

# HALLOFFAME

Through the last half-century of change and growth in Richland Township, **Melvyn Wingard** has been a calm, steady force leading his community to prosperity and success.

## A Calm Voice in the Midst of Change

**Melvyn Wingard**

Richland Township, Cambria County  
50 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / CONTRIBUTING WRITER,  
PSATS

During the past 50 years as Richland Township has evolved from a farming community to the commercial and industrial hub of Cambria County, one thing has remained consistent: Melvyn Wingard has been at the helm steering the township to smart growth and decisions.

“He is like a monument around the township and is well-respected by everyone,” Rian Barker, Richland Township’s executive director and public works director, says. “Mel has seen a lot of issues, from sewer to zoning, come and go through the years.”

While serving half a century as a township supervisor, Wingard has guided numerous issues and inspired many people, all while maintaining the level head and sensible attitude for which he is known.

“He’s very knowledgeable and even-tempered,” says Sen. Wayne Langerholc, who served on the Richland Township board of supervisors from 2002 to 2016. “He’ll listen and evaluate all aspects of an issue and then do what’s in the best interest of the township.”

While some municipalities may be

losing population, Langerholc says, “Richland Township is gaining people and attracting new businesses, and we owe a lot of that to Mel’s foresight and planning.”

### A thriving community

During his 50 years at the helm of the township, Wingard has had a hand in many of the decisions that have transformed Richland Township into the thriving community of nearly 13,000 residents it is today.

“The township was much smaller back then,” says secretary Kim Stayrook, who came on board in 1979.

“Mel has been involved through all our commercial and residential growth through the years.”

He served as chair for most of those years and worked as a roadmaster and administrator for some of that time.

During his tenure, the township also built a new municipal building, added infrastructure, expanded the recreation and police departments, and oversaw construction of a new fire hall and library. He’s been behind the scenes of it all, Stayrook says.

“The previous members of the board of supervisors have charted a well-set, well-founded path for the township to follow,” Wingard says.



**Sen. Wayne Langerholc presents Melvyn Wingard, right, with a Senate citation honoring him for 50 years on the Richland Township Board of Supervisors. “I’m very proud of the township and the people here — this board and our employees,” Wingard says. “I am also very proud of my family. My wife of 67 years is a tremendous helper and is the reason our family is so great.” The couple have three daughters and a son, 10 grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren. (Submitted photo.)**

He was a fairly new supervisor in the late 1960s when the township embraced public sewer, which was not a particularly popular decision at the time.

“Mel believed it would be best for the township, and he convinced the rest of the board,” says Barker, who first came to work for the township road crew in 1973 and served alongside Wingard on the board of supervisors in the early ‘90s.

It turned out to be one of the best things to happen to the township, Barker continues. Access to sewer

ushered in development, and zoning helped to guide growth and improve the township in the long run.

“Mel was a farmer so he wanted to protect the farmer from the retail and industries coming in,” he says, “but he also knew that it was important to make the zoning well-rounded for everyone.”

### Connecting with residents

Bob Heffelfinger was a college sophomore and had just been elected president of the Richland Township fire company when he first worked with Wingard in the early '90s. The township was consolidating its three fire companies at the time.

“Mel and I had to deal with the fall-out of that decision with residents, and we worked together on a capital equipment fund,” Heffelfinger says.

## How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Mel Wingard has a long association with PSATS, having served on a number of standing committees and attended about 48 state conferences over his 50-year history as a township supervisor.

Fellow supervisor Gary Paul, who for years would travel to Hershey with Wingard, says his mentor taught him how to navigate the annual event and make the most of his time there.

“We would sit around and talk, and he would introduce me to people,” Paul says.

After several days of attending workshops and networking with peers, both men would return home armed with information to put to good use in their township.

“More than anything else, I benefited from the meetings and discussions with fellow supervisors from all over the state,” Wingard says. “Finding out different ways that people did things was one of the best ways to learn.”

## MELVYN WINGARD: In Their Words

“He’s one of the most humble, modest, soft-spoken people I’ve met in my life. When Mel speaks, it’s time to listen because you know he has something worthwhile to say.” — *Bob Heffelfinger, Vice Chair*

“He’s an everyday guy who cares about everyone. He does his best to make the residents, employees, and businesses happy.”

— *Kim Stayrook, Secretary*

“He’s kind and passionate and is always looking out for the people of Richland Township. At the age of 90, he still gets voted in so he must be doing something right.” — *Gary Paul, Supervisor*

“Since then, my relationship with him has grown close, and I have tremendous respect for him.”

When the township was exploding with development in the 1990s, he observed how Wingard worked with all aspects of the community to ensure that the growth was well-managed.

“He had the qualities to move Richland Township from what was primarily an agricultural community to a regional retail hub,” he says.

After joining the board of supervisors in 2005, Heffelfinger continued to watch Wingard work his magic when other issues, such as stormwater management, became hot topics.

“He’s a master at connecting with residents and giving reassurances with a level of sincerity that calms everyone,” he says. “I’m not sure if it’s his presence or his presentation, but I’m amazed and envious watching how he can capture the attention and respect of residents with a few, calm, low-spoken words.”

### Not in it for the glory

Over the years, Wingard has been a mentor to many, showing them how to get things done in a low-key but effective manner.

“Many a time, he’s put a hand on my shoulder and said, ‘Heff, you’re a passionate young man, but sometimes saying less is better,’” Heffelfinger says with a laugh.

Fellow supervisor Gary Paul, who has served on the board for the past 21 years, says Wingard’s style more closely matches his own.

“He’s calm and laid back, like me,” he says. “Mel has been there as a friend and a fellow supervisor to guide me.”

The always modest Wingard says, “I’d like to think I had a small influence on the board members that have followed me and have hopefully assisted them in doing their job. And I’d like to think that some of the things I’ve done or helped to do were a benefit to our township.”

So what has been the secret to Wingard’s longevity and success as a Richland Township supervisor? It could be his willingness to listen and be accessible to residents, employees, and fellow supervisors.

“Not much falls through the cracks with Mel,” Heffelfinger says.

He keeps his ear to the ground and stays in touch with what’s going on in the community. For years, you could find him every morning at the local Eat ‘n Park, where he mingled with residents and learned the latest news. And if you didn’t catch him there, Paul says, you could go to see him at the Richland Cemetery, where he was the long-time manager.

Barker refers to Wingard as a kind of father figure for the township. “You may not always agree with him, but you always respect him,” he says.

Wingard, 92 and a World War II veteran, epitomizes the Greatest Generation of which he is a part: Those born in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who perform their duty with quiet dedication and do not expect any recognition in return.

“He is a good representative of the township and its residents,” Barker says. “He does what he thinks is correct, and he doesn’t need to be thanked for it. Just seeing how things have progressed in the township is enough for him.” ♦