Beaver Township in Crawford County may not have the biggest budget, but long-time supervisor Robert Thompson has done his best to work with what he has to make the community better.

Learning to Listen
Robert Thompson
Beaver Township, Crawford County
30 years of service

BY BREND A WILT / ASSISTANT EDITOR

Small, rural townships often have the same big problem: limited budgets that keep the supervisors from doing everything they would like to do. That is the case in Beaver Township, Crawford County, where long-time supervisor Robert “Bob” Thompson laments not being able to pave the community’s 41 miles of roads.

“I wish we could pave them, but we just don’t have the money,” he says. “We plow them and put down antiskid in the winter and then ditch and rebuild the gravel roads each summer.

“We also don’t have the budget to purchase as much aggregate as we could use in a year,” he adds. “Some of the dairy farms have big equipment that is hard on the roads, which also take a beating from local delivery trucks.”

Still, Thompson says that the roads are better than they used to be.

“Although I am never totally happy with the roads, we have improved them considerably,” he says.

Bridges are another concern. The township owns 10 bridges that exceed 20 feet long, which means they must be inspected by the county every two years. Another eight or so township-owned bridges are less than 20 feet long, but the township inspects them biannually anyway.

“Some of them need to be replaced, but that takes a lot of money,” he says. “We used to be able to replace a bridge for $70,000 to $80,000, and now it’s more like $300,000.”

Having 2,500 acres of state game lands in the township doesn’t help, either. Although the township gets payments in lieu of taxes for the land, they don’t come close to replacing the lost tax revenue.

“We have seven miles of roads that go through the game lands that we are responsible for,” he says. “That may be the biggest issue we face right now: the loss of tax revenue from that land.”

‘Good for the township’

Despite the challenges of running a small township, Thompson has enjoyed his role as supervisor for the past 30 years and isn’t quite ready to give it up. At press time, he was up for election for his sixth term.

A resident of Beaver Township since the age of 9, when his mother died and his father moved with his son back to Beaver Township in Crawford County may not have the biggest budget, but long-time supervisor Robert Thompson has done his best to work with what he has to make the community better.

“After all these years, we’ve never had an issue that separated the board so that we couldn’t get things done.”
How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Robert Thompson relies on PSATS for networking and information and doesn’t understand why any township would not take advantage of the resources the Association offers.

“Since I retired from teaching, I have gone to the PSATS Conference every year,” he says. “I enjoy the interaction with other supervisors.

“I call PSATS if I have a question or am not sure about a law or regulation,” he adds. “It’s nice to be able to get answers on just about anything. If there is a township that isn’t using PSATS, it is missing the boat. It is a great source of information.”

Thompson has been the chairman since he first took office. He is also involved in the Crawford County Association of Township Officials, serving in various officer positions, most recently president for two years.

“We help each other out’

Although Beaver Township remains rural, it has changed during Thompson’s tenure.

“We used to have a lot of small dairy and other farming operations,” he says. “Now, we have more agriculture than ever, but it’s mostly six or seven large outfits.”

Thompson even owns some beef cattle, which he says he will continue with “as long as I can get to the barn.”

Without a big budget to do a lot with, Thompson and his fellow supervisors have learned to work with neighboring small townships to combine and conquer.

“We help each other out by sharing trucks and manpower on road-related projects,” he says.

That same attitude of cooperation has stood Thompson in good stead with his fellow supervisors over the years.

“I’ve always been fortunate in the supervisors I’ve worked with,” he says. “We’ve had disagreements, but we’ve always been able to make it work. After all these years, we’ve never had an issue that separated the board so that we couldn’t get things done. I’ve enjoyed the people I’ve worked with.”

Thompson has also liked working with and for the residents and credits his patience as the quality that makes him a good supervisor.

“I’ve learned to listen to what people have to say and give them an opportunity to speak,” he says. “Sometimes it’s just about letting them vent and then making a concerted effort to solve the problem. It’s also about remembering that what a person wants to talk about is a big deal to them even if it’s not that important to me.

“I know the community, and I like when something comes up and we’re able to solve it and make people feel good,” he adds. “The disappointing part is when you have to say no to someone because we don’t have the money or what they want just isn’t needed for the township.”

While Thompson is not ready to hang up his supervisor hat just yet, he is looking ahead to the day when he is free to spend more time with his wife of 54 years.

“If our health holds, we might do some traveling or go out some evenings,” he says. “We just want to enjoy life more.”

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