and describes elections there as "a feel-good day."

"We always make a big deal when we have a new voter at our precinct," she said. "We clap our hands and go 'Woo-hoo!'"

Although Ashe lightheartedly sums up the precinct worker's role as "Get 'em in, get 'em a ballot and get 'em out," the training keeps them up to speed in campaign law and procedure.

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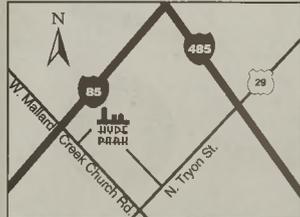
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