

# LAWRENCE BUSINESS MAGAZINE

2024 Q4



## IMPACT *of* VOLUNTEERING

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Arthur Ashe

WORKING THE POLLS

# MAREN LUDWIG

POLL WORKERS

by Emily Mulligan, photo by Steven Hertzog

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**Trained volunteers are essential to a smooth Election Day process.**

**In the fall of 2020, schools were closed, events were canceled and many people still worked from home. But the election had to happen, with fully staffed advance voting and Election Day polling places.**

Maren Ludwig saw the call from the County Clerk Elections Office seeking poll workers and knew she could help. Many of the usual poll workers were older folks or concerned about the health risks of working in person, and she was willing to step up.

She and a friend signed up and went through training, and Ludwig worked several shifts of early voting and on Election Day 2020. She says the hours were long and even quiet and boring at times, but she felt like she was contributing to the greater good.

No doubt, it was a daunting task to fill the precinct polling places during the pandemic. But the county clerk has a lot of slots and shifts to fill with trained poll workers for every election, including primaries and municipal elections. In Douglas County, early voting began three weeks before Election Day 2024, with multiple sites open at least 10 hours per day—all requiring staffing. Ludwig saw in 2020 that she could continue to contribute and be an integral part of elections from then on.

“The driving benefits are feeling a part of the civic process and feeling a little control over the situation,” she says.

To be clear, poll workers are not purely volunteers. They are paid \$120 per day and must remain on site at the polling place for the entirety of their shift, which on Election Day starts before and ends after the 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. polling hours. Douglas County usually operates about 60 locations, with a minimum of three election board workers per location: one supervising judge and two election workers. During bigger elections, many are staffed by more than three workers.

Though it is a fun, people-forward job, it comes with heavy responsibilities to uphold the voting procedures for the county and the state.

“I have come to recognize how rigorous the process is—checking that the person is who they say they are and that they’re voting in

the right place,” Ludwig says. “If everyone was required to participate as a poll worker, I think we’d have less questions about the integrity of the system.”

Having worked several elections, Ludwig now has elevated to a supervising judge, which means she handles provisional ballots and advance ballots. She also is in charge of solving what she calls “puzzles” with voter registrations, IDs or other voter information when people are there to vote.


Because of her poll work, Ludwig says she feels more strongly than ever about making sure everyone has the opportunity to vote. She cares enough to be willing to work the 14 or more hours on a typical Election Day beginning at 6 a.m.

Poll workers receive an enamel pin for each election as a signifier of their participation, and Ludwig already has amassed a small collection from the elections she has worked.

“I am very impressed by how prepared the Douglas County people are and the confidence with which they conduct the process,” she says. ▲

**POLL WORKERS**

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