

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

Living in a small, rural township has its ups and downs, but supervisor **Donald Sheeder** takes it all in stride, helping to guide and improve his community at every turn.

Riding a Rural Rollercoaster

Donald Sheeder

Ferguson Township,
Clearfield County
30 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / ASSISTANT EDITOR

Looking back over three decades as a supervisor in Ferguson Township, Clearfield County, Donald “Jake” Sheeder acknowledges that rural life is not always rosy.

The community has felt an economic pinch since the area’s strip mines closed, he says, and much of the farmland in the township has turned to weeds as younger generations have shunned farming and moved away.

“It’s been a battle over the years,” Sheeder says, “but I think things are starting to swing up again.”

Recently, Amish families have been moving into the township to farm and raise sheep, and he has observed an increase in the number of available jobs in the region.

“There are ups and downs through the years,” he says, “and that can be challenging.”

But through them all, Sheeder has been there, guiding the township and doing his best to make things brighter for the community of around 500.



Donald “Jake” Sheeder is a lifelong resident of Ferguson Township, where he and Ruth Anne, his wife of 45 years, have raised a son. With three decades as a township supervisor behind him, Sheeder has set his sights on hopefully serving another 20 years.

When a township supervisor position came open, he decided to run for office. He didn’t win, but several weeks later, when the guy who beat him quit, Sheeder was appointed to the job.

“The rest is history,” he says. He has gone on to win every election since.

For the first two decades in office, Sheeder served as roadmaster and was a one-man force tackling road and bridge projects.

“For 20 years, I did it myself,” he says. These days, he works alongside the current roadmaster, supervisor Lloyd Harnish.

“Two of us work on the roads now,” says Sheeder, who recently “retired” from full-time work and has cut his time spent plowing or maintaining roads back to three or four days a week.

Many accomplishments

Many of Ferguson’s successes over the past three decades can be linked to the extra funds the township has secured, from federal stimulus money to various state and federal grants. Without those extra dollars, Sheeder says, the township would have a hard time

A lifelong resident

The 65-year-old Sheeder has deep roots in Ferguson Township. He was born and raised there, and he estimates his ancestors go back at least 100 years in the community.

When Sheeder was a young man, he went to work in the area’s open-pit mines. Once those mines closed, he took a job in road construction and for about a dozen years, commuted to projects throughout Pennsylvania and Ohio.

“I got tired of all that travel,” he says. “In 12 years, I got to see my son play football zero times.”

keeping up with roads and equipment on its small budget.

“Most of our money goes to taking care of roads and buying equipment now and then,” he says. “Act 13 dollars and the recent raises we have seen in liquid fuels funding have helped us be able to do more.”

About five years ago, the township added five miles to its road network when the adjoining borough of Lumber City was merged with Ferguson. With just six of its 36 miles of roads paved, the township has been slowly converting dirt roads to driving surface aggregate with help from the Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies.

“We’ve done about a half-million dollars in projects through the Dirt and Gravel Road Program,” he estimates.

With \$2.2 million in state and federal grants, the township has also rebuilt two local bridges.

“It took four years to get the funding, but it was worth it,” he says. “The bridge projects cost the township just \$85,000.”

Sheeder is also grateful for additional grant money the township has used to construct a playground and hook up an area to neighboring Pike Township Municipal Authority’s water system. Strip mining had contaminated many wells in the township, he says, and providing access to clean water has improved that area and opened it up to new home construction.

A goal of 50 years

When Sheeder considers his years in office, he attributes some of his knowledge of local issues to a willingness to learn from others, both within and outside his community. Involvement in the Clearfield County Association of Township Officials, most recently as first vice president, helps to put him in touch with other local officials in the region. He also has served as a volunteer firefighter for 45 years, including assistant chief for the past decade, and is involved in the local rod and gun club.

“You can learn a lot from talking to others,” he says.

That’s also what he likes about his annual treks to Hershey for the PSATS Conference.

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Since becoming a township supervisor 30 years ago, Donald Sheeder hasn’t missed many of PSATS’ Annual Conferences.

“I’ve learned so much there,” he says, whether it’s talking with fellow supervisors or attending workshops. “The only bad thing is I don’t have enough time to go to everything. One person can’t take it all in.”

“You can learn a lot from talking to others.”

“I’ve seen a lot, done a lot, and talked to numerous people while I’m there,” he says. “You can pick up a lot just sitting around having a beer and talking one-on-one with others.”

With four more years remaining in his term as supervisor, Sheeder, who currently serves as vice chair of the board, isn’t planning to ride off into the sunset anytime soon.

“I’m proud of everything we’ve accomplished,” he says, “but I have a

couple more projects I’d like to see get done.”

In fact, when all is said and done, he is hoping he will be able to serve the township for half a century.

“Fifty years is my goal,” he says. “It’s always good to set a goal.”

That may mean two more decades of inevitable ups and downs, but with 30 years of experience under his belt, Sheeder is more than prepared for the ride. ♦

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