



PHIL SEARS /Democrat

Kids Voting volunteer Jill Canono gives 6-year-old Angela Cauley directions on casting her ballot.

# Kids come to Courthouse to cast their votes

**By Rocky Scott**  
DEMOCRAT STAFF WRITER

Lilly Caldwell studied her choices in the voting booth. A veteran voter, she quickly marked her choices, stuffed the ballot in the box and walked away — ponytail swinging in the breeze, braces glinting through a smile.

"I've done Kids Voting for a while — as long as I was able to," the Swift Creek seventh-grader said Saturday afternoon at the Leon County Courthouse after she took part in Kids Voting Leon County, a project that focuses on getting young people in the habit of voting.

Caldwell, the daughter of Thorne and Diana Caldwell, said the 2004 election has been the subject of much discussion at her school.

"We're doing this project where we debate the candidates," she said. Class

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## IF YOU GO

- **What:** Kids Voting Leon County
  - **When:** Tuesday, Nov. 2
  - **Where:** All Leon County voting precincts
  - **Who:** Children from K-12 (under 18)
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members indicate which presidential candidate they're going to vote for — then have to argue for the opposing candidate's position.

Caldwell — a supporter of U.S. Sen. John Kerry — will present arguments for President George Bush in the debate, which will be held Tuesday.

"We have to do the opposite side to learn what the issues are," she said.

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# KIDS

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Those words are music to Townsend Waddill's ears.

"It's really to get them to think about things now," said Waddill, chairman of the board of directors of Kids Voting Leon County, "so when they're 18, they will register to vote."

Waddill said 31 children between kindergarten and high school had voted Saturday and another 135 had voted earlier last week.

"We estimate probably 13,000 to 15,000 kids will vote Tuesday" during regular election voting hours, he said.

That total would easily top the 11,000 or so children who voted in the 2000 presidential election and the 9,000 who voted in the 2002 general election.

Waddill said the votes will be counted Tuesday night and the totals released to the media.

Allison Eliot, an

8-year-old with brown hair and a shy smile, stood in line with her father. Sieloff Eliot, a surgeon, had come to the courthouse to cast his ballot because, he said, "unfortunately, I'm working Tuesday."

Allison nodded "yes" when asked if she had learned about the Kids Voting project in school. She gave the same quick nod to a question about discussing the candidates with her father or her mother, Heidi.

And she played her cards close to the vest when asked about her presidential choice: no head shaking, just a smile. Unfortunately, her vest — in this case, a short-sleeved top — had a "Bush/Cheney" sticker on it.

A short time later, Latna Lee, a 16-year-old sophomore at Lincoln High School, wound her way through the two-block line of registered voters sweltering in the sun and made a beeline for the Kids Voting polling station.

"I've done this (voting) plenty of times," she said. She said that the project

has been announced on the intercom at school and that her friends all know about it.

Her choice for president? Kerry "because he's a Democrat," she said, adding "the (Iraq) war was a bad idea."

She talks politics with her father, even to the point of discussing some of the proposed amendments on the ballot.

Lee said her parents are Democrats and she "can't wait" until she is 18 and can register to vote.

Waddill, who manned the Kids Voting polling station for a while Saturday, said the youngsters "seemed to know the issues" when they cast their ballots.

Sieloff Eliot was asked how you explain the candidates' positions on issues to an 8-year-old.

"It makes you think in relatively simple terms," he said, and avoid the "hype" that often surrounds elections.

And that, he conceded, wasn't a bad approach for anyone planning to vote.