

HALLOFFAME

Over 25 years of serving as secretary-treasurer of Donegal Township in Westmoreland County, **Trudy Harkcom** has learned to listen to residents and help them as best she can, even if she can't do everything that she wants to do.

Going above and beyond

Trudy Harkcom

Donegal Township,
Westmoreland County
25 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSISTANT EDITOR

If there were one thing that Trudy Harkcom could change about township government, it would be to somehow make it easier to give residents the solution they desire without being restricted by state and federal regulations. "You understand their frustration but can only do so much with the regulations we have," she says.

The supervisors of Donegal Township in Westmoreland County, where Harkcom has served as secretary-treasurer for 25 years, say that her desire to help others is one of her best qualities.

"We tell her that she goes above and beyond trying to please everyone," supervisor Henry Hoffer says. "That's her personality. She wants to help everyone but sometimes you can't do what you want to do."

"She is very personable and outgoing," chairman and roadmaster Tom Stull says. "She really cares about the township and the people."

'I had computer skills'

Harkcom, a lifelong resident of the township, attributes her hiring to a



Trudy Harkcom has spent more than two decades helping the residents of Donegal Township in Westmoreland County as the secretary-treasurer. She is known for going above and beyond in her duties simply because she cares about people and wants to do as much as she can for them.

secretarial course she took at Westmoreland Community College the year before she began her township career. Her sister-in-law was secretary of Donegal Borough, and she told Harkcom that the township was looking for a secretary.

"I thought it would be a chance to use my new secretarial skills," Harkcom says. Although she had no practical experience at that point and was up against several other candidates for the position, she was hired.

"The supervisors told me afterward that it was because I had computer skills," she says, although the office did not yet have a computer. "I worked half days at first until it got to where they needed me here all day. My husband was happy that I was only five minutes from home."

Harkcom took advantage of the longer work hours to learn more about the township, its residents, and the problems that needed to be addressed. Donegal Township is mostly rural except for the area around a turnpike interchange on the western side of the municipality.

"We've had some commercial development near the turnpike over the last five years," she says, "and there are more businesses that want to locate near the pike. PennDOT is going to install two traffic signals in that area — the first in the township — as part of a big project on Route 31 off the interchange. Donegal is the gateway to the Laurel Highlands, which has Seven Springs Mountain Resort, Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, and Ohiopyle State Park."

'I have learned to listen'

After more than two decades as secretary, Harkcom says some aspects of her job have changed, such as computer technology and residents' level of knowledge and awareness, which she attributes to the Internet.

One thing that hasn't changed, though, is her desire to help residents, even when it gets a little frustrating.

“Dealing with residents and the job itself can be a challenge,” she says. “You have to put yourself in the other person’s place and not let things get to you. You have to have a sense of humor.”

“People don’t really want to complain, but they want to have their problem addressed. I have learned to listen because people often just want to get something off their chest. You have to listen to people and get back to them as soon as possible. If you don’t have an answer right away, let them know you’re working on it.”

“Trudy knows how to handle the public,” Hoffer says. “If an irate resident calls, she is good at dealing with that. She has a very good relationship with the public.”

“She tackles things that some secretaries might pass off to the supervisors,” Stull says. “If she can answer a question or deal with an issue, she does.”

Harkcom also enjoys getting to know officials from other townships and what they are dealing with. Her position as secretary-treasurer of the Westmoreland County Association of Township Officials has allowed her to meet people from the other 18 townships in the county, but that’s just the start.

“Our county association has a hospitality room at the PSATS Annual Conference each year,” she says, “and I get to talk with townships from all around the state to see what’s going on with them.”

“Trudy always takes the time to talk to people,” Stull says. “She’s very active in the county association and is always one of the first to volunteer for anything it has going on.”

If it sounds like there is a mutual admiration society in Donegal Township, there is.

“My supervisors all work together well,” Harkcom says. “I have great respect for each of them. We rely on each other. I try to help them address problems, deal with residents, and come up with solutions. It’s a team effort.”

All good things must come to an end, though, and Harkcom plans to break up that team by retiring at the end of 2021.

“I have enjoyed working here and love my job, but I think in about three years, I’ll be ready to leave,” she says.

How PSATS has helped this Hall of Famer

Trudy Harkcom is good about answering residents’ questions and can do so fairly easily after more than two decades as secretary-treasurer. When she needs help finding an answer, she turns to PSATS.

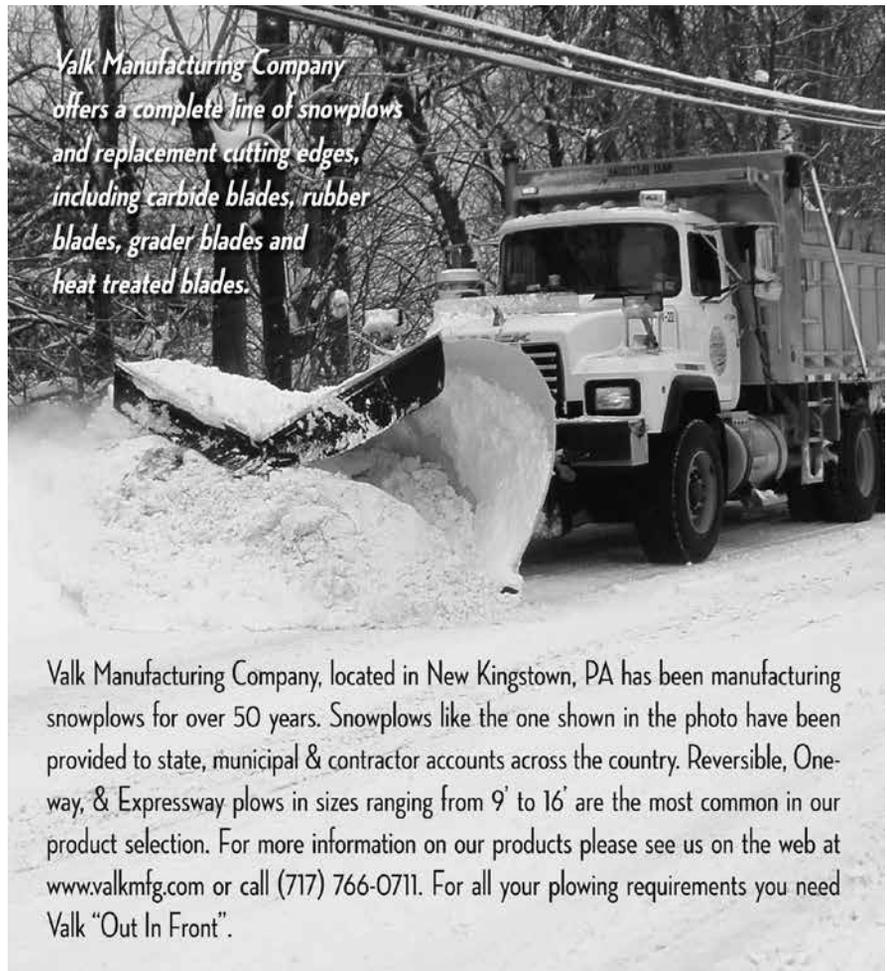
“The PSATS staff has been there to help me over the past 25 years,” she says. “I know whatever question I ask them, they will give me the correct answer, and that means a lot.”

“PSATS staff are right up there with the township solicitor on knowing the Township Code. You can trust the answer they give you and not worry.”

The supervisors may not let her go that easily, though.

“I’m glad we’ve had her for the last 25

years,” Stull says. “I joke and tell her that when she retires, I’m retiring, too.” ♦



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