Treasure Coast GOP backers contributing to Super PACs

By Henry A. Stephens

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Gene Waddell, owner of the Waddell Insurance Group in Vero Beach, liked former Republican presidential hopeful Herman Cain enough to give $250 to the 9-9-9 Fund on Oct. 20, when Cain supporters formed it to help him win office.

"He had a business plan, he's eloquent, he knows what he's doing," Waddell said Thursday. "Look at his bio — he wasn't just the president of a pizza company the way the media makes him out to be. This is one smart guy."

The 9-9-9 Fund is an "independent expenditure-only committee," commonly known as a Super PAC — a new kind of political action committee that came about in July 2010 following the outcome of SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission before the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The idea was that campaign financing is the same as free speech, and corporations are the same as people," said Kevin Wagner, an assistant professor of political science at Florida Atlantic University.

Unlike traditional PACs, Super PACs can't coordinate activities with candidates or give money directly to them. So the money goes into advertising, usually against the opposing candidates.

"People always ask, 'Why all this negative advertising?' And the answer is simple. It works," Wagner said.

Super PACs have to report their donors to the Federal Elections Commission on a monthly or quarterly basis, just as a traditional PAC would. And last week the agency released a national report that showed Waddell and 13 other Treasure Coast residents as Super PAC donors.

Waddell pointed to Cain's bachelor of science in mathematics 1967 from Morehouse College, his master of science in 1971 from Purdue University and his leadership at Burger King, Pillsbury Co., the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas, Nabisco, Whirlpool, the National Restaurant Association and finally Godfather's Pizza.
Since Cain withdrew his campaign in December, amid allegations of sexual misconduct, Waddell said he is waiting to see who becomes the Republican nominee. And he'll give that person "110 percent support" against President Obama's re-election bid.

Vero Beach resident John Wardell also is waiting to see who the GOP picks. Wardell gave $500 on Aug. 19 to the Club for Growth Action, an organization that emphasizes fiscal conservatism and opposes not only Democrats but Republicans who don't measure up to its values.

"They keep track of the different people running for (U.S.) Senate and House and only help those (conservatives) they feel have a chance," he said.

Unlike traditional PACs, a Super PAC isn't limited to $5,000 donations. They can raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, associations and individuals, then spend unlimited sums to overtly advocate for or against political candidates, according to OpenSecrets.org, which tracks them.

In fact, two Treasure Coast residents took advantage of the extra amount allowed. John W. Childs of Vero Beach, manager of the Boston-based J.W. Childs Associates, an acquisition company, gave $125,000 to Club for Growth Action on July 8.

And Robert McCormack, a Hobe Sound retiree, gave $50,000 on Dec. 30 to Restore Our Future, a committee that supports GOP presidential hopeful Mitt Romney.

Neither Childs nor McCormack could be reached for comment.

Treasure Coast donors

The following "Super PACs" logged the following donations from 14 Treasure Coast residents during 2011:

Super PAC: Club for Growth Action

Purpose: Support conservative Republicans for Congress and presidency

Local donations: $125,000 on July 8, 2011, from John W. Childs, Vero Beach, manager of the Boston-based acquisition company J.W. Childs Associates; $6,000 from Vero Beach retiree John Brehmer on Dec. 7; $500 from Jupiter retiree Edward Mooney, Hobe Sound retiree John Siragusa and Vero Beach retirees Thomas Jackson and John Wardell.

Super PAC: Restore Our Future Inc.

Purpose: Supports Mitt Romney for president

Local donations: $50,000 from Hobe Sound retiree Robert McCormack
Super PAC: 9-9-9 Fund

Purpose: Supported Herman Cain for president

Local donations: $1,000 from Ernest Litty, attorney, Vero Beach; $250 from Gene Waddell, insurance broker, Vero Beach

Super PAC: Restore Our America Political Action Committee

Purpose: Lobbies federal leaders, Democrat and Republican, to cut federal spending

Local donations: $250 from Susan M. Sticker-Ha, investment banker, Jupiter; $30 from Linda T. Gore, real estate appraiser, Jupiter

Super PAC: Democratic Governor's Association Action

Purpose: Supports President Obama's re-election bid

Local donation: $100 from Port St. Lucie retiree Raymond Moser

Super PAC: Faith Family Freedom Fund

Purpose: Opposes abortion, Planned Parenthood and candidates who support them

Local donation: $250 from Timothy Tynes, occupation not available, Vero Beach

Super PAC: Priorities USA Action

Purpose: Support President Obama's re-election bid

Local donation: $100 from Jupiter retiree R. Jeremy Solomon

Sources: Federal Elections commission, Internet research