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** Worth Repeating **

Why Obam a Won - By Jim Toedtman | Editor, AARP Bulletin Today (November 4, 2008)

In a small office at the Schott glass company warehouse in Duryea, Pa., I interviewed Sen. Barack Obama for half an hour, which became the lead article in the AARP Bulletin's October issue. Our face-to-face meeting was hastily arranged and was squeezed between Obama's tour of the plant, a public rally, meetings with local union leaders and local television reporters, a snack at a local diner and a trip to New Jersey. But it happened.

This small story tells the big story of why Barack Obama is president-elect of the United States. It shows the instincts and attention to detail that was replicated hundreds if not thousands of times over the past year, and in the process made history.

1. His campaign recognized his weaknesses and addressed them.

Half of the likely voters are over age 50 this year, and they are a problem for Democrats. They voted overwhelmingly for George Bush in 2000 and 2004. Even this year, as support for Democrats surged across the country, the number of people identifying themselves with the Republican Party actually increased among voters over 65, according to the latest Pew Research poll. This resulted from Reagan Republicans getting older, and especially from the passing of members of the New Deal generation, who were overwhelmingly Democratic.

Older voters have been a special problem for Obama. They preferred Hillary Clinton over Obama during the primary campaign. Converting them posed a crucial challenge for Obama's general election strategy. At the same time, John McCain had a significant advantage among older voters, which meant that both candidates had an interest in reaching them. One very efficient vehicle would be the AARP Bulletin, the association's monthly news publication whose circulation of 24 million reaches more than half of the nation's 50-plus population. Members are over 50, they tend to be engaged in civic activities and vote at a higher rate than nonmembers. In July I sent identical letters to both Obama and Sen. John McCain, requesting Bulletin interviews with them. The McCain campaign never replied.

2. He had a superior organization.

Within days of sending the letter, I received a call from Erin Fitzgerald in Obama's Chicago headquarters, acknowledging the request and conveying the campaign's interest in arranging an interview. After a false start, my request was bumped up to Moira Mack, also based in Chicago, who always closed our conversations confidently: "We're going to make this happen." Finally, on Labor Day, she left a telephone message and an e-mail on my BlackBerry. How about this week? Fine. How about Wilkes-Barre, Pa.? Fine. Go there Friday and we'll let you know. Call Katie Herbek for details.