

## Voting machines widely used

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Last Updated: Wednesday, September 20th, 2006 10:15:00 AM

Those who exercised their constitutional right in Tuesday's Sept. 12 Partisan Primary Election, selecting the candidates of choice to run for the general election in November, observed a little black machine on four thin legs – the new electronic voting machines.

Voters were encouraged to cast their ballots via the new machines. Many were a little reluctant at first. However, at the end of primary day, most got past any anxiety and used the new technology.

Lynn Hoepfner, Washburn County deputy clerk and recent primary winner for Republican ticket for county clerk, said most municipalities showed a usage rate of between 50 and 75 percent.

The percentage was a little lower in Shell Lake where approximately 25 percent opted for the new machines.

Mary Dunbar, an election official for Shell Lake, said the lower percentage use is probably due to the high number of elderly voters who turned out on primary night. But, she said, those who used the machines were very positive.

"It was very easy for voters," she said. "We had a very positive response."

Dunbar said the only negative aspect of using the machines is that an election official has to activate the machine after each voter finished casting a vote.

In Spooner, 362 voters turned out for the primary, and well over 90 percent used the new voting machines, according to Spooner City Clerk Barb Daniels.

"The election inspectors were awesome in encouraging people to use the machines," she said. "After voting many said, 'This is fun! This is cool!'"

The machines were amazingly easy to use. All one had to do was select a party, the candidates' names appeared, and the voter just had to touch the screen. The voter was able to see a full report of all his or her votes and watch a paper ballot print-out at the end.

Daniels said the machines were especially less cumbersome to use for a primary than paper ballots because with paper, all the party primary ballot cards are issued but the voter selects just one party's ballot and discards the others.

At the end of the voting day, Daniels said, along with the electronic tallies the machines produced a tape 6 to 8 feet long with the vote data.

"It was much easier than hand-counting," she said.

Spooner had three machines available for the Sept. 12 primary. Election officials told Daniels they are recommending Spooner buy two more for the November general election – a vote of confidence for technology.



