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St. Petersburg Times

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FLORIDA'S BEST NEWSPAPER

Wednesday, November 7, 2007

Largo Times 710 Court St., Clearwater, FL 33756

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Our perspective

With less than 14 percent of Largo's registered voters actually casting ballots in the last local election, it's refreshing to talk to someone like Paula Keyser who takes the right so seriously. I admire Keyser because she doesn't give up. If a hurdle is too high to jump, she seeks out a circuitous route. Instead of just complaining, Keyser gets busy. Is there a lesson there for the rest of us?"

Rita Farlow, Times Staff Writer

(See story next page)



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Largo Times

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Dan Phibbs at his tie-dyed clothing stand

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5 Questions » with Paula Keyser

About hydrocephalus

What is it?

Hydrocephalus is an abnormal buildup of the brain's normal water-like fluid (cerebrospinal fluid).

How is hydrocephalus diagnosed?

The most common ways for diagnosing hydrocephalus are CT scans and magnetic resonance imaging. They can accurately measure the size of the fluid spaces, or ventricles, within the skull.

Can you cure hydrocephalus?

No, you can usually just treat it.

The most common treatment is the surgical diversion of the excess fluid by placing a synthetic tube (shunt) into the ventricle.

What problems are usually associated with hydrocephalus?

Problems that can be associated with hydrocephalus vary from person to person. Some may be:

- Learning disabilities
- Memory deficits
- Psychological deficits
- Motor skill disabilities
- Vision problems
- Hearing difficulties, seizures and hormonal imbalances
- Sensitivity to sound, pressure and bright lights.

Source: www.hydrocephalus.org/facts.htm



Courtesy of Paula Keyser

Paula Keyser of Largo cast her first vote as a U.S. citizen Tuesday at Hope Presbyterian Church in Clearwater. Keyser registered to vote so she could try to have an impact on legislation.

BY RITA FARLOW | Times Staff Writer

Paula Keyser just wants to be heard. ¶ The Largo resident and her husband, Mark, started the Tampa Bay affiliate of the Hydrocephalus Association after their son Jeremy, 6, was diagnosed as an infant with the condition, which causes an abnormal buildup of fluid in the brain. ¶ The group helps families dealing with hydrocephalus. Paula Keyser is now seeking federal funds to support scientific research on the condition, which occurs in one or two of every 1,000 live births. ¶ To have an impact, Keyser, 39, who was born in England, needed to make sure her voice was heard. In April, Keyser obtained her American citizenship. ¶ On Tuesday, she cast her first vote in the Largo city election.

1 What inspired you to obtain citizenship? We went to the Hydrocephalus Association conference in Baltimore, Md., and attended "Advocacy Day" on May 30, 2006, with about 100 other family members. We each met with the staff of our members of Congress to let them know about the issues that face our families. It was a humbling experience when I realized that most of these people have never even heard the word "hydrocephalus" and unless I became a constituent, my words would not hold much weight or make a difference for my child.

2 Why do you feel it's important to vote? Most Americans do not realize how important the right to vote really is and how they can make a difference by voting. It is more than just electing someone for a local public office or voting for a new president. It is about making changes so that our children have a better life.

3 We know that voter turnout is generally low. What advice would you give to others who do not exercise their right to vote? Until you have been through the process of how difficult it really is to become a permanent resident and then an American citizen, I don't think you really have any idea just how important your right to vote is. I believe that most naturalized citizens end up acting more American and patriotic than those who were born here, because we truly are thankful for the freedom that we have in this country. I would just ask every person who is able to vote, to get out there and do so.

4 How did it feel to cast your first vote? I suddenly felt incredible pressure to make the right choice when I went to vote this morning and realized that my one vote could be a decided factor. Even though this was only a local election, I believe it is so important and should not be just a right for every American but an obligation of every American to get to out the polls and do their part.

5 What do you hope your son learns from your activism? I hope that Jeremy learns from me to never give up. Even if someone tells you no, go and try to find another person to ask the question. We have had to fight for so much with Jeremy's medical condition and advocate on his behalf for health insurance and school-related issues. It seems to be a constant fight. But I truly believe what doesn't kill you makes you stronger.