

April 23, 2025

# Serving My Community in the 2025 Consolidated Election

*The following is a blog post written by Senior Election Expert Ryan Chew about his experience returning as an election worker in the 2025 Consolidated Election in Illinois. His valuable insights on training and serving can help teams like ours at The Elections Group and election officials prepare for the challenges.*



When our local elections were held recently, I offered myself as a

poll worker, an “election judge” as we call them. To work with election offices as we do at TEG, helping rethink procedures or rewrite manuals, it helps to stay in touch with ground-level operations – how to set up voting machines, check voters in, balance totals at the end, and close a precinct — and how poll workers and voters experience all this.

But mostly, I did it because I enjoy it. When I retire, I’ll be one of those people who works in my own precinct until someone gently explains it’s time to let the younger octogenarians have their day.

Though I haven’t been a judge in several years, the coordinator believed my decades in the department qualified me for a spot normally reserved for those with several years of experience as a judge. I would be a “technician”, handling much of the equipment set-up and troubleshooting.

The first step, naturally, was training. My instructor went at the speed of a *Tour de France* cyclist, or at least it seemed so if you didn’t have recent experience. Another newcomer glanced over at me several times for reassurance. The trainer emphasized that we wouldn’t need to memorize every step, as long as we knew where to look in the manual and understood the steps when we

went back to them.

I was proud that the manual remains well written and structured, maybe better than when I worked there. We built a strong foundation, and I'm glad to see they've continued to improve.

I offered to go wherever I was needed, and was assigned a few miles from home, to a site with a backstory of a cantankerous judge. The coordinator didn't tell me this, but once my co-judges determined I was helpful, they confided they had threatened to quit if he came back.

In our jurisdiction, judges set up the equipment the night before, update e-pollbooks, then ensure that key items are secure overnight. It can seem like a hassle, but it makes the pre-dawn opening go much more smoothly. Downtown, a report would show our e-pollbook had connected along with hundreds of others, letting the office focus first morning visits on those that hadn't.

As a result, morning set-up was a breeze. We were ready well before the 6:00 am Opening of Polls.

I was briefly surprised to find that the "tackle box" in which small supplies had always been delivered was now gone. Instead, scissors, pens and other things were in their own tightly fitted plastic bags in a box that also held forms and other large items. I quickly realized why. The tackle box had always been bar-coded and scanned to its carrier to create a record proving it was sent. Now each bag has its own bar-code. Things are a little harder to find in the jumble of the large box, but that minor drawback is outweighed by the certainty offered by the bar-coding that every item is present.

As technician, I didn't work at the check-in table. My job was escorting voters to the booth or touchscreen, trying to quickly explain what would happen when they completed their ballot.

For those hand-marking paper ballots, which get initialed right before they're issued, it's a simple message – "Cover your ballot with this privacy screen and come back to the scanner."

Touchscreen voters need to be reminded to print their ballot, since the previous generation of touchscreen recorded the vote directly. They too have to cover their ballot and bring it to me, and then I need to initial it before it can be scanned. It took me a few voters to hone my message so it fit easily in the 5 or 6 second walk to the touchscreen. Surprisingly to me, ballot privacy is not a priority for some voters. I knew people were understanding my message when some started rejecting it — "Oh, I don't care if you see my ballot..."

That's fine, sir, but I still need you to cover the ballot when you bring it to me.

Our polling place is in an elementary school. Last fall, election day was a school holiday. The two precincts used the whole gym. With school in session this year, the gym had been partitioned, half for voting and half for P.E. The muffled shouts of the kids at play were charming. Then mid-morning, the activity switched from sport to dance, and without warning, the chords of the Jonas Brothers "I'm a Sucker for You" came blasting in. I don't think "Sucker" was played as political commentary, but we did ask that they lower the volume.

My favorite voter was an aging gentleman wearing a jacket that told us he was a veteran. Many veterans understandably feel their service is relevant to their vote and to American elections, and some like to talk about it. He pressed several of us judges with a question — did we know about Verdun, where he had been stationed?

The question perplexed me because I do know a bit about Verdun, a battlefield in France. The battle took place in the First World War, in 1916. He wasn't THAT old. It turned out that during the Vietnam War, he'd had the good fortune to be sent to a base in Europe, near Verdun. He told the story as a joke on himself, highlighting his luck and paying respect to those who hadn't been so lucky.

Our only moment of controversy came late afternoon. I saw two judges from our sister precinct speaking urgently to each other. Then one came to me. The man standing in the doorway talking to a poll watcher had arrived at the polling place in a pick-up. In the bed of the truck was mounted a giant flag reflecting his ethnicity. Apparently, one of the candidates in this village had highlighted that background in his campaign. Wasn't this electioneering. Shouldn't we make him go back and park a block away. The other judge thought not, and she was hoping I'd side with her.

As she explained, the man went to the table and checked in. My suggestion was that I might consider the question of electioneering if he stuck around, but if he was just voting, then it was just a flag. I'm not really sure I would have answered in the end, but sometimes, you don't have to decide the principle. You just answer the small question in front of you pragmatically. Both of my fellow judges continued to discuss the issue even after he left. But my feeling was that the flag was gone from our precinct faster than it would have been if we'd had to argue with him to get him to move the truck.

Our two precincts had apparently had a very delayed shut-down last fall, hampered in part by squabbles with the judge they complained about. Between a lighter turnout, good teamwork, and the smooth functioning of all election equipment, we were packed up and ready to leave in about 30 minutes.

I had worked with this jurisdiction's previous generation of balky election equipment. In those days, some precincts floundered for a couple hours at closing. So it was heartening to see that a line was already forming at the receiving station when we arrived with our results tapes and memory drives. After our materials were accepted, I checked online. 90% of precincts had reported by 7:45pm. An early night is a great cap to a successful Election Day!

*Original link: <https://electionsgroup.com/serving-my-community-in-the-2025-consolidated-election/>*