

Absentee Ballots Up Over 2016 Election

By Geoff Folsom
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Early voting in Franklin County is off to a fast start.

As of Thursday morning, 3,679 absentee ballots had been sent out for the Nov. 3 general election, County Clerk Tim Baker said. The first mail-in ballots were sent out Sept. 22.

That compares with 3,420 absentee ballots sent out for the entire last presidential election in 2016. Of those, 3,190 were returned.

Another 456 people had voted in person at the county clerk's office at 400 E. Locust St. in Union.

The trend is being seen statewide. Voters across Missouri are requesting absentee ballots at a "much faster pace" than previous elections, said Maura Browning, director of public affairs and strategic communications for Missouri Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft.

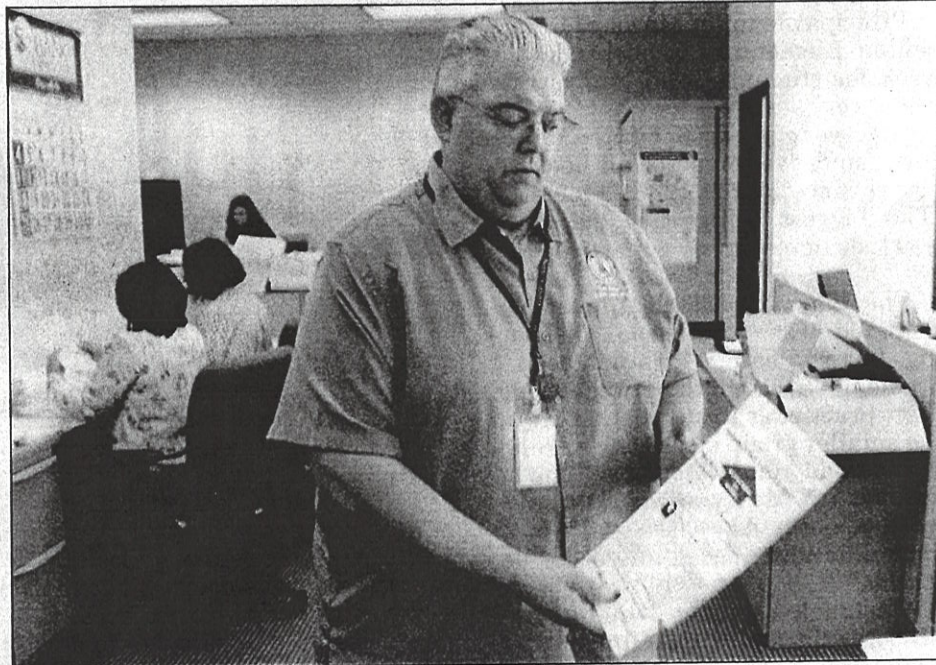
Curbside Voting

Starting Thursday, Oct. 1, some voters have another option — curbside voting. People who need assistance can now park in a special parking space on Church Street in front of the Union Police Department. After they call the clerk's office, a bipartisan team will come out to assist with their ballot.

"This is just for high-risk individuals worried about going into the polls that day or walking into the building," Baker said.

Like in-person voters, drive-up voters must show proper identification, such as a driver's license, Missouri college ID, military ID, a valid passport or personal mail, such as a bank statement or electric bill.

Voters place the drive-up ballots in a secret envelope that goes directly into the vote tabulation machine. Baker said no one from his office sees the ballot before it is counted.



Secret Ballot

Franklin County Clerk Tim Baker shows off the secret envelope used with curbside ballots. The envelope allows the ballot to go from the voter's car to the tabulation machine without being seen by workers. Missouriian Photo/Geoff Folsom.

side voters are asked to provide an excuse for voting. Baker said the top excuses for absentee ballots in Franklin County have been voters either contracting or being at risk for the coronavirus or planning to be out of the county on Election Day.

The county also has brought in a new election judge to help with curbside voting, which allows those in the clerk's office to work with in-person and mail-in voting, Baker said.

One advantage for in-person voting compared with mail-in ballots is the opportunity for workers to catch a mistake. Baker said that if someone makes an error like partly marking two candidates for the same office on a mail-in ballot, the county would have

far.

"No matter how many times we explain it, there has been a lot of confusion on it," he said.

Scenic Regional Library branches are helping out by offering free notary services. Macee Jarvis, manager of the library's Union branch, said they have seen double the number of notary requests leading up to the election compared to the rest of the year.

The library, which offers notary services from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays, also has seen some confusion from voters.

"We have had people walk in asking if they can get ballots from us," said Jarvis, one of two notaries public at the Union branch. "Unfortunately,

8 a.m. to noon for absentee voting on two Saturdays — Oct. 24 and Oct. 31.

Baker is anticipating voter turnout of 70 percent, which is close to the 71 percent turnout in 2016, according to *The Missouriian's* archives.

Baker predicts 10 percent of Franklin County's 74,000 registered voters will vote by mail.

"We prepare for 100 percent, because we have to and we want to make sure that every voter that wants to vote can vote," he said.

Baker expects things to run smoothly on Election Day.

"There will be lines at some (polling places), but it's not going to be the horror show you have in some of the big metropolitan areas," he said.

Some parts of the country have seen talk of taking days or weeks to count votes. Barring an unforeseen issue, Baker expects Franklin County to have its vote tally done on election night — or at least by the wee hours Nov. 4.

"Usually, we have the absentee (reported) at 7," he said. "It may be a little later than that, but we will have everything counted before we leave that evening."

Franklin County also doesn't anticipate poll worker shortages seen elsewhere, Baker said.

"We have replaced a few, but we are very blessed in the county to have good people willing to work," he said.

Poll workers will wear masks, gloves and face shields, Baker said. About 95 percent of precincts, all but the county's least busy polling places, will have a worker dedicated to cleaning.

So far, the postal service is delivering mail-in ballots and requests and returning them in a timely manner, Baker said.

The deadline to register to vote in the Nov. 3 election is Wednesday, Oct. 7. The deadline to request an absentee ballot is Wednesday, Oct.

last presidential election in 2016. Of those, 3,190 were returned.

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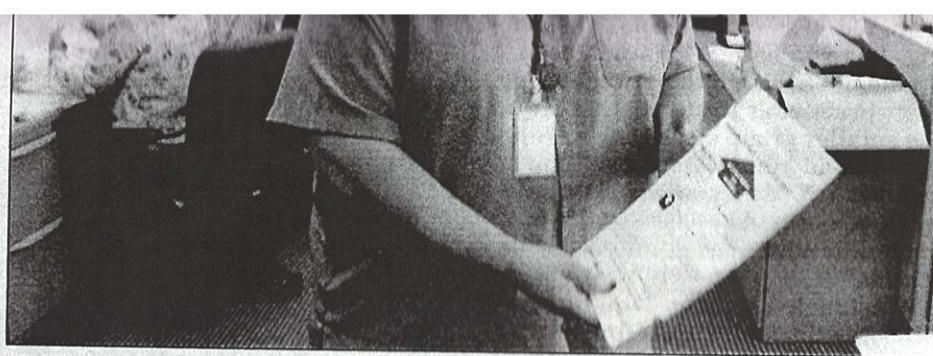
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The city of Union worked with the county on providing the parking space, which is usually reserved for law enforcement. Only one person had voted curbside in the first few hours it had been available.

"We don't know if we are going to have one person or 1,000," Baker said.

Increased Voting

Like with absentee ballots, curb-



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One advantage for in-person voting compared with mail-in ballots is the opportunity for workers to catch a mistake. Baker said that if someone makes an error like partly marking two candidates for the same office on a mail-in ballot, the county would have to negate the vote for that particular office. But, in person, they would be able to tell that the ballot was marked twice and the voter would be given the chance to fill out another ballot.

Voters are required to have mail-in ballots notarized unless their excuse given is being incapacitated or COVID-19, Baker said. That has been the most confusing part of the process so

far.

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"We have had people walk in asking if they can get ballots from us," said Jarvis, one of two notaries public at the Union branch. "Unfortunately, we don't have them."

They do, however, provide absentee ballot request forms, and have information on voting at the checkout desk.

"Really, we are the only place that offers free notary services," Jarvis said. "We don't require anything except your mask and your ID."

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sure that every voter that wants to vote can vote," he said.

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The deadline to register to vote in the Nov. 3 election is Wednesday, Oct. 7. The deadline to request an absentee mail-in ballot is Wednesday, Oct. 21.

Anyone with questions about voting can call the clerk's office at 636-583-6364.

"I'm grateful to our staff and the election judges," Baker said. "They just amaze me. You couldn't ask for finer people working the polls than in this office."