

HALLOFFAME

For three-plus decades as a Cambria Township supervisor, **Robert “Buzzy” Shook** has been a steady, stable, and enthusiastic guide in helping the township reduce debt, welcome growth, and confront whatever other issues it faces.

Steady, Enthusiastic Guide

Robert Shook

**Cambria Township, Cambria County
33 years of service**

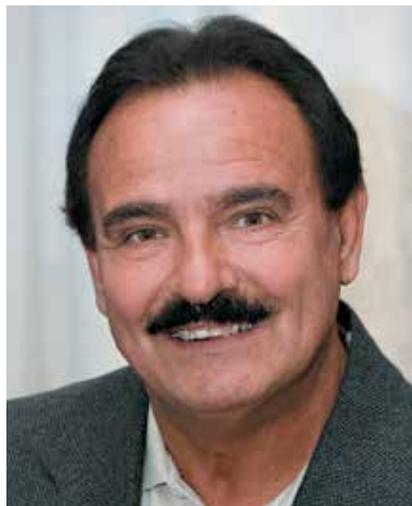
BY AMY BOBB / CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Cambria Township in Cambria County has sure changed its looks in the 33 years since Robert “Buzzy” Shook became a township supervisor.

In 1983, Route 22, one of the main roads through the community, featured a service station, an old motel, a Jamesway store, and little else. Today, the road boasts a Walmart, Applebee’s, Hoss’s, several hotels, and numerous fast-food restaurants and retail shops.

“The mines, mills, and railroad that used to define our area are all gone,” Shook says. “Now we have a mix of everything, including commercial highway and retail businesses, housing developments, an industrial park, and three co-generation plants.”

When your community is situated at the crossroads of three major highways, growth is inevitable, he says. Cambria Township has made sure to reap the benefits, and, fortunately for the township’s 6,500 residents, Shook has been in office for three-plus decades as a steady, unwavering, and enthusiastic force guiding the township through whatever it faces.



During his 33 years as a Cambria Township supervisor, Robert “Buzzy” Shook is proud of how the township has climbed out of debt and kept taxes low.

“The township is 100 percent on his mind at all times,” says Norma Cicero, who recently retired as township secretary after 37 years of service. “Buzzy has been wonderful for our township and has always put its interests first.”

Keeping promises

One of the major accomplishments Shook points to during his 33-year tenure is turning the township’s finances around.

He initially ran for township supervisor because he wanted to get the township out of debt and keep taxes low. At the time, the township was in the red as year to year it borrowed

money through tax anticipation bonds, he says. With debt reduction one of his priorities, he was pleased when the township finally became debt-free about a decade later.

“We watched our spending,” he says, “and we benefited from the growth occurring in our township starting in the mid ’90s that resulted in an increased earned income tax and allowed us to keep our property taxes low.

“I am proud of what we have accomplished in the last 33 years,” he says. “The way we have grown has helped us to keep our taxes in line. We haven’t had to raise taxes in 23 or 24 years.”

As the township developed, more roads were added to its inventory, and Shook, who served as a roadmaster for the bulk of his time with the township, says the supervisors responded with better maintenance and improved equipment. About half of the township’s roads were paved when he first came on board; today, roughly 75 percent are.

“We phase in any new paving to make sure we can keep up with maintaining what we have put down,” he says. An emphasis on upgrading township equipment over the years has helped with this task.

“Equipment has improved greatly and has become better designed and more efficient,” he says. “We didn’t have that luxury when I first started. We would get up in the morning and report to work not knowing if a piece of equipment was going to work or not. Equip-

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

"I've learned a lot from going to the [PSATS] Annual Conference and talking to other people there," says Robert "Buzzy" Shook, who estimates he has attended at least 30 PSATS conferences over his tenure as a Cambria Township supervisor. "Everybody has similar problems, and by talking to others, it's nice to know you're not alone."

ment broke down a lot, and we spent a lot of time maintaining it."

Shook points with pride to how the township road crew has been able to keep pace with increased road maintenance without additional costs to taxpayers.

"Everybody wants a paved road in front of their house so the hardest thing to do sometimes is to tell someone no," he says.

When a paved road request or any other issue for that matter comes up, he and his fellow supervisors will decide how to address it based on what is in the best interest of the entire township.

"I do not make promises that I cannot keep," he says. "Everything that we decide is based on money and whether we can afford to do it."

Dogpaddling to keep up

In the 33 years that Cicero worked alongside Shook at the township, she has grown to greatly respect him and admire what he has been able to accomplish on behalf of the township.

"When he came into office, I thought, 'Uh-oh. Here comes a hurricane,'" she recalls. "I started working at the township right out of high school so I was young and intimidated by him at first.

"He had so many ideas and so much energy, and he wanted to change so much so fast," she says. "I would joke with him that he was in a speed boat and I was always doggy paddling behind him trying to keep up."

But Cicero soon saw that Shook was more than just talk as he got to work putting his ideas into action. "I never saw anybody think how he does when it comes to money," she says. "Keeping taxes low was his priority. He had a lot of contacts with banks to get low-interest loans and with the state to get grants."

He always strived to become better

educated and knowledgeable, too, she says, and he attends the PSATS Annual Conference each year so he can talk to people and learn new things. "He always comes back with information and ideas," Cicero says, "and he isn't afraid to try to change things if he thinks it could improve the township."

She credits Shook with the success of much of the growth in the township, including the construction of three co-generation power plants that brought jobs to the area.

"You could argue that the growth would have happened if he had been here or not," she says, "but I don't think

it would have turned out as well if he wasn't standing with welcoming arms and making sure it happened right."

Shook, who turns 72 this month, retired as roadmaster three years ago and only works part-time on the township roads these days. With three years remaining in his current term as supervisor, he's not sure if he'll run for office again. He says he might decide to spend more time with his wife, Sally Ann, traveling to Florida and visiting their son, daughter, and three young grandchildren in California and Mechanicsburg.

"What would make me feel good is knowing that when it's time to walk away, I have made sure the township has enough money to operate and not go into the red again," he says.

In the meantime, his enthusiasm and passion for the township where he grew up, raised a family, and served for 33 years has not waned.

"He still has more energy than I do," says Cicero, who is 17 years his junior. "I have no doubt that I and many others will always be dog-paddling to try to catch up to him." ♦

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