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A Message from the President

By Jennie H. Bacon, ECA President, (D) Commissioner, St. Lawrence County



Jennie H. Bacon, St. Lawrence County

Dear Fellow Commissioners and Government Officials,

To become the President of the New York State Election Commissioners Association was beyond my wildest dreams when I first became a member of the Association in 2008 as Deputy Commissioner. The knowledge and proficiency of all my fellow commissioners was absolutely remarkable to me. The Election process has made some extraordinary changes since I began my career at the St. Lawrence County Board of Elections in 2006. I was once told it would take a full four years before you learn the entire election cycle. I have since come to the realization that we will never truly know everything pertaining to elections with continuous change; we all continue to learn as we go. Without

change it would be difficult for us to endlessly improve the Election Process. The fortunate part for all New York State Commissioners is having well-informed colleagues throughout the state who are always willing to share information or lend some helpful advice when necessary. The number of voters in St. Lawrence County may not compare to the voters in New York City, however we are doing the same thing; we are just doing it on a considerably smaller scale, as we may have different obstacles, we all strive to accomplish the same goal.

I take great pride to be serving as the president of this association. As we approach the upcoming chaotic 2016 Election year, with March Village Elections, Presidential Primary in April, School Board Elections in May, Federal Primary in June, petitions in July and August, September Primary, and the General Election in November, bear in mind that you have the support of your colleagues across the state. Keep your head held high, remember voting is an exquisite right, and we have the privilege of ensuring the integrity of our voting process. I would like to thank all the dedicated election professionals who work tirelessly to run honest and fair elections throughout New York State.

Jennie H. Bacon
President

**ECA
Winter Conference
January 11-14, 2016
Albany, NY**

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Have a safe and happy holiday season!

Inspector School: What a Hoot!

By Judith L. Garrison, (D) Commissioner, Delaware County

Some of the problems and complaints we as a Board wrestle with every year post-election have no clear resolution: inspectors who don't properly refer voters to their correct poll site; inspectors who wish their fellow workers wouldn't talk so much, or seemingly "lead" the voter when explaining a ballot; party committee members with similar grievances; and, not least, our own staff wishing that the information imparted at annual inspector school would sink in and stick.

Our staff came up with the notion of making role play part of our inspector training this past year. We created 7 different scenarios culled from problem situations frequently encountered. In our sessions we called for 2 volunteers, one a new inspector, one a seasoned one, to come forward to a staged table supplied with poll books, sleeves and ballots and be confronted by an "actor" voter who was prepared to enact each scenario in an unrehearsed skit. Improv! In some of the cases one of the trainer deputy commissioners would set out the basic situation. In many of the trainings I—yes, the commissioner divesting myself of all dignity—impersonated an array of variously confused, loquacious, antagonistic, and sometimes cooperative voters.

What fun! I could be an over-garrulous acquaintance of the poll worker, sharing medical advice; a Republican irked at not having been properly informed that she was at a Democratic-only primary; someone who had recently moved returning to her comfortable old poll site; a woman insisting



she was in the right place, though not in the poll book. Audience members were encouraged to chime in with a response if the "inspector" hesitated with befuddlement, or to shout out a correction if they disagreed with the answers being given.

Then one of the trainers would either commend the "inspector" for the proper response or offer a correction by explaining the law or proposing an alternative method for handling the situation, such as "call the election office", or "give directions to the correct poll site."

I (others also played the voter role) and the volunteer and conscripted actors got a kick out of our dramatics and the audience members often enjoyed a good laugh. Most importantly, I think we all agreed that being presented with a real-life challenge followed by an explanation or explication led to useful behavior models for a real-life election; and, we hope, greater clarity regarding procedure and election law.

So, adding a bit of *Saturday Night Live* to our otherwise serious and straightforward training will probably become a regular practice with us. And when criticisms and grumbles about polling place behavior roll in, one response from our staff now is, "We'll emphasize that in next summer's inspector school, maybe even in a role play."

Recent Election Law Changes Have Helped Facilitate Elections Using Our Youth and Seniors

By Chautauqua County Commissioners Norman P. Green & Brian Abram

While it's not always fair, election professionals commonly complain about out-of-date election laws and how our balloting law actually hinders us from conducting efficient elections. However, it must be pointed out that some recent election law changes have truly been quite beneficial in mobilizing our senior and youth population to assist in running Chautauqua County elections.

Election Law § 3-401 (8) allows the Board of Elections to employ 17-year-olds to be eligible to be appointed and to perform the duties of an election

inspector. This has been quite handy in our county, particularly by using our young citizens who are not quite ready to vote themselves as greeters who use our handheld AskED© computers to look up voter records and properly identify election district tables at super poll sites.

The students are recommended by their particular civics teachers and are excused from class as part of their government observation requirements. It's truly a win-win for the students, school and the voting public.

Election Law § 3-401 (7) allows the Board of Elections to employ election inspectors to work part-day shifts. This allows us to prolong the involvement of the oldest of our senior citizen inspectors who can't work the 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. workday anymore, but still have much to offer toward our goal of well-conducted elections.

All of the safeguards needed for a safe and secure election remain. But the addition of our youth and the extension of service by our senior citizens have been wonderful for the voters of Chautauqua County.

Serving Voters with Disabilities

By Cattaraugus County

Little Valley, NY - The voting booths were humming as the Board of Elections went through all the last-minute check lists to be sure that everything was ready for voting, but this day was not a cool Tuesday in November, it was gearing up to be a very warm day in June. The Board of Elections, Volunteers from Directions in Independent Living and Self Advocacy Association of New York State regional a self-advocacy group hosted a voting experience with the ImageCast ADA voting machine.

B.J. Stasio and Darren Jackson from Self-Advocacy Association of NY State (SANYS) work with people in the region who have a wide range of developmental disabilities. Some of these people throughout their lives have encountered barriers due to their disabilities that have put limits on their ability to fully participate in the full range of life's experiences. The self-advocacy groups help them join together to team up and overcome many of those intimidating barriers, and the Cattaraugus County Board of Elections has joined the team in the effort to reduce one barrier faced by many people who have a variety of disabilities - the right to cast a ballot on Election Day.

Voting by mail-in absentee ballot at home has often been the traditional option used by elderly and disabled voters. However, accessible voting



provides the same opportunity for access and participation to persons with disabilities as for other voters. A voter can choose someone to assist entering the polling location, checking in, entering the voting booth, preparing the ballot, exiting the booth and checking out as an option. Both federal law and state requirements also mandate the option that voting systems be equipped for voters with or without disabilities allowing such voters to have the same opportunity to vote privately and independently. It is required that every election district must have at least one accessible voting machine available.

As B.J. Stasio said "we know how important voting is as a society" and participating in voting is such an essential American right, and that is why he reached out to Directions in Independent Living to help facilitate the Cattaraugus County Voting Event with the Cattaraugus County Board of Elections. Republican Commissioner Sue A. Fries and Democratic Commissioner Kevin Burluson have a good working relationship with Directions in working to assure that all polling places in Cattaraugus County are ADA compliant for access to all people with disabilities. When they were asked if a voting machine could

We know how important voting is as a society, and participating in voting is such an essential American right...

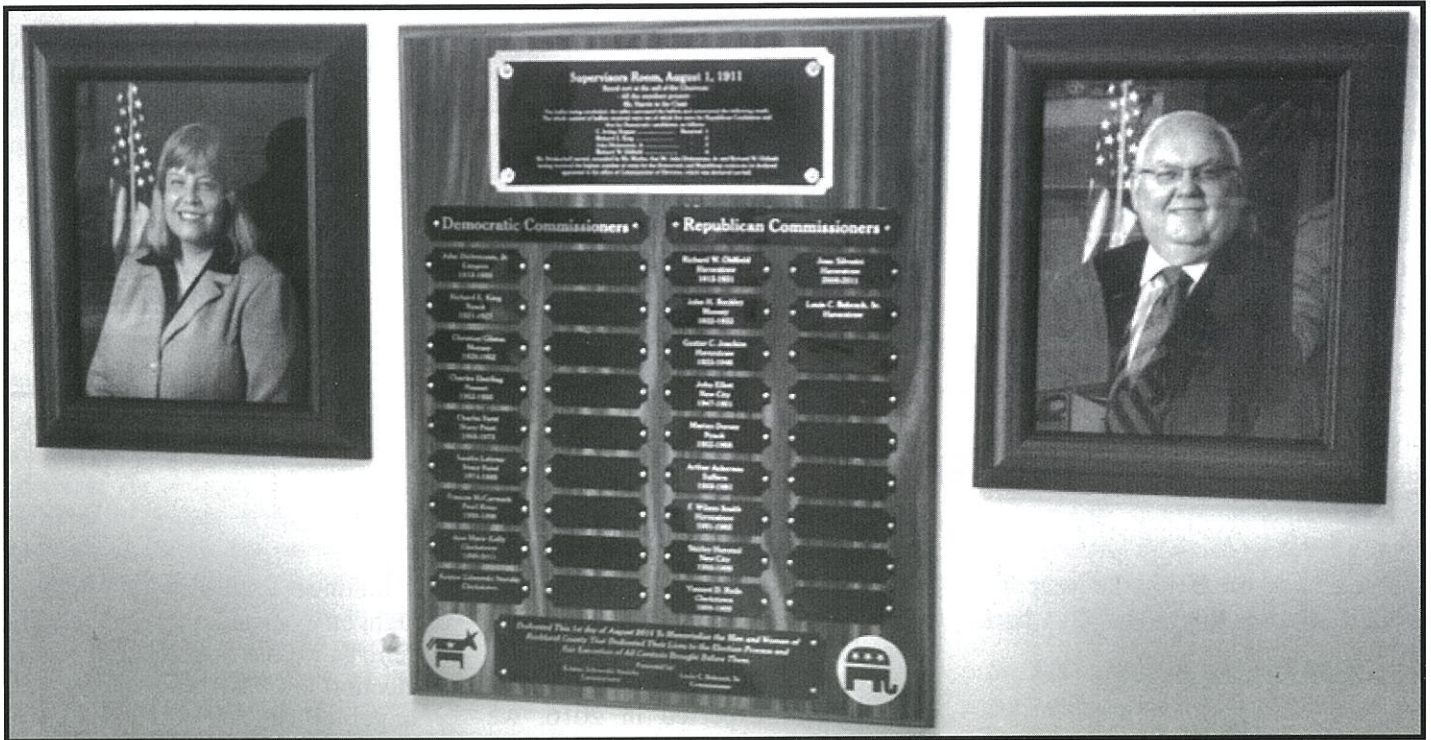
be available for hands-on use for the hands-on voting event, not only did they roll out the machine and adaptive equipment, they rolled out the entire experience with ballots, poll workers and the commissioners in attendance.

The day involved the full mock election experience with our "candidates" self-advocates B.J. and Darren engaging in a lively debate over the crucial issue we were voting on for the day - the merits of Bologna sandwiches or Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches. The debate moderator for the day was Sadie Jay-Edwards from Directions in Independent Living, and Commissioner Fries gave a presentation on the importance of voting and offered to register voters who were not currently registered.



Commissioners Plaque Unveiled

By Rockland County



The Rockland County BOE has unveiled a plaque to honor all of the RCBOE Commissioners since its creation on August 1, 1911. It is accompanied by portraits of the current commissioners and is in the lobby of the BOE. No taxpayer funds were used to purchase the portraits nor the plaque. Research for the names and terms of office was performed by the Rockland County Clerk's office along with the Rockland County Archivist.

Making Things a Little More Efficient for the Board of Elections and Inspectors

By David M. DiPasquale, (D) Commissioner, Livingston County

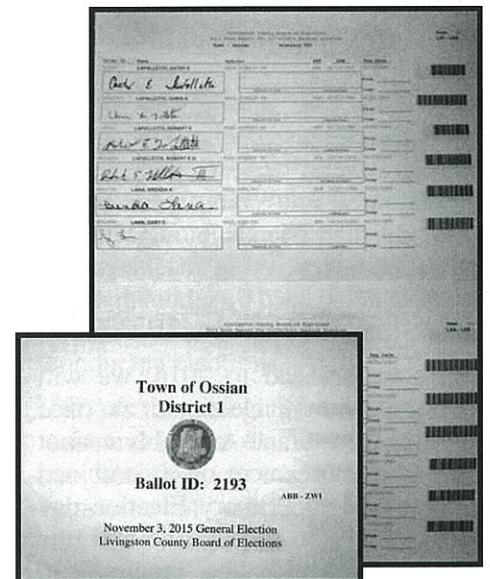
We are constantly working at making the election process more efficient for our election inspectors and our voters. This past year we purchased a new component to our copier, a booklet maker. This allows us to have a completed poll book when it comes off of the printer. There are no more plastic combs, no more GVC punching only a few pieces of paper at a time, and no more plastic combs falling apart at the poll sites.

Our county prints our own ballots and has always printed our own poll books. We take the document from our NTS poll book application and manipulate the document to fit as

a booklet, send it to the printer, and have a completed poll book when the process is complete. This has made the process much more efficient.

We did a "test run" of the new poll book at this past November's election and the inspectors liked the changes to the poll books. They said the poll books were easier to handle, didn't fall apart, and laid open for easier signing.

Just like everyone we continually try to make our office and our poll sites more efficient for our election inspectors and our voters.



Voting Transparency

By Laura Costello, (D) Commissioner, Madison County

When New York State was making the decision on a new voting system in 2008, the word “transparency” became the buzzword around the state. Even while the voters were anxious about losing the lever machines, they saw the possibilities in being able to verify every vote. At the same time HAVA requirements had all the election boards writing clear policies and procedures

on how we would handle all aspects of using a paper ballot voting system. Now that we’ve had several years of experience working with the “new” system, the benefits are clearly beyond voting accessibility. Voters can easily see and verify each and every step of the process. Our voter files continue to be available to the public, our policies are clearly documented and the votes are

physically verifiable. We have hand-counted machine audits that validate the accuracy of the count. During our absentee count, observers can view and confirm each voted ballot.

We have achieved a transparent voting process that the voters can believe in and that benefits all of us.

Another Year Down

By Veronica Olin, (R) Commissioner, Steuben County

Looking back on 2015, the year has brought us a few things to reflect back upon:



The 100th year anniversary of our Election Commissioners’ Association, meeting several new Commissioners and Deputies, and saying good-bye to colleagues and friends, along with the end of the lever voting machines that were still being used by school districts, villages, and fire and water districts.

As we look ahead to 2016, we will be faced with 4 elections, as once again the Senate and Assembly cannot come to an agreement on a combined State and Local Primary Election day that would be in compliance with the 45-day military ballot requirement.

Many counties already run their school and village elections, and will be adding those election dates to the now-growing list of election days. Along with heavy voter turnout expected in 2016, we will need every election inspector/poll worker we can train.

Faced with the loss of using the lever voting machines at the end of 2015, the counties, where once school districts and villages had wanted no help from the county Board of Elections, are now contacting them to either allow them use of the new voting machines, or to run their election for them. This brings with it a whole new learning experience and schedule.

We continue to deal with problems brought on by changes within the postal system, as well as updates and changes in election law. As an association, or a single office, we will continue to serve the voters, candidates, and the people in our county, by ensuring that all elections are handled in an honest, open fashion.

As we begin a new year, I am thankful for all those colleagues who willingly lend a helping hand, by either answering a question, sharing their office policies and procedures, or just talking through a problem. With the upcoming challenges of 2016, I am sure there will be a few phone calls made to my fellow colleagues.



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