



**RUNNING for OFFICE**  
**in**  
**MADISON COUNTY**

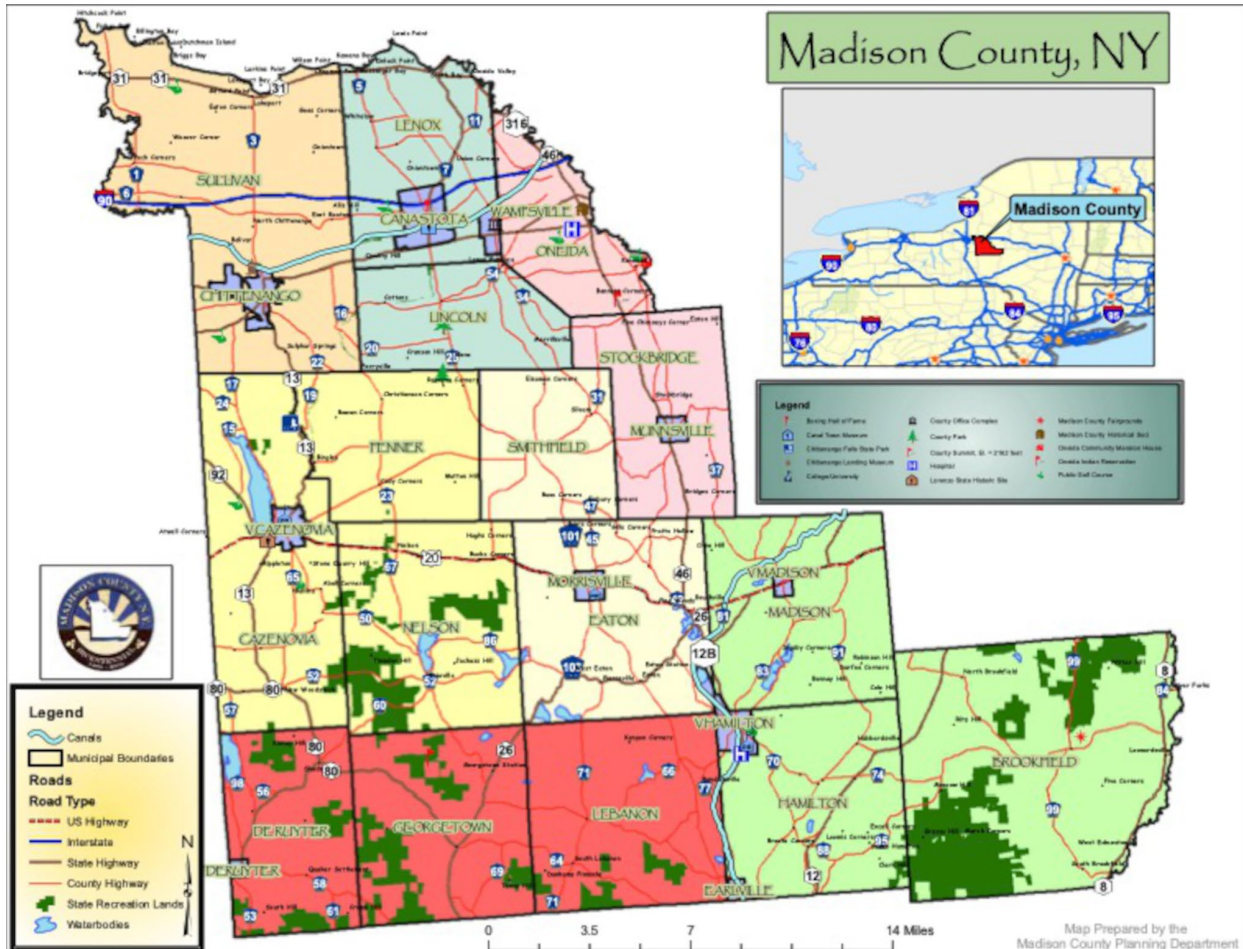
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## Step 1: Know Where You Live

### MAPS OF COUNTY ELECTION AREAS



Your county is Madison. You may live in one of 15 towns or the City of Oneida. In addition, you may live in one of 9 villages and one of 10 school districts. Within the City of Oneida, you may live in one of 6 wards. Your first step in deciding to run is to determine where you live and what governing body you might join.

Click [HERE](#) to see the 2022 redistricting map for state and federal jurisdictions. Assembly districts are likely to change in 2024.

## **Step 2: Know What's Available**

### **Countywide Elected Positions**

- Sheriff
- County Clerk
- County Treasurer
- District Attorney
- County Judge

### **City of Oneida Elected Positions**

- Mayor
- City Council
- Judge
- Supervisors (4)

### **Town Elected Positions**

- Supervisor
- Town Clerk (appointed in some towns)
- Highway Superintendent (appointed in some towns)
- Town Justice
- Town Council

### **Village Positions**

- Mayor
- Village Trustee
- Village Justice

## School District Elected Positions

- School Board Member

Terms vary with the job, ranging from 1 year (for example, to fill a vacancy on a town or village board) to 10 years (county judge)

In addition, the Board of Elections has two Commissioners, one selected by the Republican Party committee and one by the Democratic Party committee. The Chair of the Board of Supervisors is chosen by the elected Board members. Madison County uses the Board of Supervisors structure rather than a County Legislature; each Supervisor at the county level is also Supervisor of one of the towns or wards in the county.

## Learn About the Job

Once you have an idea of the position you want to run for, learn more about it before you commit.

- Attend public meetings
- Talk to former officials
- Read your local newspaper

## Step 3: Get Started

### Self-Assess

Good candidates have many of these qualities:

- They are thick-skinned;
- They are organized;
- They are willing to step outside their comfort zone;
- They are able to speak in front of a group;
- They know what their own limits are;
- They have charisma;
- They are able to ask people for money and for their votes;
- They are already involved in the community; and
- They have the support of their family and friends.

### Know Who Can Help

Your best friends as you start the process will be the [Madison County Board of Elections](#) and your town or ward [Democratic Committee](#). Before you announce, get in touch with both. They can guide you through the processes of petitioning, caucusing, and campaigning. If you are running for school board, start by contacting your district clerk via your district's website.

Equally critical will be the people we call “connectors.” Reach out to significant groups and people. You may already belong to some key groups in your community, and it's likely that you can name two or three key people who seem to know everyone and everything that is happening. Talking to connectors will give you a sense of how your community works, what is important to people, who else you need to meet, and so on.

### Delegate

It is very difficult to run for office without a substantial amount of help. You will need people you can trust and depend on to assist with the campaign. Because

there is so much to do, dividing up responsibility helps quite a bit. Delegating some of the work to others will keep you on track. Consider these positions:

**A Campaign Manager.** This person helps keep you focused, assists with writing campaign positions, sends out press releases, and generally is a person that will generate ideas. It is important that you and your manager are on the same page.

**A Campaign Treasurer.** This person keeps track of the campaign income and expenses and files required financial reports with the State Board of Elections. If you are not raising a lot of money or spending a lot of money, you may not meet the cutoff for filing. However, it is good practice to file financials. The State Board of Elections holds regular training seminars. Both you and your treasurer should attend at least one.

**Volunteers.** These people are the real boots on the ground. They will carry petitions, help with assembling mailers, build and/or deliver yard signs, hand out palm cards, and generally make it possible to get things done.

**Social Media.** While many people will write letters to the editor singing the praises of a candidate, newspaper readership is not what it once was. Social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter may reach people who do not subscribe to newspapers. These should not be stagnant websites. Posts should be made regularly. Photos, candidate statements, calendars of events, and your platform are all good subjects for posts. Social media have very specific policies about political posts, so your PR person should be prepared for that.

## Consider Teamwork

You may decide to share your campaign with others running in your municipality. For example, two candidates for town council may decide to run as a team. The pluses are that you can combine forces, cover more ground, raise less money, and share a campaign manager and treasurer. Do not join forces unless you are fairly sure that you agree on major issues in your municipality. Exceptions to this are

candidates for judge or town justice, who have strict campaigning rules and may not appear to support other candidates.

## Create a Budget

A budget is a plan. Try to keep the plan as realistic as possible. It does not make sense to spend a huge amount of money on a position that is voluntary or carries a nominal stipend. In addition, candidates for school board have strict limits on the amount they can spend without submitting detailed expense reports. Sit down with your team and figure out how much running for this office is going to cost. Here are some possible expenses:

- **Lawn signs.** These vary in price. Signs that are two-sided, more colors, or larger sizes cost more. Typically there are two parts, the sign and the ground stake. If the candidate is running on a ticket, or with a slate of candidates, having the same design on all signs makes sense. Pricing is also based on the size of the order. You can do quite well with a simple, readable design with a single color. For school board, handmade signs by kids can be great.
- **Large signs.** Many times these are handmade wooden frames with either a pre-printed vinyl sign or information painted on. These are best used in high-traffic locations. The more professional they look, the better the impression they make.
- **Mailings.** Mailings can vary quite a bit. Letters and different size postcards will be priced by the printing costs and the postage. Ideally, the more times constituents see your name in print, the better. One rule of thumb is to do one mailer that is about you, including a short bio, one mailer that is about issues, and if there are funds for it, a Get Out The Vote postcard close to the election.
- **Newspaper Ads.** These are only useful if they are timely. Look at the political calendar and check the deadlines that each paper requires for submission. How big an ad can you afford, and where will it be in the paper? Most will also allow for the ad to be in the online version too.
- **Palm Cards and/or Door Hangers.** Typically used during the Get Out The Vote (GOTV) phase of the election season, these will be a



little less expensive because they are being dropped at the house by the team, not mailed. There is debate about knocking and handing them to a person versus just leaving them at the house. Remember, every person you meet in person could be a vote. It is illegal to place advertising materials in or on someone's mailbox.

- **Other Campaign Materials.** T-shirts are nice, but they are relatively expensive. Consider giving these to people who donate to the campaign. Buttons are relatively inexpensive, and the Madison County Democrats have a button maker. These are especially nice for the canvassing team to wear and can be a good place for an appropriate slogan. Business cards and pens are another choice. While many people will discard campaign literature, they are more likely to put a business card in a wallet and keep a pen. Make sure the name and office are easy to read.

Put all of these items on a spreadsheet and get a couple of quotes. Keep in mind that any money that is spent must be recorded and reported.

## Step 4: Craft a Message

If you have been thinking about running for a while, you probably have an idea why you are running for office. Still, before you start talking to the public, designing mailers, or even planning signs, you should sit down with your team and/or your town and ward committee and/or anyone else who is running for office on a slate with you and craft your message.

### Use the Rule of Three

It's not a hard and fast rule, but keeping your message to three pithy phrases or lines will help you remember it AND help voters remember it. The three lines you choose depend on where you are running, when you are running, and especially why you are running. What is happening in your community that needs fixing? What do you believe is missing in your school, ward, town, or county? What in our background or experience makes you the best person for this position? How can you express your beliefs and plans in the shortest form possible?

Here are some examples from real-life campaigns.

#### FOR VILLAGE BOARD:

Economic development • Environmental stewardship • Improved recreation

#### FOR SCHOOL BOARD:

Inclusive: Treating all students with respect and dignity

Supportive: Encouraging creativity and open-mindedness

Rigorous: Developing critical thinkers and problem solvers

#### FOR TOWN COUNCIL INCUMBENTS:

Your town government:

Brought in outside investment of over \$100 million

Is creating municipal broadband and affordable housing

Cut greenhouse gas emissions while right-sizing the town budget

You get the idea. Your three lines will appear on your website, your social media, your mailers, and your palm card or door hanger as well as in your stump speech for fundraising events or your door-to-door conversations with voters.

## Design Matters

You don't need to be a designer, but if you have someone on your team with design capabilities, take advantage of them to plan your messaging. Choose a color scheme that you can repeat on mailers and signs and in your Facebook logo. Pick a font you like and stick with it. Remember that you are building your brand as well as running a campaign. Think like an advertiser.

## Test Your Ideas

It's always a good idea to share your message with trusted friends and advisers before taking it on the road. Email it to your town or ward chair for advice. Ask some connectors whether they think it makes sense for your community. You can refine your ideas as you campaign, but you really don't want to have to toss out a message that is not working halfway through the season.

## **Step 5: Get on the Ballot**

The process for getting on the ballot differs from one jurisdiction to the next. As of 2022, Democrats caucus to choose candidates in all villages and towns except the towns of Brookfield, Lenox, Smithfield, and Sullivan. Those towns choose candidates by petition, as do local school districts. In addition, if you decide to run on a second ballot line, which can be an advantage in a race that will be closely contested, you will need to circulate petitions for that as well.

### **Caucuses**

In individual towns, the local committee holds a formal meeting and goes through a caucus process to pick a candidate. Potential candidates make statements trying to persuade others present that they should be the candidate. All registered Democrats who live in the jurisdiction are welcome to attend and vote. The Chair or Secretary of the Caucus then submits the vote to the Board of Elections. Caucuses replace primaries in situations where they are used; the number of candidates chosen by caucus should equal the number of positions open.

### **Petitions**

The petition method means that candidates and their surrogates carry petitions to registered voters in their community. The number of signatures required to get on the ballot is a percentage of the number of voters who voted for that office in the last election, so it will vary from office to office and year to year. The state sets the percentage, and that number is available from the Madison County Board of Elections.

Petitions must meet specific criteria. They must be witnessed. They must have the Name, Address, Date of General Election, Date of Primary Election, Party and Office listed on the top. Talk to the Board of Elections to get petitions that are appropriate for your campaign. Each line of the petition is signed and dated. The signers must be registered to vote within the election district. Party registration is required if you are running on the Democratic line. The person who carries the petition must sign that they witnessed each signature. You want to make sure your

petition is not defective, or it could be challenged and potentially thrown out. Just one mistake on a petition can invalidate that entire page. For that reason, you should always aim to get 20-30 percent more signatures than are absolutely required.

Petitions must be turned in to the County Board of Elections by the deadline set on the political calendar. Collect all petitions prior to the deadline and have your team review the petitions for accuracy. Errors need to be corrected and initialed by the petitioner. Make copies of the petitions for campaign use before handing them in to the Board of Elections.

Petitioning is an opportunity to meet and talk with voters. Their signature on your petition does not guarantee their vote, but you should evaluate your conversation with them and make an educated guess as to their support. When petitioning, go to houses where you know the people are voters. Do not waste time with people who don't vote, because you have a finite amount of time to get the required number of signatures. You can get lists of voters from the Board of Elections. You can have that information sorted by street address, party affiliation, and voting frequency to make it easier for you to go from home to home efficiently.

If multiple candidates petition for the same position on the same ballot line, you may find yourself in a primary. The pluses are that you have more opportunities to get your name and positions out to voters. The minus is that your expenses will be greater.

School board petitions are slightly different: Any resident of the district for 30 days or more who is 18 years old or up may sign, because no Madison County school board races are partisan. In addition, the number of required signatures is far less for school board than for most other races. You can pick up a packet from your district clerk that will have all the information you need. That election is in May.

For more information about petitions, including the independent nominating petitions you will need if you run on a second ballot line, see the Board of Elections Running for Office Guide on [THIS PAGE](#).

## Step 6: Raise Money

You have a budget plan (see Get Started), so you have a good estimate of how much your campaign will cost. There are many ways to raise that money; here are a few.

### Ask Friends and Family

Start with your immediate family, brothers and sisters, parents and in-laws. Next, expand the asking circle to include friends. You may be pleasantly surprised to see how many will help you.

There are legal limits on donations. Check with the [Board of Elections](#) (or your district clerk, if you are running for school board) to see how much a single person can legally give for a primary and for the general election.

### Ask Your Committee

Democratic committees may give you money, too. Send a request in writing to your town or ward chair. List what you plan to spend the money on: signs, ads, door hangers, and so on.

### Loan Yourself Money

You may loan your campaign some of your own money. Then, if you raise sufficient funds elsewhere, you can pay yourself back. There are specific ways to report this on the New York State Electronic Filing Website. Work with your treasurer to do this correctly.

### Hold House Parties

Before Covid, a common way to raise funds was through house parties. A friend may host the party in their home or yard and invite neighbors and other friends. You will give a short speech on your reasons for running and your positions, and

you will circulate to meet and greet and answer questions. Guests usually give money in the form of checks. Your treasurer or another assigned person may collect money, keep track of attendees, and ensure that the required information is recorded for your financial report.

## Use ActBlue

ActBlue is also an excellent way both to fundraise and keep track of the information needed for reporting purposes. That friend you went to college with who lives on the west coast? They can give you a contribution through the ActBlue website. [Sign up](#) to get a link you can post on your website, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., and sit back as the money rolls in.

## More About Financial Reporting

The New York State Board of Elections has a [website](#) for reporting campaign finance reports. However, there are several steps to take first.

Once you have filed your petitions with the Board of Elections, you will receive a Candidate ID Number. Keep this letter in a safe place. You will need it.

Next, go to your bank with your treasurer and explain that you are running for office and need to set up a campaign account. Give that account a name such as ELECT JANE DOE CAMPAIGN or FRIENDS OF JOHN DOE. It will be a BUSINESS ACCOUNT. At the same time, the person helping you at the bank can get you a TAX ID NUMBER by going online. It makes sense to have more than one person's name on the account. Your treasurer is a good choice. At this time you may order checks and even a credit card. Keep in mind that there are very strict rules about how money both goes into and comes out of this account. Keep these papers in a safe place.

If an agency or accountant does your year-end taxes, make sure you let them know about this account. You will have to file forms for the campaign, but a good accountant knows what to do. Keep these forms in a safe place also.

We highly recommend that you and your treasurer take one of the seminars offered by the New York State Board of Elections. In addition to the information at the

seminar, they have a helpline for questions. They are very helpful. The training will make navigating the reporting website much easier.

On the [reporting website](#), you will need to report several times a year. January and July are regular reports, and there are also deadlines before and after the Primary and General Election. All this is part of the Campaign Finance Seminars.

Generally speaking, you need to report all income, all expenses, and photos of your campaign materials. There are specific categories for each. It isn't really all that difficult, but it is a good idea to have someone help you the first time.

Many candidates limit their spending to under the cutoff for reporting so they don't have to file. Keep in mind that this is all public information. That means you can see what your opponent files, and vice versa. They will know if you didn't file, so make sure you are following the rules.



## Step 7: Canvass

No local campaign is successful without a strong door-to-door canvassing plan. Meeting people and talking to them is critical to winning their votes. Often people will vote for someone just because they bothered to come to their door at the end of a cul-de-sac or out in the boondocks.

### Calculate Your Win Number

You can make an educated guess about how many votes you need to win by looking at how many people voted for your position last time. That information is archived on the [Board of Elections website](#). If you are one of two people running for a single seat, divide that total in half and add 1 to know how many votes you need to clear that simple majority. Then keep a list of whom you contact in person, by mail, and by text or phone and start to keep track of who will vote for you.

### Get Walking Lists

You will need a curated list of voters, which you can get from the Board of Elections or from your town or ward committee. Remove people who don't regularly vote. Subtract the voters you know will vote for your opponent. Do not assume that someone won't vote for you because you're a Democrat. If you know them personally, that carries some weight. If an address includes people of both parties, your success may depend on who answers the door—but take that chance. Plan to visit independent, no-party-affiliation voters, too. You may need them, and you need to give them a reason to vote for you instead of the other candidate. (This is a good reason to have your own independent line on the ballot as well as the Democratic line.)

### Go Door-to-Door

You may have your list on a spreadsheet, or you may be using a software package such as [VAN](#). As you and your team contact each person, assess how likely they are to vote for you. If they are enthusiastic, offer a lawn sign. Prepare to use

handouts—palm cards and door hangers are perfect for this. Walk with a bagful of absentee applications and voter registration forms in case you run into people who need either one. Have key dates with you in case people ask “When does early voting start?” or “When is the primary?” Check off the people you talk with directly, and plan to follow up with get-out-the-vote phone calls and/or mailers. If people are not at home, leave a handout if you can do so without placing it in or on a mailbox. Signing a stack of handouts in advance with “Sorry I missed you” is a good idea.

Hit denser neighborhoods first. Allow other volunteers to drive you to areas that are more difficult to walk. Make sure that you and your fellow canvassers are using the same script of talking points. If you are working as a team with other candidates, divide up the area.

## Connect

You should have a very brief introduction planned for each door. It should involve asking about the resident’s concerns and opinions and some careful listening. This can take time, so if you are walking with a volunteer, that volunteer should be ready to say “Sorry, but we need to move on.” Be consistent with your talking points. Your campaign is about something; let the resident know what that is. And do not be afraid to ASK for the person’s vote. Keep track and follow up!

## **Step 8: Reach as Many People as Possible**

You may not be able to knock on every door in your jurisdiction, but there are other ways to connect. Some people say that to get someone to vote for you, they must see your name seven times. Those seven times may include your lawn signs, mailings, and door hangers, but they can also include free media. Taking advantage of free media can ensure that you spend your hard-earned campaign dollars wisely. These ideas represent the bare minimum for most campaigns other than judge.

### **Free Media: Letters to the Editor**

Round up friends and volunteers, give them talking points or a copy of your palm card, and have them hit local weeklies and dailies a few weeks before Election Day with letters on your behalf.

### **Free Media: Interviews**

Call reporters or radio hosts and get a commitment for an interview. If they will only talk to you if you're making news, make some news: React to a current event or problem in your town or ward, donate something to the town or county, get an endorsement from someone newsworthy, or just gather so many signatures on petitions that you break a local record.

### **Free Media: Social Media**

It's ideal to have someone to post for you on your various campaign sites. They should post regularly and follow you around with a camera. Take pictures at local businesses and parks. Attend local events, thank the promoters, and tag them. Promote a great book or movie that you've recently read or seen.

Use videos to discuss policy issues and platform points. Always run a video past someone you trust before posting it. And always think before you post.

## A Quick Word About Endorsements

Once you have a message and are on the ballot, you can start to seek endorsements. Endorsements are a way of connecting to your potential voters. If you know an elected official, an important person, or a group with influence, their endorsement could bring in votes. Do not be afraid to ask for an endorsement.

Another way to get an endorsement is to interview with the organization. For example, many unions will do political endorsements. If the union chooses to endorse a candidate, their support may include making phone calls to their members asking them to vote for you, publishing a list of endorsed candidates in their newsletters, and possibly even donating some money. However, their endorsement may depend on the answers you give in the interview stage. In addition, there will be an Ask of you. They will ask you to make sure that your election campaign materials are produced in a union shop and to put that union insignia, or “union bug” on the materials. If you get a union endorsement, make sure you don’t just talk a good game with them, make sure you walk the walk.

There are no union print shops in Madison County as of this writing. Also, many candidates prefer to buy from local shops, keeping business in the community. There are union shops in Syracuse and Auburn, as well as online.

Regardless of where your endorsements come from, make sure you publicize them as much as possible. Put them on your website and social media. Consider taking out an ad. If you have a handful of strong endorsements, send a media release to local papers.

## Step 9: Get Out the Vote

All your hard work to this point is meaningless if your voters don't show up at the polls. Most campaigns work hard in the last week prior to Election Day to ensure that their voters are ready and eager to vote. Now that we have early voting, the GOTV effort may start even earlier.

### Call

Have a volunteer develop a phone script that includes your main talking points, information about polling places, and the dates when people should vote. Callers should ask the voters they reach when they plan to vote—are they voting/did they vote absentee? Will they early vote/Have they early voted at the one polling place available? Will they vote on Election Day at their usual site? Having citizens visualize themselves voting has proved to be a very productive way of getting them to the polls.

Phone numbers are on your walking lists, but many of them will be out of date, because the lists rarely include cell phone numbers. If you reach voicemail, leave a brief message that includes your name, the position you are running for, and the date of the election. It used to be popular to call on Election Day itself; now most campaigns do their calling on the weekend prior to that Tuesday.

### Text

If you have mobile phone numbers for a lot of voters, you can send individual texts as reminders. You cannot send robotexts without the called party's prior consent and an opt-out option.

### Send GOTV Postcards

If you have the funds, sending reminder postcards to frequent voters can be very useful. Hold a postcard-writing party with your volunteers, or ask friends and family to label a batch of cards for you. You can set up your voting list so that it is

easy to print out labels. If you are running in a village or for school board, handwritten cards may be all that you need.

### Do a Last-Minute Lit Drop

If you have door hangers left over by the weekend before Election Day, get some young volunteers to run around town and hang them on doorknobs as a reminder to vote. Put a handwritten note on them if you have time.

### Poll Watch

Candidates cannot do this, but campaign volunteers may get poll watching certificates from the Madison County Democratic Committee chair and hang out at the polls on Election Day to see how turnout looks and whether your voters appear to be showing up. Find out more about poll watching from the Board of Elections.

## APPENDIX: Some Resources

A good book: *Somebody's Gotta Do It* by Adrienne Martini, now a county legislator in Otsego County

Act Blue

[www.secure.actblue.com](http://www.secure.actblue.com)

Some local unions:

New York State United Teachers

315.431.4040 Syracuse

315.768.0131 Utica

[www.nysut.org](http://www.nysut.org)

CSEA Union Region 5

800.559.7975

[www.cseany.org](http://www.cseany.org)

A Union Printer

ARO Graph Printers

[www.arograph.com](http://www.arograph.com)

Madison County Board of Elections,  
138 North Court Street, PO Box 666  
Wampsville, NY 13163

315.366.2231

<https://www.madisoncounty.ny.gov/1547/Board-of-Elections>

Some local newspapers:

Cazenovia Republican

<https://eaglenewsonline.com/pubs/cazenovia-republican/>

Madison Courier

<https://madisoncountycourier.com>

Oneida Dispatch

[www.oneidadispatch.com](http://www.oneidadispatch.com)

Rome Sentinel

[www.romesentinel.com](http://www.romesentinel.com)

Syracuse Post-Standard

[www.syracuse.com](http://www.syracuse.com)

Utica Observer Dispatch

[www.uticaod.com](http://www.uticaod.com)