Tom Roberts and his doctor have a running joke. “He says I have more spare parts than an old Chevy,” the six-term supervisor from Chippewa Township, Beaver County, says with a laugh.

Yet, despite a series of recent and not-so-recent health setbacks, Roberts has kept motoring along, driven by a caring nature and big heart. “He’s one of the most dedicated people I’ve ever come across,” says fellow supervisor Jim Bouril. “Tom would do anything and everything for the community.”

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“It’s something I was born with; I don’t know how to say ‘no,’” a humble Roberts says. Then, the truth tumbles out. “Besides, deep down, I like helping other people.”

An unwanted tax increase prompted Tom Roberts to run for supervisor in Chippewa Township, Beaver County, but a desire to make the township a better place has kept him in office for more than three decades. His public service, but a desire to make the township a better place for his neighbors, has kept him in office. One of his top priorities has been public safety.

Roberts and his family moved to Chippewa Township in 1969, and it didn’t take long for him to get involved in the community. He served first as a tax assessor, then as township supervisor for a term, and next as an auditor. In the early 1970s, he ran for township supervisor once again and is now the board’s longest-serving member.

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With a busy highway, Route 51, cutting through the township, the supervisor was concerned that a part-time police department didn’t provide enough protection.

“You never know what’s going to happen — you could have accidents, and then there is the truck traffic,” Roberts says. This prompted the supervisors to expand the township’s police coverage and put officers on duty around the clock.

Today, the township’s police department is professional and respected, and Roberts is rightfully proud. “I’d put our police department up against any other,” he says.

Route 51 not only led to the creation of a larger police department in Chip-
pewa Township, but it also paved the way for business development. Roberts admits that it was difficult to convince residents that growth, managed properly, would be good for the community. “We had a reputation as a bedroom community,” he says, “and a lot of folks didn’t want to change.”

Progress came anyway, and Roberts is glad that it did. “I thought it was important that we broaden our tax base,” he says, “and I wanted good places for seniors to be able to shop.”

Shopping centers, big-box retailers, restaurants, and auto dealerships dot the highway and form the township’s commercial hub. “And now we’ve got a hotel on the horizon,” Roberts says.

A helping hand

Like most township supervisors, Roberts is a public servant in the truest sense, which means his community service doesn’t end when he leaves the municipal building. In addition to being the community’s emergency management coordinator since 1972, Roberts is a long-time member of the local fire department. He is also active in the Lions Club and his church, where he is president of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, one of the nation’s oldest charitable organizations, and serves on a foundation that buys hearing aids for the needy.

It’s pretty clear that Roberts has committed his life to helping others. He has also led by example. Just ask Jim Bouril, who says Roberts convinced him to become a township supervisor and has been a positive influence ever since. “He’s super generous and super caring,” Bouril says. “He taught me the importance of serving the community and giving back to others.”

Does that mean the board of supervisors always agrees? No, Bouril says, but they do see the bigger picture. “We don’t always vote the same way, but we do respect each other,” he says. “For us, it’s not about politics. It’s about what is best for the community.”

Donations from PSATS members to help the military

Thanks to the generosity of Pennsylvania’s township officials, hundreds of nonperishable items are on their way to the men and women serving our country. The items were collected at PSATS’ 90th Annual Educational Conference in May and handed off to two military men stationed at the Willow Grove Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base in Horsham Township, Montgomery County. From left are PSATS Director of Environmental Affairs James Wheeler, Staff Sgt. Adam Hallock, Master Sgt. Richard Wiktorski, and PSATS Executive Director David M. Sanko.