



Centralization new!

**By Robert C. Howe,
President,
Election Commissioners'
Association of the State
of New York**

What is centralization? The county taking over ownership of the voting machines currently owned by every municipality. Without centralization at every election, each voting machine is moved from several locations in the county. For all practicality this method is no longer a viable option. With the ownership of the new machines, it is no longer possible to maintain machines from various locations. The new machines will have to be serviced 3 times a year, maintained all in one location, and in a climate-controlled environment. Our state needs to pass this resolution; if not, then it will be up to each county to take the leadership and pass their own resolution.



We All Live in a Yellow Submarine!

By Robert Brehm, Schenectady County

February 1st began as an ordinary Saturday. However midway through my coffee and newspaper, the morning was interrupted with news that the Space Shuttle Columbia was lost during its re-entry into Earth's atmosphere. For the remainder of the morning the family gathered around the kitchen table switching channels for any new information. That is until the telephone rang at about 11:30 a.m.

"Are you the Bob Brehm from the Board of Elections," came the voice on the telephone. In the past I have found that those words are not a good way to begin a conversation. Sometime after the Board of Elections office closed on Friday two of the buildings' water lines burst. For a bit of background, our office was located on the first floor in a large building that was a former department store in downtown Schenectady. The fire department was on the scene and needed to notify us of the damage. It took me all of 5 minutes to drive to the office where I learned firsthand that my day was going to get much worse. Water was everywhere.

The first floor had about 1" to 2" of water everywhere. But nothing could prepare me for what I observed in the basement. There was over five feet of water and the level was climbing. Our county records management storage was in the basement and it now looked and smelled like an awful "stew."

I immediately went to the computer room and ejected the previous night's backup tape from the server and shut down all of the computer equipment. This was done

before water damaged the system and the fire department had called for the power to the building to be cut. For the next two weeks the staff of the Board of Elections moved, sorted and sifted through everything we owned to check for damage.

During the flood, boxes stacked on the floor containing election papers, old poll books and the like became wet. The bottom boxes were weakened by the water and tipped over putting more papers into the water. Sorted were the materials that were (1) dry and could be moved to a safe location; (2) wet and we could throw away; (3) dry and needed to be retained according to the archive schedule; and (4) wet and needed to be retained in accordance with the archive schedule.

Lessons come in many forms. From this occurrence we learned that there is something called an application through the state archive office for "emergency" destruction. Due to the bigger problem faced by the county records office, state archive people were on the scene the first day and many times during the cleanup process. We did receive permission for emergency destruction of the wet records that should have been retained.

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CONFERENCE DATES

ECA Summer Conference
June 23, 24 & 25, 2003
Cooperstown, NY

Dealing With The Stress Of New Federal Mandates

By Elizabeth W. Cree, Second Vice-President

HAVA (The Help America Vote Act) was only passed in the fall of 2002, and our whole world as Election Commissioners has changed over night. To further complicate matters, we are looking forward to our busiest year in a four-year cycle of elections. New machines must be installed by 2004 to meet the requirements of the new bill. In past presidential years, Tompkins County, which is home to Cornell University and Ithaca College, has had record voter turnout in the state and huge increases in voter registrations. Now our office is adding completely new election procedures, running a March Statewide Primary, processing new voter identification requirements, and is adding a statewide database that will change our whole registration system. Needless to say, our staff is feeling the pressure. Complicating matters more is the state of our county's budget. We have been facing tough budget times for the past two years—our office was cut by almost 25%, reducing two positions for 2003.

New mandates and worries about the budget have caused the public to raise many questions. We are still in the interpretation part and do not have all the answers to many of the questions. Voters and municipalities want to know: Why do we have to purchase new machines? Who will own these machines? Where will the money come from? Will there be enough funds for every election

district? How will inspectors operate these new machines?

Misinformation has already started to flow from different sources on the interpretation of the new law. Some of our towns thought they would have to pay for the new machines. It is our understanding that money will be allocated for the replacement of lever machines to some extent if not in full. Not knowing all the answers, not having adequate staff, and not knowing how to proceed adds extra stress to our daily work lives.

How are we working with this added pressure? We have learned to have aspirin on hand, we have added ice cream and caffeinated drinks to our daily diet, and we eventually plan to exercise more. Now we do have a small group of concerned citizens that do understand we work more than "one day a year." They show their support by providing us with truffles, donuts, bagels, cookies and a sampling of pastries. We are hoping for headlines that read "New Machines in Elections are Running Smoothly." But, we may end off with headlines about our office: "Board of Elections Staff Found to Have High Levels of Malnutrition from a Diet of Too Many Sweets." Putting all that aside, we as election professionals possess a personal pride in providing fair, accessible elections in New York State. Despite our lack of staffing and ever increasing demands, we always manage to get the job done.

Yellow Submarine continued from front cover.

Most important we learned the enormous value to have a full document imaging system and a working – redundant computer information backup process. There was a tremendous mess from the wet boxes and from the team of workers trying to clean the water from the building. However, all of the office records were safely stored off-site in the vault of a neighborhood bank. While the papers were damaged, the value of the material represented by the information on the pages was safely recorded in the voter registration system and the full document imaging system. The Board would have suffered a greater loss had it not been for our efforts to electronically record and safely store the information off-site.

We never know when an emergency will strike. However, this is a good reminder that each office should review their system security making sure that information is stored in a safe environment with a redundant off-site storage process. It doesn't help to have the backup medium stored in the same location as the computers because they can both be damaged with one emergency.

There is a silver lining to the storm clouds of February 1st. Just 79 days later, on May 1st the Board of Elections moved into new office space at 388 Broadway, Suite E, Schenectady, NY 12305. All of our boxes are neatly stored on shelves and the computers and information are fully working without the loss of any information. And, we gladly visit the safety deposit box to regularly update our computer backup medium.

FYI-The Power Of Perception

As a society, we have never been more aware of the power of perception than we are today. The motto has become to "error on the side of caution."

With the Federal and State governments requiring and appropriating money for the purchase and updating of voting equipment, we must now be the ones to consciously act with great caution.

We must be ever aware of what we are doing and how we are doing it when it comes to voting equipment as all of our actions could be put under a microscope.

We have a wonderful reputation for doing the right thing, and this is just a reminder to each of us to be ever vigilant.

You Haven't "Seen It All"

By Thomas S. Burke, Greene County

At last winter's Election Conference in Rochester there was some general discussion regarding village elections and a few of the characteristics that seem to set them apart from the November elections. Spring versus fall, the lack of affidavits and a shorter polling day come to mind.

There is at least one village, however, that since its incorporation in 1806, has operated under a charter that might make you feel that you haven't "seen it all."

For starters, the Village of Catskill, in Greene County, holds its annual election on the fourth Tuesday in

March. You'll find contests for trustee and village justice, but you will never vote for the office of Mayor. There is no Mayor in Catskill. There is, however, a President of the village of Catskill, and he/she is selected annually by a vote of the five village trustees. The President is selected on election night after the election results are announced.

Another interesting aspect of Catskill's charter is the method of budget approval. While virtually all municipalities require a vote of an election board for budget approval, Catskill's unique charter allows village residents and registered voters a direct

voice in the annual budget process. In fact, village residents can vote category by category to increase or decrease a budget line item. Therefore, when casting their votes, the elected officials are merely casting their votes as village residents, not in their capacity as elected officials. This has made for some interesting outcomes in the village of Catskill budgetary process.

As we prepare to deal with what we expect will be the sweeping changes associated with "HAVA," on the 4th Tuesday in March, in the village of Catskill NY, "the more things change, the more they stay the same."

Maps, Maps and More Maps

By Larry Adamczyk

Last year we received the state-approved new congressional, state senate and assembly redistricting plans. The county then set out to redraw legislative districts, and the cities and towns, council districts and wards.

The county redistricting was subject to a November 2002 referendum to reduce the number of legislative districts from 17 to 15. Although the voters approved the downsizing, lawsuits challenging the plan were filed in Federal Court, further delaying our map-making efforts.

In December 2002 we began checking the new county legislative lines throughout the various towns looking for possible split election districts. In the course of this process we discovered that some existing town maps had technical errors in their election district lines, necessitating a complete reexamination of all the towns' district lines, and the 1,006 election districts in Erie County.

The City of Buffalo sent its redistricting plan to us in January of

this year, at which time we began manually preparing maps. After much of the work was complete, the City's Legal Department realized they had sent us the wrong plan. In February we received Plan 13 from the city, so we had to start again from scratch.

During the city re-mapping process, several "islands" were evident, requiring consolidation. Additionally, numerous election districts had to be recoded and renumbered.

Recently, we completed manually drawn maps. These were sent to the County Department of Environment and Planning where maps will be drawn using Geographic Information System (GIS) software.

We will proof and reproof these maps before sending them out to bid for printing.

However, we're not done. Two cities, Lackawanna and Tonawanda, have yet to finalize their redistricting plans.

Maps, maps and more maps make merrier the madness after reapportionment!

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OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK

2003-2004



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A Message from the Editor

By Carolee Sunderland, Editor



**WORKING AT A
BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

**THE BEST OF TIMES...
THE WORST OF TIMES...**

First Ask Yourself “Can I work at a Board of Elections?” Or, Better Yet, “Am I up to working at a Board of Elections?” I am often asked how can I get a job at the Board of Elections? It must be interesting to work there and not too difficult! As we all know New York State Election Law governs as to the requirements for working at a BOE in New York State. What is not in THAT book is:

Summer into late Fall vacations can be very hard to come by, leaving early – not good, along with much overtime and extra work for all. True, the Winter into Spring season usually is a bit slower and taking time off a bit easier; remembering there are always exceptions to the rule if a Special Election is called or in a Presidential year.

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN

If you can’t take direction from others, you might find it difficult at a BOE. Have trouble doing physical work – there is always a box to move, supplies to lift, research to do, or if you can’t sit and do a job over, and over, and over again you could have a problem. When something goes wrong or needs correcting, if it doesn’t concern you or your Department, “stay out of it”. Keep doing your job—and do it correctly.

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN

If you are going to complain, inform your supervisor – not another co-worker. Remember, it’s your complaint, not theirs. Never argue where the public can hear or see you. Remember – the next day you may well “patch up” your differences but

the “public” that was present the day before won’t be there to see or hear that part of your conversation. What will be remembered and told outside the BOE in the days to come will be that the “BOE staff can’t get along and they don’t know what they are doing in that office.”

If you have a full time position with a BOE, that’s what it is. You shouldn’t think you can make it a part time one by calling in each week with a reason for not showing up or coming in late. Try doing your work instead of watching the staff members that sit around you – otherwise we now have two BOE staff not doing their work! No doubt about it, working at a BOE can be interesting and is hard work at times. Not your average 9 to 5, Monday to Friday, easy summer living job. So, as I suggested earlier in the article, ask yourself a few questions; however, most importantly when you are interviewed for a position that YOU inquired about, LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN to what the Commissioner says.

People who do not work at a BOE think it is so easy to work at a BOE. NOT TRUE. New York State election Law mandates all that we do; therefore, it is hard to be creative at a BOE. Flexibility is a must.

There can be a sense of amazement at the end of an Election to know, even if it was in your own small way, you were a part of a very large picture called the ELECTION PROCESS on a County, State or Federal level. Meaning – you moved that box, stayed late to finish registration applications, worked on a Saturday to get absentee ballots in the mail, packed supply bags, listened to a voter complain, presented to the public a BOE staff that works together, and let the Commissioners make the decisions because they have to explain their reason for doing so. Knowing that you helped potential new voters, current registered voter and candidates participate in this Election Process to the best of your ability can be a great feeling and it CAN be very a interesting job at a Board of Elections!

**THE BEST OF TIMES
THE WORST OF TIMES**

To Be Continued...

Incoming Office Faxes

By Joan Grainer,
Montgomery County

Incoming office faxes sometimes can use a lot of ink up on junk mail.

Recently I hurriedly dialed the toll-free number given to remove our fax number.

To my surprise, the response on the other end of the line was “This is the Witches’ Hot Line of Massachusetts.”

I curiously waited for more info – a voice then come on and stated, “A witch will be with you shortly.”

Quietly, I hung up the phone!

Participating In Democracy

By Sue Fries,
Cattaraugus County

On Wednesday, February 5, seniors from Mr. Ratel’s and Mr. Bohn’s Social Studies classes attended a presentation from the Cattaraugus Board of Elections. Karen Byrne, the Democratic Deputy Election Commissioner and Sue A. Fries, the Republican Election Commissioner instructed students on the importance of participating in a democracy and the challenge of increasing voter turnout amongst young people. Jody L. Shaw, the former Gowanda District Clerk and current Administrative Secretary also advised students on the upcoming school budget vote (May 20, 2003). Before leaving school today, each student was asked to fill out a voter registration form. Most Gowanda seniors study Government and Economics which covers a variety of issues including voter behavior.



THERE MAY BE MORE TO LIFE THAN HAVA

By Dave Gamache, Chair., Legislative Committee

HAVA HAVA HAVA HAVA. There are times when it is all we seem to think about. Yet, we all have elections to run this year and a Presidential primary, primary and general election to conduct next year before the full impact of HAVA will hit local Boards of Elections.

The New York State Budget is nearly final. As can be expected, much of the activity of the state Legislature so far this session has been centered on budget issues. Now that the budget is final, legislators and their staffs will begin to focus on other issues, including elections.

There may be some minor non-HAVA related election law changes in place for this year's elections. For example, it appears that more time may be provided for a military ballot to be received after an election. New laws such as this will be reviewed at the 2003 summer conference in Cooperstown. By that time the state legislature will have had several weeks to address elections issues.

The legislative committee has focused its entire attention on the issue of centralization. Some members of the committee, along with some members of the executive committee,

recently met in Albany with the staffs of the Senate Elections and Assembly Election Laws Committee. During the meetings the commissioners also met with Assemblyman Keith Wright, the Chair of the Assembly Election Laws Committee, and I had the opportunity to meet with State Senator Thomas Morahan, Chair of the Senate Elections Committee. The commissioners present gave a strong presentation supporting Board centralization. Both of the committee Chairs, Assemblyman Wright and State Senator Morahan, were encouraging and supportive of the centralization issue. Both indicated there was a strong probability that centralization of county boards would soon be a reality.

The legislative committee recognizes there are other issues beyond centralization. However, given the impending impacts of HAVA, the centralization issue is vital for our long-term future ability to properly conduct elections. But issues such as elections inspectors' compensation, elections inspectors' training and the spring primary are all issues that have importance to county boards.

On the issue of the spring primary, it is still a long shot that it will be adopted anytime soon. However, there seems to be more support in the legislature for the spring primary than there has been in some time. One of the many benefits of an earlier primary is the ability to have absentee ballots printed, mailed, received, voted and returned in a timely manner. The late primary causes some voters to receive the ballot late and, thus, the ballot is returned to the Board of Elections by the voter too late to be counted. Having the vote of everyone eligible to vote and have their vote counted is a concept important to all of us and is an argument being made and heard by some state legislators.

It remains important for all elections commissioners to speak with their state legislators about the importance of centralization, as well as our other issues, at every opportunity. These state legislators count on us to properly and fairly conduct elections. Your state legislators are receptive to your ideas and individually we are their best and most trusted source of information regarding the conduct of elections.

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*** notifies other counties

A Sentimental Journey

by Tom Wilkey, Executive Director, State Board of Elections

I have had the great privilege over these many years to write and speak to you often on so many occasions and on so many topics. These opportunities have given me the chance to talk with you about good things and bad, the good old days as well as the future. Some messages were easy to write and talk to you about, and others, like this one – especially this one – are far more difficult, for this will be the last. As many of you know, I will be leaving the State Board in mid-summer and there are no words that can adequately convey all of the emotions I feel as I write this today.

As I look back over nearly 35 years in this business of elections administration, I see a fascinating, heart-felt journey, complete as all life's journeys are, with ups and downs, good things and bad – the sorts of things all of us ultimately face along a similar journey.

Along the way, I have been blessed beyond belief, by some extraordinary people who have supported and guided me through all of my successes, as well as my mistakes.

During those early Buffalo years, I was privileged to have the support, wisdom, advice and friendship of such great people as Ed Mahoney, Joe Crangle, Ray Lawley, Bill Cramer, Harold Doney and Bill Quinn. These, and so many others who worked then, and many who continue to work today at 134 West Eagle Street, fill me with such fond memories.

During those early years, I was also so very grateful to have had the support of my Rochester neighbors, Betsy, Bill, Susan, Ron and my adopted dad, Jim Chivaroli.

During my 24-plus years at the State Board, I have been privileged to be surrounded by so many good people who have given their support, their loyalty and

their friendship – to name them all would take more space than allowed here, and I fear that I would leave someone out. Suffice it to say, I am grateful beyond words to all of them and will miss them more than they will ever know.

It is for you at the county level, that I chose to continue to do this work. I hope I have never forgotten that the real job of running elections is in your capable hands – and I have been privileged to be a part of it and to have had your support and friendship.

Throughout my years at the State Board, I have been given an extra special blessing, in that I have had the great opportunity to come to know so many wonderful friends and colleagues throughout the country. From my many years of association with such organizations as the Election Center and NASED, I have had the honor and privilege of working with a great number of outstanding people, many of whom have become life long friends, and others still, whom I have come to call, with great affection, my Brothers and Sisters.

Some people have asked what my legacy will be after so many years of service to the State Board, though I truly believe that those before me and those who follow, may well have accomplished more. I would like for it to be said that I have treated everyone with honesty and with respect. Over the course of these years, I have attempted to treat everyone the same, from the far right to the far left and everyone in between. And while there have been a number of goals and accomplishments during my tenure, none was greater than my goal to help raise the professional status of election officials here in New York and throughout the nation.

As to the career highlights, there have been many, but none more awe-inspiring than watching first hand, our New York City colleagues, who went above and beyond the normal call of duty, to achieve the unbelievable task of conducting four elections in the aftermath of the terrible events of September 11th. It was an honor to have played a minor role in their saga, beginning with my presence there on that tragic day, the events of which will be forever carved in my memory.

Over the course of the past several months, I have had the good fortune to address you on a number of occasions, and each time the message has been consistent and familiar, for it remains all that I believe and all that I am: On the day that I was born, my Creator drew for me a map outlining a journey I would take for all time and for all eternity. Some days the path was wide and clear, and on others, it took twists and turns. Some days the path could be glorious and bright, and on others, the sky was dreary, bleak and dark. On this path, on good days or in bad, I have been accompanied along the way, by great people who have taught me, counseled me, supported me and who wrapped their arms around me in bonds of friendship, all of which made the work so much easier to take.

I am hopeful that the next leg of my journey will be as interesting and fulfilling as the one I now conclude. And should I need a push or a shove from those who have been with me all along the way, I know I can count on you to provide the appropriate nudge.

Thank you to so many of you who have taken this walk with me, who have given me your support and most importantly, your friendship. You have participated in sharing a great journey, yes I'll say it – a sentimental journey, and to each of you I offer my most grateful thanks.

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