

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

For nearly three decades, **Ed Brandt** has been serving the residents of Lower Gwynedd Township and the surrounding area with dedication and commitment. His enthusiasm for giving back to the community has inspired his fellow supervisors, citizens, and his own children to make community service a part of their life.

'Mr. Lower Gwynedd'

Ed Brandt

Lower Gwynedd Township,
Montgomery County
26 years of service

BY **BRENDA WILT** / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Not every supervisor begins his township involvement by coordinating a bug spraying program, but that's exactly how Ed Brandt started working with Lower Gwynedd Township in 1982.

"The chairman of the party told me, 'We want you to do something, and it's quite unusual,'" Brandt recalls with a chuckle, "so my first role was as gypsy moth coordinator."

At the time, the county had an insecticide spraying program to deal with the infestation, and each municipality needed a coordinator to notify residents and businesses. From there, Brandt served four years on the zoning hearing board, and when the board of supervisors grew from three to five members, he threw his hat into the ring.

"I was happy with the community and didn't want to run against another supervisor," he says. "Because of the two new seats, I didn't have to."

Kate Harper, who is now a state representative, was elected to fill the second open seat. A year later, Brandt was elected chairman, a role he alternated with Harper every two years until she won a seat in the House in the late



Active in his community and beyond, supervisor Ed Brandt has rightfully earned the nickname, "Mr. Lower Gwynedd." The local leader does his best to get other residents involved, too.

1990s. Brandt remained chairman until two years ago.

"I'm thrilled with the chairman we have now," he says, noting the fiscally responsible township has a coveted AAA bond rating. "We have three younger people on the board who are all very involved in the township."

Calling all residents

The beginning of Brandt's tenure on the board was a busy time for the township, manager Larry Comunale says.

"Ed was supervisor and chair when the township was growing quickly dur-

ing the late 1980s and '90s," he says. "He and the board made sure the township grew in a smart way, and we're still one of the greenest townships in the county."

Brandt has been a proponent of maintaining open space and a trail system in the township, Comunale says. When the township purchased 75 acres for a park and everyone was debating how to use the land, Brandt advocated for it to be left 50 percent natural, with the other 50 percent developed into playing fields. It is now home to many area sports teams.

These days, the township doesn't have much open space left, beyond an extended trail system and five state-of-the-art parks, Brandt says. What it does have, though, is an innovative approach to doing business.

"I set up subcommittees in the early '90s, which allows two supervisors to meet with residents to discuss and, if possible, resolve problems without having to address them at the supervisors meetings," he says.

For example, the township has a public safety and welfare committee; a Gwynedd Green committee, which addresses recycling and environmental issues; a building and zoning committee; a public works committee; and a financial review committee. The latter includes executives from the financial sector who advise the board of supervisors on the pension programs for police and nonuniformed employees.

Not only do the committees save time

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during the supervisors meetings, they make it easier for residents to be heard.

“If a resident brings something up at a meeting, we refer it to a subcommittee,” Brandt explains. “The resident can go to the committee and talk his heart out. The subcommittees give residents more time than we can give them at the regular meeting. Some people are more comfortable talking about their issue outside of a public meeting, too.

“Then the subcommittee comes back to the full board to report on what it did to resolve the situation or if more needs to be done to address the issue,” he adds.

Involving the community in its own governance is important to Lower Gwynedd officials. When the township was hiring two new police officers, it invited several residents to participate in the interviews. Two years ago, when the township was looking for a new police chief, officials asked the Chiefs of Police Association to narrow down the applicants to the best candidates, who were then interviewed by the supervisors.

Brandt began an annual banquet for township volunteers in 1993 to recognize residents who go above and beyond to help their community. Each year, the township bestows a Citizen of the Year award on one outstanding volunteer.

Community involvement is a two-way street, though, Brandt believes.

“We have very active supervisors who are very involved in the township,” he says. “I get great satisfaction out of seeing their work in the community.”

Giving something back

Brandt’s own community involvement has always stretched beyond the township’s borders.

He joined the Jaycees in 1975 and chaired the Christmas parade in Ambler for 25 years. After switching to the Kiwanis Club in Ambler, he originated a July 4 carnival and fireworks display in 1981, which he ran for three decades.

In 1984, he became president of the club and was named a distinguished president for recruiting from 5 to 10 members in a single year. The following year, Brandt was named lieutenant governor of the Kiwanis Club and received the distinguished designation for founding a club in Boyertown.

Brandt also served as president of the local elementary school’s home school association (*the parochial school version of a PTA*) and was president of the Lower Gwynedd Little League for 10 years.

He did all of this while working as a national account manager for Stauffer Glove and Safety in Red Hill, which required him to travel across the country every other week. He retired in 2004, having grown tired of the travel, he says.

Brandt’s commitment to making his community a better place to live and work earned him the PSATS President’s Leadership Award in 2004. He is quick to point out that Larry Comunale, the township manager he helped hire, also won the award in 2006.

Brandt is also the father of three adult children and a grandfather to seven. Community service has always been important in the family, he says. His two sons and daughter are all involved with their communities, and Brandt’s wife, Rosemary, works with the church to prepare meals for the homeless.

“We feel that you have to give back to the community,” he says.

That attitude has earned Brandt a fitting nickname from Comunale: “Mr. Lower Gwynedd.”

“He really defines what it means to serve his community,” Comunale says. “Ed exemplifies what service is all about. He really sets the tone for everyone who works at the township. He is the kind of person you hope you can attract to local government.” ♦

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