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Democrats have new plan to tap into Treasure Coast resources

Democratic Professional Forum
links candidates, constituents at
monthly lunch meetings

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Once upon a time, one didn't advertise liberal leanings on the Treasure Coast.

Attorney Rich Gitlen remembers it well.

"At one point, being a Democrat in Martin County, you'd be ostracized," he said.

But with the advent of a new liberal-minded organization, Gitlen and other area Democrats could soon be waving those party affiliation cards high.

Gitlen was among the throng that heard Democratic National Committee Chairman and former presidential candidate Howard Dean speak

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DEMOCRATS

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Wednesday afternoon in West Palm Beach as part of the Democratic Professional Forum, a group attempting to extract the party faithful from the area business community and boost Democrat fundraising.

Enthusiastic about the year-old group that links candidates to constituents over monthly lunch meetings, Martin County Democratic Party Chair Dave Dew contacted the Democratic Professional Forum's founder and Chair Bryan S. Miller about a month ago to talk about starting a Treasure Coast chapter.

"We're just now forming — We're getting started," Dew said Wednesday morning, en route to the \$50-a-plate Dean lunch at Mark's CityPlace restaurant.

Dew said the Treasure Coast version of the forum emerged for the same reason the Palm Beach County version did —

REGISTERED VOTERS

Martin County

Total: 99,185
Democrat: 27,347
Republican: 51,036
Other: 20,802

St. Lucie County

Total: 142,537
Democrat: 58,621
Republican: 51,478
Other: 32,438

Indian River County

Total: 85,798
Democrat: 25,492
Republican: 43,091
Other: 17,215

Supervisor of elections offices

area Democrats didn't feel that the county chamber of commerce offices were responsive enough to the democratic platform.

And that seems to especially ring true in Martin and Indian River counties, considered historically "Republican" counties, Dew said.

The number of registered Martin County Democrats has been about half that of registered Martin County Republicans for many years, said Debbie Dent, deputy of elections systems for the county.

Based on the most current data, there are 99,185 registered voters in Martin County. Of those, 27,347 are registered Democrats and 51,036 are registered Republicans. The remaining 20,802 consists of "other" voters.

Indian River County currently has 85,798 registered voters: 25,492 Democrats, 43,091 Republicans and 17,215 "other" voters.

"Our businesspeople really have nowhere to go unless they're going to form their own group — The party isn't enough," Dew said.

However, Miller and Dew see St. Lucie County, with its influx of young families and new development, as a burgeoning source for Democratic party growth.

In 1996, there were only 11,948 registered Democrats compared with 14,002 registe