

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

Over the past three decades, **Robert Wagner** and his fellow supervisors have worked hard to provide services to the residents of Lycoming Township in Lycoming County in spite of a small budget. Good money management, intermunicipal partnerships, and natural gas development have helped them do just that.

Doing a lot with a little

Robert Wagner

Lycoming Township,

Lycoming County

34 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As a self-employed masonry contractor, Robert Wagner was used to making all the decisions himself. When he took a seat on the board of supervisors for Lycoming Township in Lycoming County more than three decades ago, he had a bit of a learning curve.

"That first year, I had to get used to the fact that I wasn't making 'Bob Wagner' decisions," he says. "There were two other guys I had to work with."

He also had to learn that he does not always have the answers. "I don't look at this as if a supervisor knows everything there is to know," he says, "but it's important to know where to go to get your questions answered."

Wagner learned his lessons well and now says he has a very good working relationship with the other supervisors. In fact, his fellow officials have named him chairman ever since he's been in office.

"If we are facing a problem, we are able to sit down and come up with a solution," he says. "We don't always agree, but we are always able to work it out."



Robert Wagner is thinking about retiring when his current term as a Lycoming Township supervisor ends. He hopes someone younger will fill his spot. "We need to get more young people involved in local government," he says.

It's a family affair

Wagner was no stranger to township government when he was appointed to complete the last year of another supervisor's term. He attended township meetings, spent a few years on the planning commission, and had run for supervisor previously, but it was a family connection that led him to seek public office.

"My grandfather had been a township supervisor back in the '30s," he

says. "I always thought it would be something interesting to do."

That same drive for "something interesting" is what brought Wagner to Lycoming Township in the first place. Originally from neighboring Old Lycoming Township, he wanted to buy a small farm as a hobby, and when one became available in Lycoming, he bought it.

"Eventually, I picked up the family and moved here," he says.

Wagner certainly never let any grass grow under his feet. In addition to his hobby farm, where he tends to beef cattle, pigs, corn, and hay, he ran his masonry business for 45 years before turning it over to his son. In the winter months, he helped the township road crew plow snow. And in the midst of it all, he found time to raise five children with his wife, and the two now enjoy 14 grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

"My family always supported me in anything I wanted to do," he says and adds after a beat, "even my wife."

'We've done pretty well'

During Wagner's tenure, Lycoming Township has remained a rural community with many farms and fewer than 1,500 residents. The township manages to do a lot with its small budget, though, often partnering with neighboring townships to share services, Wagner says.

Lycoming has three parks, plus a bike path that was created through cooperation with Hamburg, Loyalsock, and Old Lycoming townships. The four communities also worked together to bring a sewer line to the most developed area, near Lycoming Creek.

The township also has an agreement with Old Lycoming Township for police protection, which, in combination with the State Police, gives Lycoming Township coverage 24/7. Hepburn, Lewis, and Old Lycoming townships also provide fire protection for Lycoming Township.

All but a half a mile of its 29 miles of roads are paved, Wagner says, and the township has been able to replace two bridges through the state bridge program.

The township also provides services and amenities with a yearly budget of less than \$200,000 and a tax rate of less than half a mill — a fact that Wagner takes particular pride in.

“We’ve done a lot with the small amount of money we have,” he says. “We’re a small township that has to provide the same services as a community with a \$5 million budget, and we’ve done pretty well with that.”

Good money management has a lot to do with it. To be able to update its equipment, the township saves money in an escrow account so that when they need to purchase something, the money is there, Wagner says.

‘A boost for townships’

The biggest threats to the township’s finances are the ever-increasing regulations and requirements from Washington and Harrisburg, the longtime supervisor says.

“It seems like we have to answer to more people about what we need to do,” he says. “There are too many mandates without any money to pay for them.”

More people moving from urban areas into the township also put a strain on the budget, he says, because they tend to demand more services.

Hope is on the horizon, however,

“If we are facing a problem, we are able to sit down and come up with a solution.”

in the form of natural gas impact fee money.

“This Act 13 money will be a big boost for townships,” Wagner says. “We’re getting about \$85,000, which is almost half of our general fund. Most of that money will be put back into our roads.”

He’s happy to be getting some benefit out of the gas drilling occurring in his township and neighboring municipalities. Traffic from the activity has damaged the roads, although the drilling companies have been good about fixing them, he says.

As for the ultimate impact of natural

gas development on the township, the governing board will deal with it without him. Wagner says he will probably retire when his current term is up in a few years so that he can spend more time with his family. He’s hoping that someone younger will step up to fill the spot.

“We need to get more young people involved in local government,” he says. “When you go to the conference and see the age of a lot of the supervisors, you realize that something has to change.” ♦

Turn page for more Newsworthy ►



TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Townships Sharing Ideas That Work

Planning Ahead

Many township secretaries fulfill the requirement to advertise board of supervisors meetings by publishing a list of all the meetings for the upcoming calendar year at one time. In a recent thread on the PSATS email discussion list, Lisa Everett of Covington Township in Tioga County revealed that she goes a step further.

“I always advertise the reorganization meeting for the following January when I advertise our meetings for the year,” she said. “I also advertise a regular monthly meeting to follow the reorganization.”

At least one fellow PSATS member liked the idea so much she decided on the spot to include the dates for the 2014 supervisors and auditors reorganization meetings on the list she submitted for approval to the board of supervisors this January. ♦

Have you come up with an innovative way to solve a problem or complete a task in your township? Share your “tricks of the trade” with PSATS members by submitting them for possible publication in the *Township News*. Send your tips to PSATS, Attn.: Tricks of the Trade, 4855 Woodland Drive, Enola, PA 17025 or email them to Editor Ginni Linn at glinn@psats.org.