



**30th Annual
National Conference
San Francisco, CA**

2014 Professional Practices Program

iPad, iRegister

A NEW TECHNOLOGY SOLUTION FOR NATURALIZED CITIZENS

Johnson County, Kansas

Submitted by:

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iPad, iRegister

Around the world, iPad users depend on the device to stay current on news, listen to music, read books, watch movies, play games and connect with friends. In Kansas, the Johnson County Election Office uses the iPad in partnership with the local League of Women Voters (LWV) to help newly naturalized citizens register to vote.

That used to be fairly easy to do in Kansas. In the northeastern part of the state, new citizens would be sworn in during the monthly naturalization ceremony held in the ceremonial courtroom at the Federal Courthouse in downtown Kansas City, Kansas. Then at the punch-and-cookie reception that followed, members of the Johnson County LWV would help the newly-minted U.S. citizens complete the simple voter registration application. Applications were turned into the Election Office, the forms were processed; and within a short time, the newly naturalized citizens also became newly registered voters. Postcards arrived notifying them their registrations were complete and their polling places assigned.

But, beginning in 2013, a new state law went into effect, requiring new voters to provide proof of citizenship before being allowed to register. Now the 94-year-old League faced a dilemma: how to continue carrying out its time-honored initiative to register newly naturalized citizens simply and easily. Would each new citizen be forced to appear in person at the Election Office with his or her citizenship certificate in hand?

For many, that presented a real hardship since Johnson County covers 473 square miles, making it the largest county in Kansas. Incomplete applications required election office staff to spend extra time following up with the new citizens and seeking further documentation of citizenship. Registration was delayed and in some cases applicants simply gave up on the process.

Christine Hutchins, who chairs the Naturalization Ceremony Committee for Johnson County's LWV, was particularly frustrated. For 5 years she and members of her committee had helped thousands of new citizens complete their voter registrations. "Now suddenly there was a huge roadblock in our way and a new hoop to jump through," she said. "We were frustrated and didn't know what to do. How were we going to help these new citizens exercise one of the most important responsibilities of citizenship?"

Christine and her League cohorts took their concerns to Brian Newby, Johnson County's Election Commissioner. How could his office help the League navigate this new law? His answer was a single word: iPad.

The office already had successfully used its 200 iPads to help poll workers on Election Day with an Election Worker Electronic Resource Guide. Poll workers used the iPad to get quick answers to questions that arise on Election Day, such as examples of acceptable photo IDs and a street index guide to direct voters to their correct polling location. Why not try using the camera function of an iPad to record proof of citizenship?

The single iPad, a \$300.00 investment, has proven economical, effective and easy to use. Here's how:

1. On the last Friday of every month, a representative of the League drops by the Election Office and checks out the designated iPad which is secure and not connected to the Internet. The league representative signs a checkout form that includes an oath of confidentiality on behalf of voters' documents.
2. After the naturalization ceremony, 71-year-old Christine Hutchins stands with the iPad in hand waiting for new citizens to bring their completed voter registration application and naturalization certificate to her.
3. The certificate is placed on a table and with one quick click is recorded and saved.
4. Just a few hours later, the iPad is returned with photographic proofs of citizenship. When downloaded and paired with the completed voter registrations applications, the photos fulfill Kansas' voter registration requirements. Registration is complete.

"I consider voting very important. Now it's my right and my responsibility," said Igor Boulatnikov, a biochemist at the University of Kansas Medical Center, whose naturalization certificate was recorded on the iPad. Originally from Russia, he became a U.S. citizen on May 30. "I thank you for making it very convenient. This way is simple and easy."

Igor was one of 94 new citizens from 35 different countries who were sworn in at the May ceremony in Kansas City, Kansas. He and 56 other citizens took advantage of the League's iPad process. That's slightly more than 60%, a good showing, according to Christine. Since the iPad partnership with the League started, the Johnson County Election Office has registered more than 500 new voters this way, including new voters residing in nearby counties.

"I will vote to elect dedicated people with knowledge to run the country," said Gielila Kokeb Reda, whose naturalization certificate was photographed with the iPad. Originally from Ethiopia, she too became a U.S. citizen on May 30. "This way was very easy and saves time for me." And if an applicant happens to live elsewhere in Kansas, the Election Office forwards the documentation to the correct county.

Moments before adjourning May's naturalization ceremony, presiding U.S. District Court Judge John W. Lungstrum encouraged these proud new citizens to exercise their newly-bestowed right to vote. Their native countries ranged from Bangladesh to Yugoslavia. "The ability to choose the leaders of our country is one of the most important rights and obligations of citizenship," Judge Lungstrum told the packed courtroom. "I don't care who you vote for or what party you join, just take advantage of one of the most fundamental privileges of being a citizen. Representatives will be available to help you register."

With the click of an iPad, 57 new citizens did, joining more than 450 who have benefitted from this iRegister initiative.

Supporting Documents

- Photos from the May 30, 2014 naturalization ceremony reception in Kansas City, KS
- Newspaper article from Shawnee Dispatch



Johnson County Election Commissioner Brian D. Newby receives 'Making Democracy Work' award

Staff Report

May 5, 2014

Johnson County Election Commissioner Brian D. Newby was recognized for his efforts in helping naturalized U.S. citizens register to vote at the annual 'Making Democracy Work' breakfast Saturday sponsored by the Johnson County League of Women Voters.

Roberta Eveslage, the county's LWW president, nominated Newby for this year's 'Making Democracy Work' award. She said the state's new voter registration law requiring proof of citizenship has complicated the League's efforts to help new citizens register immediately after their naturalization ceremonies and while protecting their government documents.

The election office loans an iPad to help expedite the process for the new citizens and securely capture citizenship documents, Eveslage said.

For the same willingness to use new technology resources in administering elections, Newby was recognized by Harvard University as the winner of a 'Bright Ideas Award' in 2013.

He and his staff developed an Election Worker Electronic Resource Guide that allows poll workers using an iPad to get quick answers to questions that arise on Election Day.

Among other election-related information, the guide provides examples of acceptable photo IDs and a street index guide to direct voters to their correct polling location.

Previous winners of the 'Making Democracy Work' award honoring public service in Johnson County include former State Sen. John Vratil, former County Commissioner and State Legislator Dolores Furtado, former Overland Park City Council member and State Legislator Carol Sader, and former County Commission Chair Annabeth Surbaugh.

Originally published at: <http://www.shawneedispatch.com/news/2014/may/05/johnson-county-recvies-making-democracy-work-awar/>