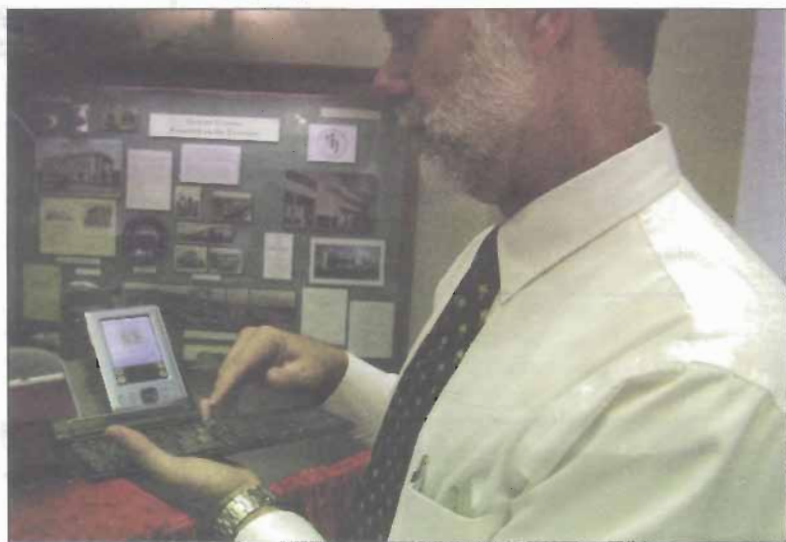


County streamlines voting process



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Greene County Clerk Richard Struckhoff holds a personal data assistant that will be used at the polls Nov. 2. The PDAs contain the county's approximately 180,000 voter registration records.

Palm PDAs storing registration records to debut Election Day

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Greene County is going high-tech. In September, the county clerk's office purchased a new system that stores voter registration records for the entire county in handheld computers – or personal data assistants.

Ninety Palm Zire 31 PDAs and

keyboards were purchased, along with voter registration software developed by Martin White, senior account manager with Miken Technologies in St. Louis. The system, which cost the county \$41,400 for two years of service, will debut Nov. 2.

“One of the biggest chores that we have on Election Day is trying to

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get people to the right polling place," said Greene County Clerk Richard Struckhoff. "We have literally thousands of phone calls to our office (on Election Day), inquiries not only from polling places but from voters at home who are trying to figure out where they need to go to vote now that they've moved."

Denny Williams, purchasing director for Greene County, said the bill for the PDAs and keyboards came to \$17,100, and a one-year subscription with Miken Technologies, providing software updates and service, costs \$12,150. A second payment of \$12,150 will be paid in 2005 to fulfill Greene County's two-year contract with Miken. Voter registration records will be updated prior to each election within the two-year contract.

Funds for the system came from the

Greene County election budget. In addition, a portion of the costs will be covered by the Help America Vote Act of 2002. Struckhoff could not provide a total he expects to receive from HAVA, but said that the funds would approximately cover the \$135 cost of each PDA.

Greene County's voter registration information – approximately 180,000 names and addresses – has been loaded into the PDAs. Students from Southwest Missouri State University and Ozarks Technical

Community College will be trained to use the PDAs and software and will be stationed at the polls on Election Day to help voters. Students will be paid \$120 for training and for working a 13-hour day on Nov. 2.

Struckhoff said that lost voter registration cards and changes in residence often cause confusion at the polls.

How it works

When a voter reports to a polling place but his name does not appear on the poll books, workers at the polling place call Struckhoff's office and a staff member determines if the individual is a registered voter. The voter is then sent to the correct polling place, along with a code to let poll workers know the individual is a registered voter.

Struckhoff hopes the new system better serves voters during Election Day frenzy.

"We have no way of calculating how many calls go unanswered. We know that we jam the phone lines on Election Day, regardless of the number of people we have. We don't have enough people to man extra phones," he said. That's where the PDAs will save time – and sanity.

All but a handful of Greene County polling places will have a precinct registrar, a college student trained in using the PDA and software. Voters that may have wasted time in line only to wait while phone calls

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Richard Struckhoff
Greene County

were made to verify their voter status will now be able to find the precinct registrar, who will look up the voter's information in the PDA.

The goal of the new system, he said, is to move voters in the right direction so that their votes count.

Each Palm Zire 31 has 16 megabytes of memory. White said that the software and Greene County's data use about three MB of memory. Greene County's voter registration information – about 60 MB worth – was loaded by White into each Palm Oct. 18.

"Our software and Greene County's data uses about three megs," White said. "Imagine about 200,000 registered voters and on top of that they have their polling place book. That's a lot of data. What we're able to do is get all of that data into an inexpensive Palm and make it searchable."

At the end of the two-year contract, Struckhoff said, the system will be evaluated to determine if the subscription will continue.

The county clerk's office has another tool to help voters before they head off to the polls. Voters may look up their polling place online at www.greenecountymo.org/election.