



Tompkins County Election Worker News

Tompkins County
Board of Elections

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"To make democracy work, we must be a nation of participants, not simply observers."— Louis L'Amour

BOE News

It's been a very busy summer at the Board of Elections. Besides the usual endless administrative work, we've been preplanning for the fall elections, (66 local offices up for election in November!) and getting ready for more changes resulting from HAVA legislation.

The real big news this summer is the passage of legislation that gets us that much closer to being able to buy new voting machines. (See "Meet ERMA" on page 2). This new legislation will also change some of the administrative procedures regarding machines and inspectors. We're still receiving all the details, but one very good result is that we expect inspector pay to go up in 2006.

Designating Petitions were filed in our office in July. (A Designating Petition is a petition from either a Republican, Democrat, or any other State recognized party member. The candidate needs to gather a certain number of signatures from registered voters so that he or she can run for office under that party's name.) The results of the petition process means that we will have Primary Elections September 13 in some, but not all election districts. (See the last page for more information about these races.)

We'll still be using the same old lever machines for the Primary and General Election this year. Right now, there are no new voting machines certified for use in New York State. But some time next year we will begin to examine and eventually purchase new machines. It is very important to us that you inspectors feel confident and comfortable using whatever new machine we choose. Once we have some certified machines to look at, we'll have demonstrations where we can solicit your opinions. And after we buy the new machines, we'll have plenty of training and practice sessions, as well as demonstrations for the voters.

All of us at the BOE hope you're having a nice relaxing summer, and thank you for your continued interest in helping us put on elections. (Be sure to read a new inspector's thoughts about her "first time" on page 3). We've said it before, and we'll say it again— we couldn't do it without you!

Important Dates:

September 10:
*Machine Training
(for Primary Election work-
ers only)*

September 13:
*Primary Election.
Polls open noon to 9 pm.*

November 5:
*Machine Training
GIAC (time TBD)*

November 8:
*General Election.
Polls open 6 am to 9 pm.*

Tips for Election Day

Before you open the polls, each inspector votes for a Chairperson. The Chair will direct the duties for the day. But remember that each inspector on election day has a vote on any procedures or problems that come up. (Another reason we have bipartisan representation!)



Meet ERMA

No, ERMA is not a new Board of Elections' employee or Election Inspector. ERMA is the acronym for New York State's Election Reform Modernization Act. On July 12 Governor Pataki signed the legislation that will allow us to move forward with election modernization as mandated by HAVA (The Federal Help America Vote Act). ERMA says, among other things, that the Board of Elections in each county will now be totally responsible for the purchasing and care of election machines, as well as the hiring and paying of Election Inspectors and Custodians. That means that starting in 2006, your pay checks will come from the County, not the municipalities. ERMA also specifies that training pay will rise in 2006 to \$25.00, and all inspectors and custodians in the county will receive the same pay on Election Day. It's up to our County Legislators to set the new rate, and we will strongly recommend they increase your pay. We will let you know when we have the exact figures.

How To: Write-in Ballots

When a voter wants to vote for a candidate whose name does not appear on the machine, they can do a "write-in." Refer them to the instructions at the top of the sample ballot, immediately following the heading "IF NAME IS NOT ON MACHINE".

To do a write-in, the voter must raise the diagonal sliding door at the top of the machine above the title of the office, and then write in their candidate's name.

Once a voter slides the diagonal sliding door up, they can no longer pull a lever for a candidate running for that office. This often explains those occurrences we hear about every election where a voter inside the curtain complains that they cannot pull down a lever. Almost always it is because they moved the write-in door. Regardless, if the voter denies that they touched the write-in door, please contact us and we will send a custodian to check it out.

Important reminder: do not offer unsolicited advice to voters, like "Remember, if you want to write-in someone, then you need to...". This could be misconstrued that you were advocating for a particular candidate, especially if there is a known write-in campaign going on.

Submissions Wanted

Are you an experienced Election Inspector? Or are you just starting out? Either way, you might have thoughts, concerns, or knowledge worth sharing with other Inspectors. We encourage you to send items to us, and we'll try to publish them in this newsletter. Anything from a short "Election Day Tip" to a longer piece like Jennifer Terpening's reflections on page 3. (Has anybody written an Election Inspector themed poem?!)

Call (274-5522) or email Tom Paolangeli (tpaolangeli@tompkins-co.org) for more information, or just send something in!



Reflections From a First Time Inspector

By Jennifer Terpening

My eyes were barely open. The birds were not yet chirping. The sun wasn't even out, but I managed to fumble my way to the house lights so that I could see. I was getting ready for a job that began at 5:30am: a position that would last only one day. What was I thinking when I said "yes" to being a voting inspector?

In preparation for this position, I was asked to take a short course on the voting process. "What can be involved with voting," I asked myself? One goes to the voting place, signs in, and votes. As I was about to find out, it's not all that simple. Along with learning the set up and use of the machines my instructional course covered the many "what ifs" that may arise. For example: "what if" you're registered and your name isn't in the voting register, "what if" you're in Ithaca and you're registered elsewhere, "what if" your name or address has changed, or "what if" you pre-registered with a well meaning group and they never turned in any of those names? All of these situations arose on voting day at Robert Purcell Community Center on the Cornell University Campus.

At 6:00 am sharp the official day began. Voters started arriving to participate in the democratic process of making choices and letting one's voice be heard. Most of our voters were between 18 and 21 years old and were voting for the very first time. It was a good thing that we had a sample machine set up to demonstrate how the actual voting machine would work as almost everyone needed the presentation. At times we had students stacked two and three deep.

Friends often came along with their cameras to document the first voting experience. The excitement was running high as was the volume of voters for that district. The international students also stopped by, not to vote but to observe democracy in action. They brought with them their own "what if" questions. Some of the questions were tough and as a citizen I should have known the answers, yet many times I didn't. Embarrassed, I was determined to do a little more research the next time.

As the day progressed the enthusiasm became infectious. There were just four of us working until early afternoon when we were joined by one other helper. Our day was so busy that my caloric intake consisted of yogurt, water, and a Snapple. We were put through our paces. This was my first inspector experience and thank goodness I was working with a group of knowledgeable people who were able to quickly assess and resolve every holdup.

We gave out "I voted" stickers and as it turned out they were a big hit. One student said that her roommates wouldn't let her into their room until she had an "I voted" sticker. Another student said that her professor was giving extra credit for bringing in an "I voted" sticker, so I gave her the rest of the sheet and figured she should be eligible for an "A". The stickers almost became a badge symbolizing the accomplishment of one's civic duty. At the end of the day I think we had approximately 535 voters, we had given out more than 535 stickers, we had thanked 535 citizens for voting, and we had met a significant number of young adults with an interest in the future of the United States.

When the doors closed at 9:00 pm, the people's voices were officially reflected through their votes. I was exhausted, but having spent the day with exuberant and interesting co-workers and students, I came away with an uplifting feeling that the opportunities for our country would continue to be in good hands. Was it worth getting up before the birds?...Yes! Would I do it again?...You Bet!



September 13 Primary Races

COUNTY LEGISLATURE

Dist. 1 (Democrat) Hank Dullea vs. Pamela Mackesey
Dist. 4 (Democrat) Joan Spielholz vs. Nathan Shinagawa vs. Matthew Thomas Bishop
Dist. 6 (Republican) Douglas T. McEver vs. Michael J. Sigler
Dist. 8 (Republican) Michael J. Kobre III vs. Gail S. Kaiser
Dist. 9 (Republican) George L. Totman vs. Duane T. Randall II

City of Ithaca

ALDERPERSON Ward 2 (Democrat)
Larry Roberts vs. J. R. Clairborne

Town of Ithaca

TOWN JUSTICE (Working Families)
Jim Salk vs. Glenn G. Galbreath

Town of Newfield

TOWN COUNCILPERSON (vote for 2) (Republicans)
Richard S. Gehring II vs. Cindy L. Schulte vs. Karen M. VanEtten

Help Wanted

We're always looking for new Inspectors! Tell your friends or relatives to call us for more information.

For questions or comments about this newsletter, contact Tom Paolangeli, 274-5522, or email: tpaolangeli@tompkins-co.org.

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Check our Web site:
www.votetompkins.com,
for information about upcoming and past elections.