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## Volunteers worked area during campaign

BY LISA MILLER • TELEGRAPH-FORUM STAFF • JANUARY 20, 2009

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BUCYRUS -- Jason Dougherty was prepared for the hours, he was surprised by the passion for politics.

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Tim Willard, a veteran of more than one presidential campaign, didn't really think Barack Obama could win it all.

Dougherty, an upstate New York native, and Willard, a suburban Philadelphia native, were among thousands of Americans who signed on with Obama's presidential campaign. Dougherty was a volunteer. Willard was paid. Both were deployed to north central Ohio, where they pounded the pavement in Richland, Crawford and Wyandot counties.

A history major at State University of New York in Oswego, Dougherty graduated from the University of Detroit law school. Friends convinced him job prospects would be better in Chicago. He moved there and took the Illinois bar exam in July and was awaiting results when the campaign bug bit.

"Man, it seems like a long time ago," Dougherty said of the unpaid work that consumed his summer and fall.

The 26-year-old spent a weekend at Camp Obama in Chicago, learning along with other volunteers about canvassing, phone [banks](#) and dealing with the public.

By the first week in September, Dougherty was working out of Obama headquarters on Walnut Street in Mansfield. He was deployed to Bucyrus for the Crawford-Wyandot counties effort and for much of his tenure was at it 13 hours a day, seven days a week. The Democratic headquarters on South Sandusky Avenue opened at 9 a.m. and he was usually on the street and then back in the office until 10:30 p.m.

"I think I knocked on a thousand doors," Dougherty said, calculating he stopped at 100 [homes](#) a day on some weekends.

His impressions of central Ohio?

"It was definitely different there," Dougherty offered. "People were so into politics."

He also found the locals to be pretty friendly. He had Thanksgiving dinner with campaign volunteer Judy Shroll and her family in rural Bucyrus. Dougherty didn't strike out with Republicans either.

"The opposition would definitely engage me."

Election night was exhausting, but came with a sense of powerlessness.

"I couldn't imagine losing," Dougherty said, explaining he almost felt bad for the people on the other side. "There's so much work that's put into this."



Obama volunteer Jason Dougherty worked in Richland, Crawford and Wyandot counties during the campaign. (Telegraph-Forum photo)

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He got some other good news during the campaign: He passed the bar and was sworn in as a newly-minted lawyer on Thursday after the election.

He would enlist for another political campaign if time and circumstances allowed or would at least like to knock on a few doors on a Sunday afternoon someday.

"I really enjoyed it," Dougherty said.

Six hundred miles south, Willard is in Washington, D.C., to see the culmination of his work. He's been a volunteer for Howard Dean's run for the Democratic nomination and a paid staffer for both Sen. John Kerry's presidential campaign and a Pennsylvania statehouse race.

Last year he took two weeks of vacation to stump in South Carolina where Obama won the Democratic primary.

"I thought that would be fun."

The 29-year-old moved on to Maryland, eventually running out of time off work and submitted his resume to the campaign. Ohio was his top choice of campaign destination.

"That's the game," Willard said of coming to the battleground state in July.

"I believed (Obama) when he spoke. I believed that he was telling the truth."

Willard never thought the race was a slam dunk.

"I didn't think he had a chance," Willard said. "I was cynical when I started."

"It's a weird kind of process. You don't want to get on board because you don't want to get your heart broken."

Wins in February made him grow more confident in the candidate.

Willard admitted he didn't know what to expect when he came here. He began working 100-hour weeks with an estimated 150 volunteers.

"I felt good all the way through about what we were doing," he said.

Right now, Willard is between jobs. Would he sign on for another campaign?

"In a heartbeat," he said.

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