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Creative Campaigning



Obama supporter at "Bark for Obama" rally.

“Bark for Obama” and “Hillary Happy Hours” are not typical fundraising events.

By [Jelena Kopanja](#) and [Merry Pool](#)

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Ruffy the Dog may not be willing to disclose his political preferences. Bitsy, on the other hand has conservative tendencies, her owners say. Whether they wanted to or not, both served the campaign purposes of Bark for Barack, held in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park on Saturday: to get voters talking about the presidential primaries on Tuesday.

The campaigns for the two Democratic contenders, Senators Barack Obama of Illinois and Hillary Clinton of New York, are becoming creative in their efforts to turn out the vote on Tuesday, when 22 states are to hold presidential primaries.

Bark for Barack, organized by Chuck Choi of Brooklyn, was one of about 144 events held all over town on Saturday, in support of Obama. “I was trying to inject a little humor into the campaigns,” said Mr. Choi, “but also get people to talk about what they’re thinking about.”

Supporters of both candidates have capitalized on imaginative ways to attract new voters. Visibility campaigns such as Bark for Barack have been essential in reaching out to people in New York where Hillary Clinton, the former first lady, has “greater name recognition,” said Joe Romano who came out with his wife, Cassie and their canine, Ruffy the Dog.

Wanting to contribute but with little money to give, 24-year-old, Lana Wilson thought of ObamAerobics: Barack your Body – an intense cardio workout with a sliding scale donation for the Obama campaign. “I’m going to put [Barack Obama’s] paraphernalia around the studio, but we’re not doing aerobics to his campaign speeches or anything,” Ms. Wilson said in a phone interview.

Small-scale fundraisers such as this one – along with debate watching parties, wine and cheese events, pub crawls and spaghetti dinners that cost \$20 dollars a plate – seem to be a major force behind Obama’s fundraising success. According to a New York Times article, \$32 million dollars raised by the Obama campaign in the month of January came mostly from small donors; the Clinton campaign did not release its figures.

Quinlan Smith, who was at the Clinton rally at Union Square on Saturday, came up with Hillary Happy Hours, “really sexy events” intended to get young people involved in the political process. “Most young people can’t afford \$1,000 benefit dinners,” the backbone of traditional campaigns, Mr. Smith said. Hillary Happy Hours– advertised on the Website with the same name – created enough buzz to culminate in an event at Hiro Ballroom that raised approximately \$100,000, he added.

Hadrian Blampoix, 12, may not be old enough to attend the happy hours, but he probably wouldn’t want to. He is an avid Obama supporter. He and two of his friends crashed the rally at Union Square, waving skateboards with Obama posters plastered on them. “My parents are voting for Obama” said Hadrian. “He will give more money to teachers and lower tuition rates, which will matter when I apply to college.”

Not all events were as successful as the happy hours. A night of Jazz for Barack Obama was canceled after only one person signed up for the event. However, Salsa for Barack fared better, taking place in front of the Brooklyn Museum of Art during its popular First Saturdays extravaganza that featured a salsa band.

Saturday’s events brought out diverse groups with varying political experiences. For Jen Abrams, a volunteer helping out at Salsa for Barack, this was the first campaign involvement since her mom ran for the school committee, “when I was twelve,” she said.

And while the furry gathering for Mr. Obama at Prospect Park was the first campaign for John Armstrong’s dog, Mr. Armstrong has been involved with elections since the late 1960s. “You make contacts with people not part of your circle,” he said of campaigning. And in some cases with dogs, too.

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