

NEW STAFFING WITH AN INCREASED WORKLOAD

With a Presidential Election looming, voter involvement spiked. 2004 was a year of records as registration levels reached the highest ever, and absentee applications were arriving in stacks on a daily basis. Throughout the County, many organizations were conducting registration drives to encourage the public to take part in their inherent right to vote. During the last week to register, one group brought in over 1,000 forms. 5,244 new registrations were entered into our database between August 1st and October 31st alone. This does not include any address changes or status changes which account for over 3,000 changes to our database during the same time period. This meant that over 8,000 registration forms were processed in a 3 month time period.

On top of an increased workload, there were staffing changes as well. The Commissioners each appointed a Deputy Commissioner, a new position in our office. The Legislature also allowed us to employ two half time positions to help keep up with the increased demands caused by such a huge election year.

The entire staff put in extra hours this fall to ensure that all the necessary work was completed by our deadlines, and no voter was left behind.

HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT (HAVA)

Despite the fact that New York State has yet to pass legislation regarding HAVA requirements, our office proceeded to follow Federal Legislation and State Board guidelines in regards to HAVA.

ADJUSTING TO IDENTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Without a Statewide Database or the NYS approval of new Voting Machines, our biggest hurdle was implementing the new I.D. requirements into the procedures that we already have in place. Prior to the elections, voters still needing I.D. were sent letters, giving them the opportunity to comply before they went to vote. A list of those who had failed to provide identification was provided to the inspectors at each district, with instructions on how to proceed. Those on the list were required to fill out a HAVA sheet that we prepared, which asked for ID and listed the several options. Those who had no I.D. were asked to vote by Affidavit Ballot. These affidavits were later counted as stated by HAVA. We had very few voters who were unable to show ID on Election Day, and no complaints were made. All in all the process went smoothly.

CENTRALIZATION

Since State Legislation is not yet in place, the Commissioners have continued to lobby the Senators for centralization of the new voting machines. Commissioner Cree met with Senator Seward, and wrote letters to several other Senators across the state while Commissioner DeWitt met with Assemblywoman Barbara Lifton. The Commissioners have also met with the County Legislature over this issue. The county proceeded to send out questionnaires to all the municipalities regarding their voting machines, and the relative burdens and costs that are incurred on a yearly basis. The questionnaire also inquired about the ability of

the municipalities to comply with the new storage requirements set forth. This was an effort to determine if centralization would be a benefit to both the towns and the county as a whole. With centralization in place, the Board of Elections would have full control of the machines, as well as inspector and machine custodian training. This way we could ensure consistent and efficient training on the new machines. We would also oversee the proper maintenance of the machines.

VOTER REGISTRATION STATISTICS

MAILCHECK

A total of **49,041** mail check cards were mailed out on August 24, 2004 to all registered voters in Tompkins County. The mail check cards serve several purposes including verification of residence and mailing addresses, notification of election information, and the recruitment of election inspectors. This year we made a few changes to our normal procedure. We used yellow cards instead of the standard white cards in the hope that they would capture the attention of the voter. In the past we have found that voters assume the cards are junk mail and throw them away without a second glance. Later they call to complain they were never notified of the upcoming election dates. Also, on the card we stated what type of Party Primary was occurring this year. Many voters receive these cards and believe that they all are eligible for the Primary Election, then show up at the polls only to be told that they cannot vote, or to see that their polling place was closed because there was no Primary in their town. This led to some very discouraged voters. We hoped the new cards would avoid some of this confusion.

Mail Check Forwardable	1,742	In County Transfers	1,815
Mail Check Nonforwardable	1,109	Miscellaneous Returns	805
Total cards returned	5,471		

NATIONAL CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Every year the Board compares the voter rolls against the National Post Office Listing in May. This year we had a total of **4,045** changes. Over 1,000 of the changes had to be done manually due to discrepancies between the NCOA files and our files.

In County Transfers	494
Out of County Transfers (Inactive)	530

INSPECTORS

This year we conducted two major inspector-training classes with approximately 40 people per class. These were followed by 5 smaller training sessions for new inspectors, and for those who were unable to attend the previous training. Inspector recruitment is still a difficult process. We are still working with the

County to make Election Day a County holiday, so we can recruit County employees as inspectors. At the State level, efforts are being made to make Election Day a school holiday in the hope of recruiting teachers as inspectors as well. Considering the long hours, the pay rate is still very low, however, we have managed to bring all the towns rates up to a similar level. We are constantly looking for new inspectors, and we appreciate all the help we receive from the County and from current inspectors.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

ACCESS

In years past, we have used excel spreadsheets. This year, we created an Access database to input results. This database is extremely user friendly. It makes inputting and reading data much easier because each district has a separate page. The numbers do not run together and it's not as easy to make inputting errors. Also, the program was set up to create its own reports based on the data, and we were able to make the report look neat, clean, and easy to read. After the election, many organizations were asking for our results, and we were complimented on our new reporting system. Jeff Dupee from the Working Families party said “. . . they were the most comprehensive and detailed [results] in the state.” We also incorporated this program into our Call-in and Tallying Process.

CALL-IN & TALLYING PROCESS

This year, our office tried a new technique for calling in results. Rather than writing down results as they're called in and having them manually tallied, we tried a new process. At each station we had someone answering phones and someone entering the results into the new Access program that manually tallied the results into totals. This saved on the time it took to have results ready, and it cut down on possible human error. As the results were being processed, we had volunteers checking the inputted results versus the called-in results. On the night of the Presidential Election, we had results by 10:30pm and available to the public on our website. Normally results would not be available until the day after the election, so our process was obviously expedited.

WEBSITE UPDATE

Last year we changed our website from www.tompkins-co.org/boe to www.votetompkins.com with the realization that it is much easier to remember and to find. Also, the entire site has been revamped, and now provides a lot more information. We now have sample ballots, absentee ballot applications, and registration forms that can be printed from the website, and then mailed in. All the election results are also available. For potential candidates, there is information on how to run for office, including financial disclosure information. The website is now much more thorough and easier to work with.

STORAGE ROOM ORGANIZATION

Usually our organized storage room looks like a disaster area. There are boxes crammed full of documents stacked five boxes high, and eventually each stack looks like The Leaning Tower of Pisa. Employees enter the area at their

own risk, with the full realization that a tower could fall at the least disturbance. This is no longer true. We purchased 30 durable and stackable totes to store all our necessary records. They are organized by year, and the contents are described on the label. They are stacked no more than three high, and are easily accessed. We have cut down on space usage, and it is now much easier to navigate through the room. Our organized store room now actually looks organized. We were able to do this through records retention categorizing and moving 120 boxes of records to the "Old Library."

FUTURE PLANS

FULL DOCUMENT IMAGING

On December 1, 2004, we applied for a grant for Full Document Imaging. With the full document imaging we can scan all of our registration forms and store them on the computer. We would no longer need to store all our documents in the filing drawers. This would save us a huge amount of space. Also, we would no longer need to file the forms. This takes an enormous amount of time. If we receive the full document imaging, we will need to spend quite a bit of time scanning all the old registration forms that we have filed onto the computer. This will require extra staff for this process, but in the long run, the full document imaging will save us a lot of money and maintain staffing needs through the implementation of HAVA.

NEW VOTING MACHINES

We are still waiting on State Legislation for the new voting machines. Until this is passed, and the State certifies a voting machine, we will not be able to purchase new machines. We are hoping this will happen soon. We would like to begin the process of purchasing and training as soon as possible so that the first election we use them in will run smoothly.

STAFFING

2005 may not be a Presidential year, however, it is a huge local election year, and our workload will still be significantly higher than in past years. There are 69 offices open this year within the County, constituting over 60% of all the elected offices. Without the temporary help we had last year, it will be more difficult to keep up the increasing demands, however we will continue to get the work done, no matter what it takes, and maintain our position as a Board committed to excellence as well as fair and open elections.

Respectfully submitted,

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Commissioner of Elections

Stephen M. DeWitt