

HALLOFFAME

Being a township supervisor can feel like a second job sometimes, but it's never a burden for **Jeff Bishop**, who enjoys the people he works with — and the public service.

Part-Time Supervisor, Full-Time Public Servant

Jeffrey Bishop

Plain Grove Twp., Lawrence Co.
29 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / ASSISTANT EDITOR

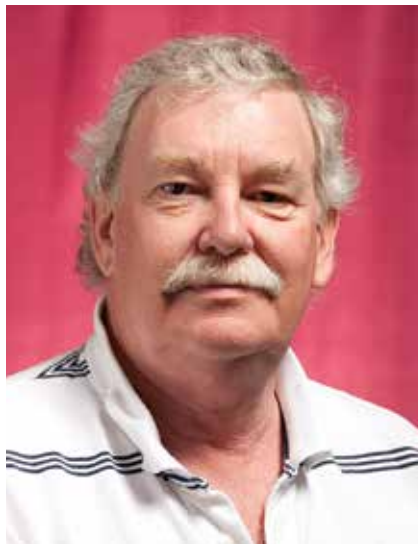
When you're serving a township part-time while holding down a full-time job, evening and weekend work comes with the territory, but Jeff Bishop, chair of Plain Grove Township in Lawrence County, is not complaining. It's what he signed up for when he was first appointed a supervisor 29 years ago.

"Being a supervisor is not for everyone," he says. "It takes time, patience, and the support of one's family."

Despite all the extra work, it's apparent that Bishop is thrilled to be a public servant for his neighbors, family, and friends. His enthusiasm is evident when he talks about all he and the rest of the township "team" have accomplished during his nearly three-decade tenure.

"This can be a very satisfying job if you have the right people you're working with," he says. "I'm proud of how we work together as a group to accomplish everything we do for our residents. We work well together as a team. It's like we are all a piece of machinery, and each one of us is a gear."

His pride also extends to the rural, farming community of about 850 people that has been his home for the last 45 years while he and his wife raised their



Jeff Bishop credits the different jobs he's held throughout his life — from electrician to managing the maintenance systems at Grove City College — with making him a more effective, hands-on township supervisor.

family. Now, they're watching their three grandchildren grow up nearby.

"It's a nice area to live in," he says. "It's very pretty, and the people are friendly."

A constant challenge

Bishop moved to Plain Grove Township in 1973 with his newlywed wife, Rosemary, who was born and raised there. Her father was serving as a township supervisor at the time, although he had passed away before his son-in-law

considered running for office.

In 1986, Bishop decided it was his turn to run for supervisor after he started to have concerns about a couple of strip mines operating a few miles from his home.

"I thought if I have complaints and suggestions, then I need to step forward and take an active role, rather than just sit around and whine," he says.

He lost the election, but a few years later when the person who beat him resigned, he was appointed to take his place. That was 1989, and Bishop has remained in office ever since, usually winning around 98 percent of the vote.

"So, I must be doing something right," he says.

Over his many years of service, the strip mines have been replaced by gravel companies hauling stone to the Pittsburgh airport and large construction sites as other issues have also come and gone.

However, the one constant challenge, he says, is maintaining 24 miles of local roads, plus another 10 of state turnback roads, with the township's limited dollars.

"Even when we get more liquid fuels money," he says, "it's still challenging because the costs to repair the roads keep going up. We have to see how much money we have for road repairs and decide which roads to make a priority."

During his 29 years of service, the township has managed to convert all roads to either asphalt or tar and chip.

“We work well together as a team. It’s like we are all a piece of machinery, and each one of us is a gear.”

“The biggest part of our job by far is taking care of the roads, making sure they are cleared and passable for school buses in the winter and repaired and maintained in the summer,” he says.

Each winter, Bishop and the other supervisors are responsible for plowing almost 50 miles of roads, a task made more difficult because the supervisors, roadmaster, and two-person crew are all part-time employees and most of them also hold other full-time jobs. Bishop says it’s not unheard of for him to be out on the roads at 3 a.m. clearing snow before heading to his full-time position at nearby Grove City College.

“I work close enough that I can run home if I have to,” he says, noting that he sometimes takes a vacation or personal day to get caught up on plowing or repairing roads. “It’s a balancing act of being a part-time township supervisor and a full-time employee elsewhere.”

Rural in character

In the three decades that Bishop has served as supervisor, he has seen the township shift from being mostly agricultural to part-farming and part-bedroom community for residents who hop on nearby I-79 and commute an hour to Pittsburgh.

Despite an influx of commuters, the township remains rural in character. More than 10 percent of its acreage is state game lands, a popular destination for hikers and hunters. With 380 acres of land in the southern portion of the township owned by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Plain Grove is home to several rare and endangered species of plants and birds.

The township, which is relatively flat, is also popular with bicyclists.

“We keep our roads in good enough shape to have many bikeathons go through our township,” he says. “It’s nothing on a Saturday to see a couple hundred or even a thousand bicycles on the roads.”

Bishop is pleased with several ser-

vices the township has implemented, including an annual garbage day and an electronics recycling program, an idea he picked up while attending the PSATS Annual Conference in Hershey. He is also proud of other amenities offered to residents: an expanded park with ballfield and playground equipment and a renovated township hall with a new pavilion that is available for rentals.

While the township may experience a controversy from time to time, he says such issues eventually get resolved and are soon forgotten. The township implemented zoning nearly two decades ago, a concept that was first met with skepticism but has since been appreciated for controlling what can come into the township.

“We were probably one of the first townships to be approached about growing medical marijuana here, but our zoning prevented it,” he says. “We have a lot of elderly with older values who would not have wanted that.”

Most recently, the township has

been entangled in a boundary dispute over the county line separating Plain Grove in Lawrence County and Worth Township in Butler County, an issue that came to a head during construction of a truck stop at an I-79 interchange.

“How it gets resolved will affect where taxes are paid and where children go to school,” he says.

His philosophy for serving as a township supervisor is to keep everything in perspective.

“Every day is sort of a challenge, and it’s that day’s challenge,” he says. “What may feel like an important issue today will likely be forgotten years from now.”

He prefers instead to approach public service with a rather simple outlook: Do what is best for the people while keeping one eye on the budget and the other one to the future.

“I want to be able to sit back when I’m out of office and say we did a great job and we didn’t adversely affect the future generations with any bad decisions we made,” he says. ♦

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How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Ask Jeff Bishop what PSATS services he uses, and he has a pretty impressive list, including the CDL Drug and Alcohol Testing Program, the *Township News*, the Annual Conference, the website, and the online discussion group.

But what he has come to appreciate the most over the years are the conversations and input he receives from other township officials around the state, whether it’s at the Annual Conference he’s attended for more than 20 years or as a participant on the PSATS discussion group.

“The discussion group is very helpful,” he says. “I try to read all the emails that come through, and even if something is not pertinent to us now, I know it might help me a year or two down the road.”