

## Going to the Polls

Written by Marty Carlson  
Friday, 07 December 2012 08:25 -

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### *Runoff anticlimactic compared to general election*



Saturday's local run-off elections aren't likely to collect any of the complaints registered in last month's general election; it wasn't just a local problem – complaints came from around the country. Those included long lines of voters and long waits to vote.

A growing problem with large-turnout elections is a growing shortage of poll workers, or in Louisiana, elections commissioners. These are the folks who man the polling places; they open the doors before sunrise, spend about 14 hours checking in voters and setting machines for voting, then close it all up – and leave about an hour after the polls have closed.

It's a long day for poll workers, and in Bossier Parish the average age of those workers is 60-80 years old.

"These people are a dying breed," said Bossier Parish Clerk of Court Cindy Johnston.

Johnston, whose office handles all parish elections, said she has slightly over 400 certified elections commissioners to serve in the parish's 85 voting precincts. And she described these commissioners as a dedicated group of people who serve for various reasons.

"Election day is a time to get out and meet people in their community, and that generation has a drive to do public service," said Johnston.

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Patsy and Richard McGuire, both in their 70s, have been election commissioners for about 8 years. The couple became commissioners under former Clerk of Court Joan Carraway. Patsy recalls that there was a shortage of commissioners at that time — and they were invited to help in Plain Dealing, where they live.

“It’s interesting because you meet people and do a civic duty,” Patsy said. “But you sure don’t do it for the money – at least when we started.”

At the time the McGuires became commissioners, the pay for that 14-15 hour day was \$100. It’s since been increased to \$200, and commissioners-in-charge (of precincts) make are paid \$250. Additionally, for state and local elections, beginning in 2013, polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m., shortening the commissioners’ day by an hour.

Johnston said that while she advertises for new commissioners, there isn’t a lot of interest from younger folks. “We really need young workers,” said Johnston. “We have some long term older workers with health issues and may not be able to return.” Johnston said that while she would like to see young people become involved, her office welcomes anyone who meets the requirements to become a commissioner.

The new year is a good time to look at getting more involved in our community and service as an elections commissioner is a worthy consideration.

According to the Louisiana Secretary of State’s website, the few requirements for this service include:

Must be a registered voter in Louisiana;

Must be a registered voter who does not need assistance; and

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Must attend a course of instruction as required.

In addition, if you're 17 years old and a high school senior, you can serve as an election commissioner.

Elections are infrequent events locally, so it's not as if this paid civic duty that offers a time to visit with all your neighbors is an often obligation.

Folks interested in becoming elections commissioners in Bossier Parish can contact the Clerk of Court's office at 965-2336.

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