

HALLOFFAME

Whether it's with his job as a potato farmer and businessman, his work on the Penn State Board of Trustees, or his role as a Hubley Township supervisor, **Keith Masser** puts his vision and leadership to work for the good of all.

Visionary Leader

Keith Masser

Hubley Township, Schuylkill County
39 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Lots of titles could be used to describe Keith Masser — farmer, businessman, Penn State grad, pilot, township supervisor — but visionary leader may be the most encompassing.

A seventh-generation farmer, Masser is the chairman and chief executive officer of a potato farming, processing, and distribution company that employs approximately 350 people in western Schuylkill County. For the last eight years, he has served on the Penn State University Board of Trustees, where he helped to lead the university out of its most tumultuous period in recent history.

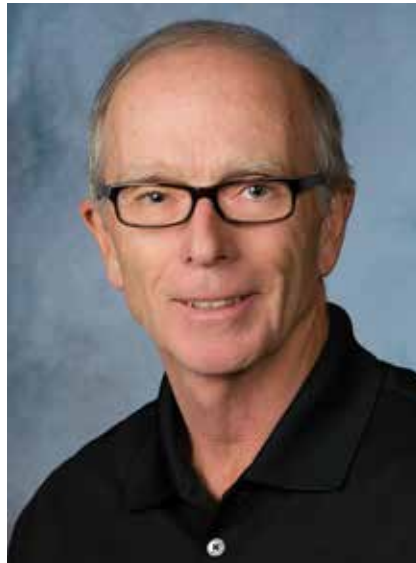
A well-respected leader in the potato industry, he has chaired several national promotion and cooperative boards and held leadership positions with the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

In addition, for the past four decades, he has served as the chair of the Hubley Township Board of Supervisors, lending his leadership skills and providing guidance to the community where he lives and works.

“My mantra has always been the more you give back, the more you get in return,” Masser says.

Potato entrepreneur

Masser grew up in western Schuylkill County, where his family has been growing potatoes since the turn of the



Keith Masser has served as chair of the board of supervisors in Hubley Township, Schuylkill County, for 39 years, helping to guide it into the 21st century and beyond. (Submitted photo.)

19th century. A few years after graduating from Penn State in 1973 with a degree in agricultural engineering, he and his wife, Helen, returned to the area to raise a family. Masser wasted no time getting involved and making a difference in the community.

In 1984, he purchased his parents' farming operations, Sterman Masser, Inc., and in the 30-some years since then, has grown the business to the \$110 million operation it is today. The company grows, packs, and ships more than 300 million pounds of potatoes annually to supermarkets along the East Coast.

“Visionary is the best word to describe Keith,” Michael Pechart, chief

operating officer at Sterman Masser, says. “He has an uncanny ability to understand what the future holds and to make key business decisions in response.”

Take what he did in 2003 to find a use for potatoes that don't quite meet industry specs for shipment to supermarkets. Putting his familiarity with the industry to work, he launched Keystone Potato Products, one of the nation's most advanced and innovative potato processing plants.

Here, less-than-perfect potatoes are cut, steamed, and dehydrated into high-quality potato flakes and sold for making such products as instant mashed potatoes, potato bread, and pierogies.

“As our business grew, we needed an alternative use for off-grade potatoes,” he says.

Not only did he find a solution for those potatoes, but he was able to build a facility that has been lauded as energy-efficient and environmentally friendly. The plant is powered by methane gases produced at a nearby landfill, and recently the company built a state-of-the-art water treatment system that pulls acid wastewater from nearby abandoned mines and removes iron and manganese from the water, which is then used in the plant's operations.

Community leader

The visionary leadership skills that have served Masser so well in the business world have proven to be successful in other aspects of his life, including his job as a township supervisor, a position he has held since returning to the area in the mid-1970s. ➤

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“One of the supervisors that I knew at the time kept trying to talk me into running for supervisor,” he recalls. In the spring of 1977, Masser put his name on the ballot but lost by a few votes in the primary. Not one to give up, he launched a write-in campaign and was elected supervisor in the general election.

“I’ve run every six years since then as a way to put my leadership experience to work in the township,” he says. “My son and daughter and my four grandchildren all live in the township, and I want to keep working to make it a better place.”

Carol Shade has known Masser longer than most people. She worked alongside him as Hubley Township’s secretary for 32 years and also served for decades as his secretary at Sterman Masser.

“I have never met a more energetic



A pilot for 40 years, Masser has flown his planes all over the continental United States for both business and pleasure. “I actually fly more miles than I drive,” he says. (Submitted photo.)

and driven person,” Shade, who retired as township secretary in 2010, says. “He’s more than willing to get his hands dirty and always accomplishes what he sets out to do.”

Even when dealing with an unpopular issue, she says, Masser knows where to go to find expert advice and how to talk to people to get them to under-

stand the reasons for certain decisions. Despite the occasional controversies, she says, he was always re-elected as supervisor and chair of the board.

“People see what all he’s done for the community and how many people he employs,” Shade says. “They admire him and respect him for what he’s accomplished.”

When Masser first became a supervisor at the young age of 26, the township’s main concern was maintenance of its roads. Over the next four decades, he helped to guide the township into the 21st century even if that has meant tackling the sometimes sticky topics of zoning, water, and sewer.

“He’s not afraid to step into controversial matters and make decisions if he knows it’s the right thing to do for the good of the whole,” Pechart says.

Masser plans to continue as township supervisor at least until he is confident that a controversial sewer project the township is now working on is squared away.

“Being a township supervisor is a thankless job at times,” he says, “but it is these kinds of issues that keep me involved. I don’t want to let the citizens down by walking away from a controversial project that needs completion.”

As he’s done at Sterman Masser where his son, David, and daughter, Julie, hold key positions poised for succession one day, he wants to find the best and brightest from the community to eventually take his place as township supervisor.










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"I want to make sure the imprints and changes I have made will stick," he says. "That goes for Hubley Township, as well as Penn State."

Commitment to the future

Masser's leadership shines the brightest during times of conflict and controversy. While serving as chair of the Penn State Board of Trustees from January 2013 through July this year, he helped lead the university through the fallout from the Sandusky scandal. It was not an enviable position, but Masser says that leaders can't always follow the path of least resistance.

"Going through a crisis like we did at Penn State has given me crisis management skills that I have been able to put to work in the township, for example when dealing with this sewer issue," he says.

His current term on the Penn State Board of Trustees ends June 30, 2017, when he is eligible to serve one more three-year term. He points with pride to how Penn State has been able to rebound since the controversy, but there are a few loose ends he would like to see tied up before he steps away from the board.

"At this point, I'm not sure if I'll run for another term again or not," he says. "I do know I want to stay involved until I have seen Penn State completely through the process."

It is this commitment to things he holds dear and his willingness to face challenges head on that make Masser a proven leader, Pechart says. "He has such dedication to his township and to Penn State."

Whether dealing with his alma mater, his business, or his township, Masser embodies a leadership style that is visionary and proactive, rather than reactive. Such a strategy has worked well for him and the place he calls home.

As a successful businessman, Masser has traveled the world, but, he says, there's no other place he would rather live than in Hubley Township.

"We live in a beautiful township," he says. "In the decisions I make as a township supervisor, I want to ensure it remains a pristine, safe, and clean place to live far into the future." ♦



COUNTY ASSOCIATION

Upcoming Conventions

OCTOBER

October 4: Sullivan County

October 5: Snyder County

October 6: Cumberland, Dauphin, Lebanon, McKean, and Washington Counties

October 7: Cambria and Pike Counties

October 10: Fulton County

October 12: Columbia and Wayne Counties

October 13: Huntingdon and Jefferson Counties

October 17: Warren County

October 18: Crawford County

October 19: Schuylkill County

October 20: Berks, Greene, Mifflin, Montour, Susquehanna, and Union Counties

October 22: Potter County

October 27: Erie and Northumberland Counties

NOVEMBER

November 7: Lancaster County

November 9: Adams County

November 10: Chester and York Counties

PLEASE NOTE: The convention dates listed had been confirmed when the News went to press. For the most current list of confirmed county conventions and the contact person for each, call PSATS at (717) 763-0930 or visit www.psats.org (choose the "Links" tab and click on "County Associations of Township Officials"). Please be sure to confirm the details with PSATS or the county's contact person.

Conference military donations handed off



Members of the 28th Infantry Division of the Pennsylvania National Guard, based in Harrisburg, traveled to PSATS in August to collect the food and other items PSATS members donated during the Annual Conference in April. From left are PSATS Chief Education Officer James Wheeler and Chief Operations Officer Kirk Montrose, Specialists Jeremiah Clark, Kerin Francois, and Marcus Brown, and PSATS Technology Manager Sarah Shatto and Executive Director David Sanko.