

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

When **Albert Wildenstein** was elected township supervisor 30 years ago, he says he found his niche in life. Serving others while improving his community turned out to be a perfect fit for this natural leader.

The Unofficial Mayor

Albert Wildenstein
 Mount Pleasant Township,
 Wayne County
 30 years of service

BY AMY BOBB / ASSISTANT EDITOR

If the people in Mount Pleasant Township, Wayne County, could elect a mayor, it would be Albert Wildenstein, hands down.

“We refer to him as the mayor so that should tell you something,” secretary Kathryn Dix says. “He is respected by the members of the community, and the knowledge he has is unbelievable.”

For 30 years, the former dairy farmer has made it his life priority to serve residents and improve the township he has always called home. Now as his time as a supervisor draws to a close, Wildenstein can look back with pride at what he has helped accomplish for his community.

“I like helping people, and in this job, I have been helping them for 30 years,” he says.

‘A beautiful 30 years’

Wildenstein had been a dairy farmer for 25 years when a family tragedy made him rethink his life’s vocation. After his 22-year-old daughter was killed in a car accident, he found the agricultural life



didn’t hold the same appeal anymore. When a township supervisor position opened up, he took a chance, ran for office, and won. He will tell you it was one of the best decisions he ever made.

“I found my niche,” he says, “and it’s been a beautiful 30 years.”

Not long after becoming a supervisor, he decided to sell his cows and equipment and rent out his fields for crop growing so he could devote himself full-time to serving the township.

“Thirty years ago, my township was a nice place, but I could see it needed

Retiring from his job as township supervisor in January will be an adjustment for Albert Wildenstein, who prides himself on serving others. Through the years, he has served the community in various capacities, from Boy Scout leader to member of the community center and library boards. He plans to continue as president of the township’s fire company.

some updating,” he says.

Wildenstein quickly rolled up his sleeves and got to work. Over the next three decades, he and his fellow supervisors would guide the township through numerous improvements, including upgrading every road, modernizing equipment, and constructing a new municipal building.

“What I am most proud of is that the township doesn’t owe a nickel,” he says, noting, too, how the supervisors have held taxes steady over the years.

Arguably, the township’s most challenging issue involved guiding two fire companies with long-standing differences to consolidate and merge their operations as Mount Pleasant Emergency Services in 2000.

“It took 11 years to get that to hap-

“What I am most proud of is that the township doesn’t owe a nickel.”

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

During his three decades as a township supervisor, Albert Wildenstein attended at least 25 PSATS Annual Conferences, where he took full advantage of the educational sessions, the exhibit show, and, most of all, the networking. "I loved to sit at a round table along the long, narrow corridor [outside the exhibit hall] and talk to people," he says. "I believe I learned just as much, if not more, at those tables than I did going to a session."

pen," says Wildenstein, who was a long-time firefighter and now serves as president of the fire company. He credits the eventual consensus to a transition to newer volunteers who were less interested in continuing the feud and more willing to accept the incentives to merge, including township help with a new firehouse, now in operation for six years. Wildenstein proudly reports that the final payment on the building was made in August.

'I love this township'

Except for a three-year tour with the military in the 1960s during which he met his wife, Ann, in Arizona, Wildenstein has always lived in Mount Pleasant Township. It's where he was born and bred, where he and Ann raised five children, and where he plans to spend his final days.

"The end of my life will be here in Mount Pleasant," he says. "I love this township."

Over the decades, he's watched his municipality of 1,400 evolve from a mainly farming community to a destination for retirees and summer residents to build homes and enjoy the natural beauty of the Poconos region. Today, most of the farms that covered the township when he was a boy have been turned into residential lots.

"There are maybe five or six active farms left," he says. "It's just become too expensive to farm here."

A large percentage of the new residents come from New York and other metropolitan areas where they are accustomed to receiving more public services. When they question why Mount Pleasant's roads aren't paved or why residents must contract directly with garbage haulers, Wildenstein patiently

explains country living to them.

"He's a reasonable person," Dix says about her boss. "He listens to both sides and is a wonderful mediator. He helps to solve problems."

In fact, his unofficial title of mayor could, in part, be owed to his excellent listening skills and empathetic style of leadership, which naturally makes people like and trust him.

"I've always worked well with people," Wildenstein says. "I treat my township like I live on your road and make decisions like I'm the one living there."

He must be doing something right as no one has ever run against him for office.

"People have liked me enough to keep me," he says.

On his own terms

Over his tenure, the job of supervi-

sor has changed quite a bit.

"It's a lot more mental than it used to be," Wildenstein says. "When I first started, we would plow or grade a road and go to lunch. Now I spend considerably more time in the office in front of a computer."

He estimates the administrative responsibilities during his early years as a supervisor took maybe 15 minutes a week to complete. Today, he devotes about three hours a day at a computer tending to everything from subdivisions to onlot sewage enforcement. The rest of his time is spent helping to maintain the township's nearly 50 miles of dirt and gravel roads.

After three decades of work, however, the physical demands of the job have pushed Wildenstein, 77, to step down as supervisor come January 6 when his successor takes office.

"My body says it's time. I'm no longer able to easily climb in and out of trucks," he says. "It's becoming dangerous."

While he admits it will be difficult to hang up his supervisor hat, he knows the township is well-run and is confident the good work he's been involved in will continue.

"I'm going out on my own terms," he says. "I had a life full of community service. I did a lot and enjoyed the people. It was fun, but now it's time for me to go home." ♦

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