

HALLOFFAME

Priscilla deLeon, a councilwoman for Lower Saucon Township in Northampton County, jumped into public service with both feet. Now, nearly 30 years later, she's stacked up a long list of accomplishments, all proof of how much she loves and values her community.

'You Have to Speak Up'

Priscilla deLeon
Lower Saucon Township,
Northampton County
29 years of service

BY JILL ERCOLINO / MANAGING EDITOR

In high school, Priscilla deLeon was known as one of the quiet ones.

Just mentioning this makes her laugh, and just as quickly, she reveals something else: "Well, I'm not shy anymore."

In fact, deLeon has built her 29-year career in public service — she's a councilwoman for Lower Saucon Township, a home-rule municipality in Northampton County — around being a vocal advocate for historic and community preservation, government transparency, and citizen engagement.

After all, the need to support what's right is what got deLeon involved in local government in the first place.

"Some things just aren't fair," deLeon says, "and you have to speak up."

Catching the bug

The councilwoman had never been involved in a cause before moving to the township in 1985, but that changed the day she went to her mailbox and found a zoning hearing board notice inside.

The news concerned her: A company wanted to build a stone quarry near her home.



Priscilla deLeon got involved in her township when she decided to speak up about a proposed stone quarry. After nearly 30 years on Lower Saucon Township's council, she's never forgotten what it's like to be on the other side of the table as a concerned citizen.

The proposal didn't make sense. The roads, she says, weren't in any shape to support heavy truck traffic going into and out of the quarry, but more important, the quarry was going to be built on a historic site where Redington Village, a significant manufacturing hub in the 1800s, once stood.

Fearful that the quarry would ignite a chain reaction that would eventually erase the township's character and history, deLeon organized a group to fight the business and soon became a regular at township meetings.

"As I sat there and watched the proceedings, I thought, 'Wow, this is really fascinating,'" she says. "That's when I caught the public service bug."

By 1987, after successfully stopping the quarry's construction, deLeon was preparing to take a seat on the Lower Saucon Council. In the nearly 30 years that have passed since then, she has never forgotten what it's like to sit in the audience as a citizen, rather than at the table as a public official.

She believes strongly in transparency and accountability.

"Council represents the people," she says, "and I encourage our residents to get involved by not only exercising their right to vote but also by attending council meetings and providing valuable input to help us make informed decisions."

At times, however, deLeon and her colleagues have had to make decisions that weren't popular. Residents, for instance, weren't happy when the township council revised the zoning ordinance to increase the minimum lot size from one acre to two acres.

In the long run, it proved to be the correct decision, she says, because the change has helped to promote an unspoiled landscape.

“People move here,” she says, “because we’ve preserved the beauty.”

‘That’s who we are’

While deLeon has a long list of accomplishments, covering everything from creating the township’s first web-site and the Saucon Valley Partnership, a council of governments that includes the Borough of Hellertown and the Saucon Valley School District, to acquiring land for parks, she’s most proud of her work to protect the environment and historic, scenic places, including barns, bridges, and homesteads.

“Those things... that’s our character. That’s who we are,” the councilwoman says, adding that the past is important to the future. “Everything we’re doing is for our children, the next generation.” ♦

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Back in the day, there wasn’t a lot of communication between Lower Saucon Township and neighboring Hellertown Borough.

Priscilla deLeon, a new councilwoman at the time, couldn’t understand why. The communities shared the same history and school district, she says, and when something impacted one, it impacted the other.

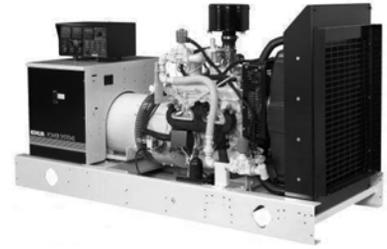
“I really encouraged cooperation between the two of us,” she says, explaining how this led to regular joint meetings.

One month after reading an article in the *Pennsylvania Township News*, however, she realized the communities could do more than just talk. They could officially unify their efforts and even save money by forming a council of governments with the local school district.

Soon after, the Saucon Valley Partnership was created, which has since adopted a multi-municipal comprehensive plan and created a regional compost center.

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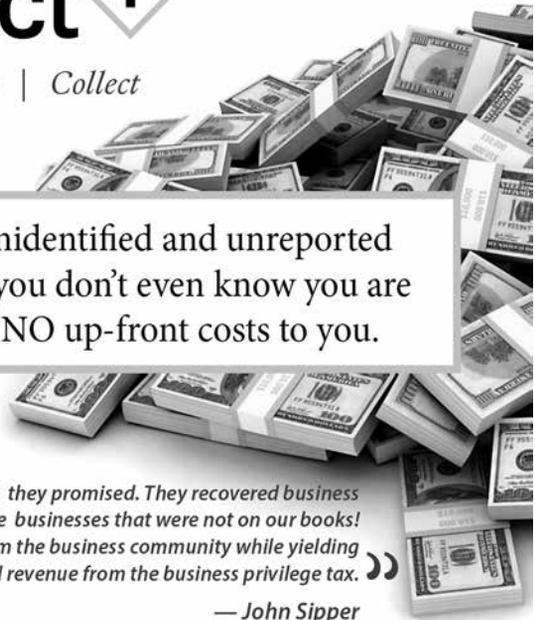
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