

# CURTAIN CALL

## Getting out the vote begins at the grass-roots level

BY REBECCA KAUFMAN  
Of Suburban News

A majority of Americans traditionally fulfill their civic duty on Election Day by pulling the levers in the voting booths for the candidates of their choice. Before doing so, you've read about the candidates' positions on the issues, listened to live or televised debates and digested the substance of the candidates' advertisements.

But unless you've been involved in a campaign as either a candidate or a supporter, you're probably unaware of what makes those campaigns run – volunteers.

Republican or Democrat, residents throughout Northwest Bergen County have answered the call of candidates on the local, county, state and national levels. They are united in their goal: persuading you to vote their way come Nov. 4.

The volunteers largely do the same tasks – canvass-

ing, operating the phones and facilitating mass mailings.

"Volunteers hand out fliers, talk about the candidate, man phone banks and go door to door doing literature drops," said Deirdre Woodbyrne of Ramsey, the Bergen County coordinator of Sen. John McCain's presidential campaign. "They have a real presence in the community."

Mark Macellaro of Mahwah, a volunteer on Sen. Barack Obama's campaign, said, "Volunteers basically show up at different events to get Senator Obama's name out there and get people asking questions. Volunteers also set up 'open house' events where an individual agrees to have an open house for Obama and invites people from their neighborhood to come and ask questions [of] a spokesperson from his campaign."

The Bergen County Young Republicans are more actively involved in county campaigns.

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"We started an absentee ballot voter drive," said Greg Lois, president of the Bergen County Young Republicans. "It entails us going through lists and hand-addressing envelopes for the candidates to send to voters. We've already completed the first 5,000 names and when it gets closer to the registration deadline, we will complete more names. It's a big ongoing project."

Aside from providing volunteer backbone at town fairs and other special local events around the county, the Young Republicans donated to and created Web sites supporting Kathleen Donovan for county clerk and Chris Calabrese for county freeholder.

Franklin Lakes resident Jocelyn Krieger of Franklin Lakes, a field coordinator for West Bergen and Passaic counties for Democrat Dennis Shulman's congressional campaign, said volunteers attend local events with literature detailing Shulman's assets and positions and also create campaign videos.

"We have volunteers making YouTube videos to enlighten voters through humor," she said. "We have two so far and last time I checked, the videos had over 5,000 views."

Pat Tirri, a member of the Oakland Democratic Club, said the club is volunteering on both local and national campaigns.

"We are really working with all the campaigns, whether it be Obama, Shulman or [Sen. Frank] Lautenberg," he said. "We are really trying to get the vote out. We've had registration drives and registered over 200 people to vote for the upcoming November election. We also have hosted fund-raisers and cottage parties."

Pat Pignatelli, president of the Oakland Republican Club, said that club is focusing on this year's Borough Council campaigns.

"We are having fund-raisers for the candidates, a pasta dinner, pancake breakfast and a candidate's night," he said. "The candidates are also going door to door and some members might go with them."

Mahwah Republican Club President John Gavejian said many of the club's members go to the Republican headquarters at election time to help get out the vote.

"We will be doing that for the freeholder candidates and Congressman Scott Garrett," he said. "I personally volunteered in the last campaign for council supporting two candidates. I wrote letters for them to voters who generally vote Republican."

Gavejian said that at Mahwah Day, the club put up a tent in support of McCain and his running mate, Gov. Sarah Palin, distributing bumper stickers, pins and posters.

Gail Reynolds of the Mahwah Democratic Club said a number of their club's members are volunteering with Shulman's campaign.

"Generally we distribute fliers and participate in phone banks held by the Democratic Committee of Bergen County on the weekends as it gets closer to November," she said.

Harvey Clark, president of the Franklin Lakes Republican Forum, said the forum might hold a fund-raiser for Garrett with the Franklin Lakes Republican Club.

"If we don't do something with them, we will do some canvassing for the congressional and presidential election," he said.

Meanwhile, Christine Ordway, the municipal chair for the Franklin Lakes Democratic Club, said that group is canvassing and registering voters, among other things.

"I personally hosted two fund-raisers at my house for Dennis Shulman," she said. "We had representatives from Obama's campaign come to the Town Fair to hand out literature. We also had Shulman and Lautenberg representatives there to answer questions."

Campaign volunteers around Bergen County range in age from those too young to vote to senior citizens.

Members of the Young Republicans are generally 18 to 40 years old and Lois said their average member is under the age of 30.

Shulman campaigner Krieger said that campaign has volunteers of all ages.

"We reach out to the local colleges for interns and volunteers," she said. "We also reach out to the local high schools. Our high school volunteers can't vote but want to be able to do whatever they can."

Krieger said many senior citizens volunteer because they are retired and have free time during the day.

"We also had a family bring their young child canvassing with them," she said.

Campaigners say high school and college students bring energy to their efforts.

Mike Wasserman of Wyckoff, 16, president of the Indian Hills High School Young Democrats, said the club has about 30 members.

"Even though we can't vote, we still want to help make a change in our area and nationally, if we can," he said. "There's still a lot we can do to register voters who wouldn't have voted in the past. We are doing phone banking on Wednesday nights and canvassing on the weekends for the Shulman campaign. The Oakland Democrats got us a voter registration booth that we are running for them on the weekends. We also met with two people running for Oakland Borough Council and we are doing some campaign stuff for them."

Wasserman said the various campaigns usually reach out to the Young Democrats several days to a week before they are needed to see if they can supply volunteers.

"The club started last year, so this is the first real election season that we've been able to volunteer during," he said.

Indian Hills High School also has a Young Republicans Club headed by 16-year-old David Dorsey of Oakland. The club has about 20 members and Dorsey says it's growing rapidly and officers were elected recently.

"I've worked with the Bergen County Republican Organization so far," he said. "I am hoping to reach out to the Garrett and McCain campaigns very soon."

Mathew Letinski, president of the Ramapo College Republicans, said that in the 72 hours before the election, the group is most active



PHOTO COURTESY OF GREG LOIS

**Two members of the Bergen County Young Republicans operate a voter registration booth.**

getting out the vote.

While volunteers on all campaigns perform the same work, they have many different reasons for participating in the election process.

"I like to think volunteers are interested in good government," said Lynne Hurwitz, campaign manager for the Bergen County Democratic freeholder candidates. "Some feel it's really important to get a good candidate elected."

McCain supporter Woodbyrne said people volunteer because they want to be part of history.

"This is a historic election," she said. "This is the first time in many decades where there's no Bush or Clinton running and three senators on the ballot."

"Some are just excited to get involved," said Krieger. "Some of our volunteers feel strongly against Scott Garrett or for Dennis Shulman."

Lois said Palin's addition to the

Republican presidential ticket has resulted in a boost in volunteers for the Young Republicans.

"Since she joined the campaign, I have received more e-mails from interested people than I have in the last six months," he said.

Mahwah resident Jan Bidwell has worked on numerous congressional campaigns canvassing, organizing and phoning.

"I always felt it was our duty to pay attention to what was going on in our government," she said. "The government is only as good as the voters and constituents because we are one of the ones who decide who is in office."

Bidwell said her 14-year-old son is one reason why she volunteers in campaigns.

"When you have a kid tapping you on the shoulder asking you if you're going to help, you really have to step up and show him how

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he can help," she said. "It's our obligation as American citizens. We have an amazing abundance of freedoms in this country and with these great gifts comes great responsibility."

Macellaro said he volunteers because he's always been interested in politics.

"I was a political science major in college," he said. "I am a big fan of the issues and people expressing how they feel about different things. I try to be a good citizen."

Volunteers also choose what they do for the campaigns based on their preferences.

"I worked on Capitol Hill and did media work for the Republican leaders," said Woodbyrne. "I had always worked in politics – it was natural. I wanted to help out on the campaign."

Bidwell is currently volunteering on Shulman's campaign and is the co-chair of his finance committee.

"I am going to support anyone who is a Democrat and runs against Garrett," said Bidwell, co-chair of Shulman's campaign finance committee. "Dennis and I have a lot in common. He became a tabbi after dealing with ethical issues and similarly, I became an interfaith minister after dealing with ethical issues.

I think he'd make a phenomenal congressman. I would still be volunteering even if I didn't have such a high opinion of him."

Krieger, 22, said she was not involved with politics prior to Shulman's campaign.

"I consider myself to be politically aware," she said. "I read newspapers, argued with friends and was active in some campus politics. I wanted to work in non-profits and after graduating in May, this summer was not a good time to get a job. I heard Dennis speak at a Franklin Lakes Democrats meeting and when he won the primary, I contacted the campaign and began working with them."

Krieger said her favorite part of campaigning is going to political events.

"I like meeting other politicians and campaign contributors," she said.

Bidwell, on the other hand, favors door-to-door campaigning.

"You get to see where everybody lives and speak to people," she said. "I've had maybe four or five people that didn't want to talk when I went to their door. It's really energizing and a great thing to do."

Reynolds also enjoys going door to door.

"You get to hear that people love the town and, concurrently, you hear any problems," she said.

Ordway got involved in politics

because of the heavy Republican presence in Franklin Lakes.

"I've been a Democrat my whole life and thought it would be nice to have a Democratic presence," she said. "I started the club about three years ago with a couple of other people. We now have about 50 members."

Ordway said her favorite part of campaigning is talking about the issues.

"I feel like I have a lot of information to share and when I have someone that will listen to my point of view and express theirs and we're able to have a dialogue, it's pretty exciting," she said.

Even though campaigns also have numerous paid staffers, the volunteers say they make a difference.

"Campaigning is intense," Krieger said. "I was warned that it's like working on a start-up company that is only existing for six months. You do an insane amount of work in a short period of time and you do it fast to get it out to a lot of people. We have a large staff for someone running for the first time. But even with the size of our staff, there's no way everything could get done without volunteers. We couldn't afford to pay people to do the amount of work that needs to be done."

Pignatelli said volunteers are important because of campaigns'

expense.

"We need volunteers to help get the word out," he said. "Many of our volunteers are well known and respected in the community. They give credibility to our candidates."

"Without substantial volunteerism, you just don't get the motivation or message you are trying to portray out," Tirri said.

Volunteers are more effective at increasing candidate support, said Ordway.

"I think that people appreciate the opinion of a volunteer sometimes more than a paid employee because they know the paid person has to support the candidate, whereas a volunteer really supports them because they believe in them," she said.

Macellaro said volunteers are

important because they bring campaigns to a personal level.

"Especially with presidential elections, the only way you ever see a candidate is onstage talking about something," he said. "A volunteer is taking time out of their day and believes so much in something that they agree to spread that word. Volunteers bring it to a one-on-one level."

"Volunteers speak to everyone they know and put up lawn signs," Bidwell said. "Paid staff just can't do what the volunteers do. We should all be working on campaigns, educating ourselves and paying attention to the real issues. I would like to see Americans voting at 100 percent this year."

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