

## Happy to be Here: Bridget Wingert

### Voters root for the paper trail

The election systems we trusted for so many years have failed us. In this divided country we've needed recounts and as this year's elections draw nearer some local residents – Democrats and Republicans – are hoping for a clear picture in Bucks County.

The county's recently purchased Direct Record Electronic voting machines (DREs), they say, are not adequate because they have no way of keeping an external record to count the votes.

And confidence in the votes is more important than ever since Pennsylvania is a swing state and Bucks County, with its cross section of parties, is critical to the voting. Memories of Florida in the 2000 election, when the U.S. Supreme Court declared George W. Bush had won the presidential election, are still fresh. In Bucks County's Eighth Congressional District in 2006 the election was won by 1,500 votes and a recount could not be done.

Supporters of replacing the Danaher Electronic 1242 touchscreen machines owned by the county demonstrated at recent county commissioners' meetings – some were outside picketing because they couldn't fit in the meeting room. The commissioners rebuffed the group at the first meeting. At the second, Commissioner Chair James Cawley relented somewhat – he offered to call a meeting to examine data on the Danaher machines.

Later in the meeting Cawley and Commissioner Charles Martin approved a \$105,000 two-year contract for hauling the Danaher machines to polling sites throughout the county for the primary and general elections in 2008 and 2009. Minority Commissioner Diane Ellis-Marseglia dissented.

The Coalition for Voter Integrity (CVI), an organization founded to promote a voter-verified paper ballot system, wonders why the commissioners would vote to transport the voting machines if they are seriously considering a review of the machines' accuracy.

Pennsylvania, according to the group, has a total of 9,389 precincts with DREs, the highest number in the country. New Jersey, which has 6,169 precincts with DREs, has passed a law to replace those voting machines by November.

"We have given the commissioners evidence that these machines can break down, flip votes, crash, and possibly give questionable vote tallies," the coalition says. "Our gravest concern about the Danaher system isn't because it may break down,



*Supporters of exchanging the county's voting machines for an optical scanning system demonstrated outside Bucks County Courthouse during a recent commissioners' meeting. Photographs by Bert Johnson*

though losing all the data without any kind of software-independent, hard backup is a very serious concern. It is precisely because any problem with the election results would be impossible to find. If the software-generated tally at the end is wrong, we have no way of knowing."

The concerned voters believe the commissioners should be more concerned about not knowing if a count is wrong than they are about breakdowns. The commissioners believe that the DREs do leave a paper trail but that paper trail is generated internally – so if the program goes wrong, it goes wrong with the printout that it produces.

The voters group proposes the use of voter-marked, voter-verified paper ballot systems. With such systems, a voter marks spaces on a paper ballot, feeds the ballot into an optical scanner, which records the vote. If the scanner sees a possible error it shoots the ballot back to voter and asks if the choice is correct. The voter sends the ballot back to the scanner – corrected if necessary – before recording the vote.

After recording the vote, the scanner returns the ballot to the voter, who picks it up and deposits it in a secured ballot box. The ballots are then available for a recount if there is a question about the returns.

A bill in the House of Representatives

sponsored by Congressman Rush Holt of Hunterdon County, N.J., would require voter-marked paper ballots and fund replacement of DREs'

But even without funding optical scanning systems are cheaper to buy and maintain.

The Danaher machines, said Mary Ann Gould, executive director of CVI, are complex machines that have a short life cycle, they require expensive technical contract work at each election and the polls require more machines to get the job done.

Optical scanning systems cost less to purchase, they have a long life, maintenance is simpler and delivering to polling locations is easier because the hardware takes up a small space. Miami Dade in Florida replaced its \$24 million DREs with \$7 million optical scanners, Gould says. Ohio, California, Colorado and New Mexico have made changes.

The Bucks County commissioners met for an hour with the CVI group on Tuesday as the Herald was going to press.

"We will be sharing information," Gould said. "We've asked Commissioner Cawley to be a guest on Voice of the Voters, our radio show."

But, she insists, the issue is not about cost. "We need to have proof of the source vote."