

# Sheriff recall effort takes historic step

by Warren Cooper / Hunterdon County Democrat

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The committee to recall Sheriff Deborah Trout made New Jersey history Monday when it filed a Notice of Intent to collect enough signatures to get the question on the Nov. 3 ballot. According to the N.J. League of Counties and Eagleton Institute of New Jersey Politics, it may be the first official effort to recall a county-level elected official in the state.

County Clerk Mary Melfi delivered a copy of the notice to Ms. Trout on Monday afternoon.

OutwithTrout.org Chairman Donna Simon of Readington Township said the committee will begin collecting signatures on Saturday, Jan. 31 at a public information session at the

American Legion hall on Route 31 in Flemington. It has filed with the state Election Law Enforcement Commission to enable the committee to accept financial donations toward the effort, which Ms. Simon expects will be costly.

With room for only seven signatures per petition page, OutwithTrout.org will need to fill at least 3,144 pages to collect the signatures of 21,866 registered Hunterdon County voters. Ms. Simon said the group hopes to collect 5% to 6% more than that, in case some names are deemed ineligible and thrown out. If the 160-day effort begins by the Jan. 31 meeting, the group will have until July 9 to reach its goal. Ms. Melfi said she's only obligated to certify that the number of signatures is right, unless Ms. Trout mounts a challenge. But she'll go ahead and certify each signature if the petition is submitted on time.

The group plans to have a "municipal leader" in each of the county's 26 towns who will organize people to petition for signatures locally, but it will concentrate on Raritan, Readington and Clinton townships, which have the most voters.

Each person in the process has to be a registered voter, according to Ms. Melfi, who confirmed the status of Ms. Simon, OutwithTrout.org Treasurer Mary Mott of Baptistown, and Ms. Simon's husband Michael, who together comprise the official committee. The Simons were part of the Readington Township group that opposed expansion of the Solberg Airport.

The petition, still being prepared, will include a statement by the recall committee that reads, in part, that the sheriff "has abused the power given to her by the people through her maladministration of office. Her political appointments have committed fraud and threatened citizens. She has initiated at taxpayer expense costly and irresponsible lawsuits, and has exhibited hostile behavior towards county officials and employees which has embarrassed and violated the trust that we the people have placed in her."

The sheriff had no comment about the Notice of Intent Tuesday, other than to say that she would deliver to Ms. Melfi by Monday a response to the committee's statement that will be printed on the petition.

Ms. Simon said she has received about 200 supportive e-mails from people responding to the information on the OutwithTrout.org Web site and she is hoping for a big turnout on Jan. 31, perhaps as many as 300 people. But low attendance won't discourage the group, she said. "We are determined and motivated and absolutely will get this done."

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Posted by [op3ftwn](#) on 01/08/09 at 9:04AM

This Is a Joke. Somerset County(Non-Civil Service)is the only sheriff's

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Photo by George Pacciello

THEY WANT TROUT OUT -- Donna Simon of Readington Township (left) heads a group that wants to remove Sheriff Deborah Trout from office. On Monday she filed a 'notice of intent' with County Clerk Mary Melfi, beginning what may be the first official effort to recall a county-level elected official in state history.

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