

2012 ECA Flood Presentation

It all started on the morning of August 28, 2011 around 7:27 am, when I received a phone call to report to the Schoharie County Emergency Management Office as a Public Information officer (PIO), my second job for the County. For the next two weeks my job was a co-public information officer.

Every employee of the Board of Election was directly or indirectly affected by the flood, and for weeks following were busy trying to help restore themselves and family with living quarters or repairs to homes or businesses.

Republican Commissioner Lew Wilson was dealing with his own property destruction; Democrat Commissioner Cliff Hay assisted Governor Cuomo and other state officials in assessing the damage done by Hurricane Irene; Deputy Democrat Commissioner Richard Shultes was handling damage at his home and business and cooked for the Catholic church to feed volunteers and flood victims; Election Specialist, Brian Largeteau worked with the Fire Department and the Town of Esperance on relief and clean-up efforts. Election Specialist Colleen Benton worked with the Town of Carlisle Fire Department receiving donations of food, clothing, furniture, and monetary donations to help the affected residents of the county.

The County Building was severely damaged and no one could enter at this time. Most departments which had been closed for two weeks were looking to relocate. We were lucky enough to find and secure the Old Stone Fort Badgley Museum.

We were fortunate that Schoharie County did not have a September primary, and on September 15th we were allowed one hour to retrieve everything from our office that we felt we needed to set up our office and run the November Election.

We purchased totes, collected boxes, lined up help, arranged transportation and devised a plan of action for the day. The plan was that everyone would help floor by floor retrieve what they needed for their relocation. Since we were the top floor, we were last and by then the workforce was scarce and only a few stayed to help our office.

To make this task tougher, contamination gear was required for each employee. Flashlights were used for lighting in the stairwells. Hot air was being pumped into the building to stop mold growth raising the temperature to over 100+ degrees. Each Board of Election employee was assigned certain articles to pack and what was left of the volunteers trudged up and down the three flights of stairs carrying our now mobile office. Our box truck had been commandeered by the Sheriff's Department, so the Department of Transportation loaned us a bus with a wheel chair lift and took the seats out to move what

we needed. We did grab our computers, chairs and most importantly for those of you who need coffee our Keurig. The voting machines stayed on the third floor until a plan was devised to retrieve them.

Now we were ready to set up our office. Folding tables, locking file cabinets and some throw rugs were purchased for temporary use. In the space allowed, we set up as best we could. We started twisting arms to have our computers and phone lines installed and hooked up. We did have a laptop with our voter information loaded for our yearly trip to our local County Fair. We did have some access to our voter information while waiting for our IT Department to hook us to the back-up server in a secure location. Our IT Department was very busy setting up all the County Departments in ten different locations around the County. We were not a priority at the time since we did not have a primary. Thank goodness.

Now crunch time was approaching, so we started to be very annoying to our IT Department and our County Legislators about our needs. Set up was finally achieved at a less than desirable computer speed and internet access.

Here we were, less than a month from the 2011 General Election with no EMS system, no voting machines, no voting booths, no voting signs, no box truck, early 1990's computer

speed and internet, displaced inspectors and to add to all that about 35% of our polling sites were destroyed by the flood.

First Priority was to retrieve the voting machines. The clean-up company would not let us in the building because of contamination issues. We explained our issue to the lead person and he conceded to let us in the building for four hours if we wore contamination gear. The County hired a moving company at a cost of \$4,050. We were insured against any mishaps. Every machine was shrink wrapped for protection. Our county has 18 BMD's and 6 scanners. Moving Company personnel carried each machine down the three flights of stairs, along with some important files. Three hours and the job was completed. Machines were moved to our new location.

We also looked in the basement of the county building to see if we could salvage any of our booths or new "Vote Here" signs. Nothing was salvageable. We called the company that we purchased the booths from and were told that the booths could be here by November 4th. If we paid for speedy delivery, we could have the booths by October 31st. We immediately ordered the booths and carts. We were able to find a local vendor for the signs and had them within a week. The only downside was we had to assemble the signs.

Our EMS was still in the building and we were not sure whether the system would work and had no secure location to set this

system up. We called Dominion and they offered to help with the ballots at a cost and suggested that we call the state for their input. Our saving grace was the state. They entered in all the information that we e-mailed to them. They faced the same challenges we did with the EMS system in formatting the ballot. Thank you to the NYS Board of Elections for their help.

The Sheriff's Department was done with our truck but the Department of Public Works wanted to use the truck to help the other departments move to their new locations. When we received the truck back, there had been some damage and were assured the damages would be fixed before we needed to use it. Damages included missing hooks, straps and blankets.

We were not, and still are not, hooked to NYS Voter. We called Ingrid and she helped us with our internet postings for SCYTL.

Our next task at hand was to assess the damage to the poll sites and to gauge how much time was needed to traverse the various routes that were to be traveled by the delivery truck and the election night couriers. Routes were changed to avoid heavy constriction areas, and time allotted for deliveries was extended. Of the six polling sites affected by the flood, three of the sites would be ready for Election Day. That left us three to change.

Alternate sites were located and checked for handicap accessibility. Our Commissioners ok'd the changes and we

notified the State. Colored cardstock printed with pollsite changes had to be cut by hand and mailed. This was due to the fact that our perforated postcards were delivered before the flood to another department that never looked at the boxes. They were returned to us after the election when the department realized they didn't belong to them. We also posted notices in our local newspapers and radio station.

The state came through with our ballots and we began our test decking. Due to time constraints, we purchased printed ballots from Dominion. This helped free our staff for other work.

All election inspectors were called to see if they were still able to work, and notified that there may be changes in procedures and poll sites. We met with all the election chairpersons and our couriers to go over changes that occurred.

One week before the election we had poll site trouble. One of our poll sites was at a church where a pastor signed off to let us use their church hall without notifying the church council. They were still serving dinner to those individuals affected by the flood. We asked if they would abstain from serving dinner on Election Day and we were not successful. As a compromise we brought in partitions from the office in which we are located to cut the room in half. One problem solved.

We received a call from the trucking company that was to deliver our booths and half the order would be delivered on

November 1st or November 2nd, to add to that, the delivery truck didn't have a lift gate. We were ready to load our truck and start our deliveries. The delivery truck arrived and we used our truck to back up to the delivery truck, unload the crates to our truck so we could use the lift to set them on the ground. At this point the weather had been very cooperative. During all this, our office received a phone call from the State Board of Elections. Paul Collins and Bob Brehm were going to come out to see our new location and see if there is anything else we needed. They arrived to see us outside unloading our poll booths. They were pleased with our location and reaffirmed our confidence that we would handle this election. The truck was loaded with machines, signs and poll booths. Delivery began. With the weather still cooperating, the balance of the booths came the next morning and we unloaded them without a lift-gate in time for the next delivery.

One of the poll sites that said they would be ready by Election Day called on October 31st and said the sheet rockers never showed. After discussion, they said that the concrete was dry in the truck bays and we could set up there. Another small problem solved.

Election Day has finally arrived and things ran fairly smooth. A few paper jams.

We implemented a new procedure for Election night. We had runners pick up our cf cards and tapes and had the inspectors phone in candidate totals only. Ballots were locked in the machines and picked up in the morning.

Routes in the southern end of the county were a little more challenging. This was due to roads being washed out and being rebuilt. Single-lanes. Our last courier arrived at our office at 10:30 pm. Our IT Department had the results posted on the internet also by 10:30 pm.

Post Election -Story for another day.

Our County is slowly rebuilding. Our office will be moving back to the County building by the end of this month. We hope for the Spring primary that we are at 100%, probably not, but we will handle that also.

Once again we would like to thank the State Board of Elections for their help to our office and for spearheading donations for our county.

Any questions?