

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

For **Dennis Richards**, working for the people of Adams Township in Cambria County has been both his livelihood and his pleasure for more than 30 years. Whether working on the roads or solving sewer issues, he has always put the needs of the residents first.

'A good guy'

Dennis Richards

Adams Township, Cambria County

30 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

These days, municipal elections aren't exactly known for drawing a lot of voters to the polls, not to mention candidates. Thirty-one years ago, however, things were much different, at least in Adams Township, Cambria County. When Dennis Richards was encouraged to run for supervisor after he was laid off from his mill job, he joined a slate of 18 other candidates vying for two open positions. Eighteen!

"Now it's hard to find one person to run," Richards says. "It's tough to get people involved."

Richards won the seat for an open six-year term and has been in office ever since, although he says his current term will be his last. It's time for someone else to step up, he says.

He never did go back to his former job. Instead, he worked as a member of the township road crew until recently stepping down, helping to maintain the community's 52 miles of roads.

"Working for the township is a great



job," he says. "Every day you have something different to do. You might be laying pipe, plowing snow, or cutting trees. Even in the winter, you are busy."

Richards still serves as chairman of the board of supervisors, a position he has held off and on over the past three decades. His longevity as a supervisor and road worker has made him a valuable resource for the other four members of the board, as well as the township employees.

"He's a good boss; he listens," long-time township secretary Diana Baxter

Long-time supervisor Dennis Richards has spent more than three decades working on the roads in Adams Township, Cambria County. His extensive knowledge of the township and its history has made him a valuable resource to his fellow supervisors.

says. "He stops and thinks before opening his mouth."

Growing internally

Adams Township is primarily a bedroom community for the nearby City of Johnstown. Most development during Richards's tenure has been residential, with a little commercial thrown in. There is no industry, but energy companies have given the community a boost in recent years.

Two gas wells were drilled in the township, although neither has yet been tapped, and 29 wind turbines grace a reclaimed strip mine, generating clean energy and a yearly influx of revenue for the township.

"We get about \$130,000 a year from the turbines," Richards says. "The school district and county get a share, too."

Time has brought upgrades to township facilities, as well. When Richards took office, the municipality had two coal-heated buildings. The township

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erected a new municipal building and rented half of it to the district magistrate. A second building constructed for the magistrate freed up half of the municipal building, where state Rep. Bryan Barbin now has an office.

The township also constructed a shed for its trucks and other equipment and purchased an old fire hall nearby to store the vehicles for the police department, which boasts three full-time and nine part-time officers.

"The police department takes a big chunk of our budget," Richards acknowledges. "It's not cheap to have a police department, but with an area this size, we need one."

Two volunteer fire departments also serve the community.

When the township added public sewer some years ago, there were the usual concerns about the location of the lines and the cost of tap-in fees, Richards says.

"Plus, if a property's interior plumbing would not work with the sewer system, it had to be dug up and replaced, which didn't make people happy," he says.

'You never know what's going to happen'

Over the years, Richards has learned to roll with the punches and take things as they come.

"You have to be prepared every day; you never know what's going to happen," he says.

For example, when a bridge collapsed some years ago, the township had to build a temporary structure and then work to get a permanent replacement, Richards says. Fortunately, the bridge was eligible for state and federal funding, and the township was able to replace the span that connects the two ends of the municipality.

When an issue like this comes up, his fellow supervisors turn to Richards for guidance, secretary Diana Baxter says.

"He has a very good relationship with the other supervisors," she says. "They look to him for his knowledge of the township and its roads because he has been in office so long. He has also developed a lot of contacts, which is very helpful."

Baxter says that Richards is always working to improve the township, whether it's upgrading infrastructure or pushing for stormwater management. Most recently, he has been focused on flood control on the Little Conemaugh River and trying to get the state Department of Environmental Protection to see that dredging is the simplest and most cost-effective remedy.

Richards has five more years to serve and then will hang up his hat. He's looking forward to spending more time with his wife of 51 years and their three children and grandchildren. Until then, however, he will keep one thing foremost in his mind: the residents.

"I try to do my best for them," he says. "I don't compare one part of the township to another or treat one group differently than another. I try to help the whole community."

He excels at that, Baxter says.

"Denny is a good guy. He truly thinks of the people of Adams Township," she says. "He always remembers who elected him." ♦

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