Allen West gets significant support from Indian River County donors

By Jonathan Mattise

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The second-most generous Treasure Coast county for U.S. Rep. Allen West this election season is too north for its donors to vote for him.

Supporters from Indian River County — the lone Treasure Coast county outside the District 18 seat West is seeking — have forked over about $45,500 to fuel West's re-election bid. Almost $28,000 of it has come from the ritzy 32963 barrier island ZIP code, according to Federal Election Commission reports.

"He’s certainly gotten people's attention up here, and he’s been here on several occasions," said Tom Lockwood, Indian River County Republican Executive Committee chairman.

Indian River's haul for West tops the $13,260 that Democratic-leaning St. Lucie County has given the retired lieutenant colonel. Martin County, however, has shelled out the most on the Treasure Coast by sending more than $100,000 West's way. St. Lucie, Martin and northern Palm Beach counties comprise the new District 18.

Indian River remains in a district covered by U.S. Rep. Bill Posey, R-Rockledge, but the county has earned a reputation as a wealthy national Republican fundraising base. The 32963 barrier island region, for example, has signed the seventh-most checks for presidential hopeful Mitt Romney of all ZIP codes in America — totaling about $659,500, according to the nonpartisan, nonprofit Center for Responsive Politics.

West, a Plantation Republican who moved to Palm Beach Gardens to run locally, thinks the Indian River support stems from his message's wide appeal.

"I guess the message resonates with people all along this coast, from the Fort Lauderdale area all the way up," West said.
The campaign has upped its attention on Indian River since 2010, when West only tapped into $5,400 from Indian River contributors.

West's potential Democratic competition Patrick Murphy has reported one $250 donation from Vero Beach out of $2.4 million raised this cycle. No other District 18 candidates reported Indian River donations.

West faces Martin County Sheriff Robert Crowder in the Tuesday GOP primary.

The West campaign has stopped by Vero Beach a few times to greet supporters during his campaign — one event at Pointe West in November, another one with the North Indian River County Republican Club about six months ago. He's also been to California, Texas, New York, Massachusetts, Georgia and more on the campaign trail.

The campaign's direct mail machine also shoots for money out of the district. West has churned out $4.8 million worth of mailers, peppering prospective conservative contributors across the country. West's entire campaign has cost almost $8 million.

John Brehmer, a retired Illinois manufacturing director who moved to the barrier island full-time in 2000, said he could stack the West mailers he's received up to the ceiling.

Brehmer, 78, said West's conservative stances mesh with his beliefs. So he donated $2,000 to West's campaign last year. Brehmer has given almost $80,000 to various Republican contenders and committees through the years, from George W. Bush to Mitt Romney.

Brehmer is used to tons of political mail as a consistent donor, but he said the West mailer volume has been unprecedented.

"I've gotten more campaign literature from Allen West than any other candidate in the United States, and I support a lot of candidates," Brehmer said.

Election law doesn't require reporting specifics on contributions less than $200, so smaller donations aren't counted. More than $5.4 million of the $10.8 million West brought in were donations below $200.

Only about $2.8 million of West's $200-or-more donations came from Florida supporters, however. Murphy, who moved from Fort Lauderdale to Jupiter to run as a Democrat, raised a chunk of his money from Miami donors.

Appealing to donor bases outside of a candidate's congressional district is nothing new, but the practice brings up some potential concerns, said Florida Atlantic University political science professor Kevin Wagner.
"A lot of congresspeople simply don't have a profile outside of their area," Wagner said. "For better or worse, Allen West has become symbolic and representative of the tea party movement. ... But the bigger question is, 'Is it a good idea that members of Congress can raise money outside their district? ' It raises all kinds of questions about if that makes a congressman or woman less representative of the people they're supposed to be representing."