

## STAFFING CHANGES

2005 was a huge local election year, and our workload was significantly higher than past election years. There were 69 offices open this year and 229 candidates within the County, and we had several propositions on the ballot as well. This constitutes over 60% of all the elected offices within Tompkins County. With HAVA legislation being passed in July, we had plenty to do to get ready for all the changes that will be taking place across the state and within our office in the next few years. Added to this, we obtained a SARA Grant for Full Document Imaging. Of course, time made it necessary to start the project in October, amidst the chaos of a General election.

On top of an increased workload, there were staffing changes as well. Krystal Hastings was hired on as the Republican Sr. Elections Clerk in January. Two project assistants were hired in October, just to work on the Full Document project. County Personnel provided staff to quickly start the Full Document project until we were able to hire two project assistants.

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.

Also, Elizabeth Cree passed on the presidency of the Election Commissioner's Association to Commissioner Burke from Greene County in June.

## HELP AMERICA VOTE ACT (HAVA)

The Commissioners lobbied the state legislators and New York State finally passed legislation regarding HAVA requirements such as the Statewide Voter Database, Centralization, and Inspectors/Machine Custodians.

### LEGISLATION

There is still no Statewide Database, however, with new legislation in place, progress has been made. The State Board has hosted several meetings across the state regarding this matter that both the Commissioners, and Deputy Commissioner Tom Paolangeli have attended. NYS has set preliminary standards for new voting machines, and vendors are still in the process of meeting these standards and getting their machines certified. We continued the process of requesting ID's when necessary, and prior to the elections, voters still needing I.D. were sent letters, giving them the opportunity to comply before they went to vote. We also verified license numbers with DMV records, and those that did not match were also sent a letter. 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. We had no voters who were unable to show ID on Election Day, and no complaints were made. All in all the process again went smoothly.

## CONSOLIDATION

With State Legislation mandating centralization, this office has been preparing accordingly. After the General Election, we began taking possession of the old machines as required by law. Currently, we have machines from the City of Ithaca, the Town of Ithaca, and the Town of Lansing for a total of 46 machines. We are storing the machines in the Old Library Building. We have been coordinating with the Town Clerks to take over the rest of the machines in the next few weeks. All the Town Clerks were invited to two meetings with the Commissioners to discuss the consolidation process and to discuss any issues the Town Clerks had with centralization. The Town Clerks have been working with the machines and inspectors for years, and we thought it would be helpful to get their input. The old machines are still being used for Village Elections and the Ithaca City School Board Election. As of yet, no new voting machine has been certified, and we anticipate using the current machines in the fall elections as well. The Commissioners have been strategizing on how best to handle the new responsibility of election inspectors and machine custodians. In the past we have always recruited and assigned these positions, but we are now also responsible for their pay and training. Through the budget process, we have managed to get inspector and machine custodian pay significantly increased in order to better enlist higher quality assistance.

## VOTER REGISTRATION STATISTICS

### LOCAL YEAR

229 Candidates makes for a very busy year. 198 designating petitions and 31 independent petitions were filed. We also had several close races this year, especially in the Town of Enfield where the Town Supervisor's race came down to just ONE vote. The Commissioners were counting absentee and affidavit ballots for weeks.

### MAILCHECK

A total of 51,780 mail check cards were mailed out on August 26, 2005 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. Because some election districts contained a very large number of voters, new election districts were created. Mail check cards helped notify affected voters of their new polling site.

Mail Check Forwardable	1,033	In County Transfers	1,946
Mail Check Nonforwardable	4,548	Miscellaneous Returns	1,336
<b>Total cards returned</b>	<b>9,446</b>		

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 1837 changes.

In County Transfers	653
Out of County Transfers (Inactive)	1108

INSPECTORS

This year we conducted three major inspector-training classes with approximately 40 people per class. These were followed by several smaller training sessions for new inspectors, and for those who were unable to attend the previous training. Inspector recruitment is still a difficult process, but hopefully with the pay increase, it will become easier in the future. We are constantly looking for new inspectors, and we appreciate all the help we receive from the County and from current inspectors.

ABSENTEES

This year, Kate Bortz processed 1,497 absentee applications and ballots were sent out. Of those, 1,066 were returned. Each year, the Senior Clerks visit nursing homes within the county. In order to visit a nursing home, they must have at least 25 eligible voters for the election. This year we visited both Kendall and Longview for the General Election. We hand delivered 101 ballots to residents of the nursing home, who are eligible for a permanent ballot.

**SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS**

ACCESS

After our success last year with our results database, Laura Owens, developed databases for Petition filing, Campaign Finance Disclosures, and Inspectors. This way we are able to easily track information from past years in order to streamline our processes. At the Annual State Board of Elections Conference in May, we were again awarded a Certificate of Outstanding Achievement for Innovative Concepts developed in the field of Election Administration & Operation for both our access databases and web development.

CALL-IN & TALLYING PROCESS

Every year we use the Lions Club to help us answer phones and tally results. This year, we had several student interns answering phones for us on the night of the Primary Election. These were high school students who were interested government operations and the election process. They were fun to work with, and it was great to see such enthusiasm.

### WEBSITE UPDATE

This year Tom Paolangeli continued to update our website on a daily basis providing detailed information to the constituents year round. There is now more content that is better organized. The website has proven to be a useful tool for the public with 17,413 hits.

### BUDGET

This year, budget time was particularly hectic. With so many new procedures and costs being added to our workload, the Commissioners worked very closely with the Legislature and the County Administrator to put together a solid budget that allowed us to follow the federal and state mandates that have been thrown at us. Centralization alone has added many new and ongoing costs that we have never had to account for before. The process was long and tedious, but in the end we were able to sort it all out. We want to give a special thanks to the legislators for all of their assistance during this very important time period.

### INSPECTOR NEWSLETTER

This year we started putting out a quarterly inspector newsletter. This newsletter goes out to all of our inspectors. It has articles written by both new and seasoned inspectors about working the polls, along with helpful hints about problems that have occurred in the past and potential issues in the future. We have also been providing updates about HAVA legislation and what it means to the inspectors on Election Day. We have received several compliments from inspectors about how useful it is. It is nice for them to hear from us throughout the year rather than just before election time. We have also been using it to recruit new inspectors. It gives people an idea of what the job entails.

### REDISTRICTING

With an increasing population in Tompkins County, our registration rolls have been increasing as well. Several districts within the town have seen a large increase. Because of this, it was necessary to create 3 new election districts and to redraw the election lines within Ward 2 in the City of Ithaca. Commissioner DeWitt worked diligently to even out the details. After the redistricting we sent out notices to all of the voters who were affected by the change. Many of them had different polling locations for the elections in the fall, and we wanted to cut down on the amount of confusion on election day.

## FUTURE PLANS

### FULL DOCUMENT IMAGING

This fall we obtained the SARA Grant that we applied for last year. We have already started the process of scanning all of our back files, however for the next few months we will be very busy scanning in all of our forms by the deadline we were given in April. The grant also gives us money for 2 project assistants who we hired in October. Jennifer Terpening (an election inspector) and Shaheen

Rogers (formerly of the District Attorney's office) have joined us and will be assisting us with the Full Document project for the next several months.

NEW VOTING MACHINES

Some State Legislation has been passed for the new voting machines. However; the vendors are still in the process of having their voting machines certified by the State Board. Until 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. All of our staff needs to be trained before we can begin the process of educating the public and training our inspectors.

STAFFING

2006 will be a very busy year for us. We have several countywide races, plus senatorial and congressional races. In addition to our regular duties here at the board, we will be implementing major changes in all of our procedures. We will be maintaining the staff levels we have had for the last year, despite the significantly increased workload caused by the HAVA changes. Our two project assistants are funded through the SARA grant and therefore are only permitted to work on Full Document Imaging. As always, the Board of Elections is committed to holding itself the highest standards, and we will continue to strive toward excellence in all elections.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth W. Cree

Commissioners of Elections

Stephen M. DeWitt