

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

Over more than four decades, **Ted Stout** has worked to create a bright future for the people of Clifton Township in Lackawanna County. With compassion and a listening ear, he has done what he feels is best for the township, even if it may take a while for the residents to realize it.

The visionary

Ted Stout
Clifton Township,
Lackawanna County
41 years of service

BY BRENDA WILT / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Some people call Ted Stout a visionary, but he would be the first to tell you that making decisions today that will not bear fruit until later can be a great source of contention. When he and his fellow supervisors in Clifton Township, Lackawanna County, decided to purchase 50 acres of land behind the township building to expand the municipal grounds and provide open space for recreation, it caused quite a ruckus in the community. It didn't help that the expenditure coincided with a planned tax increase that was unrelated to the land acquisition.

"It was the worst problem I've faced in my 40 years as a supervisor," he says. "People thought we raised taxes to pay for the land, but that's not true."

The backlash didn't stop him from doing what he thought was best for the township, however, even though the issue reared its head again during the recent primary election.

"Probably 50 people asked me about the land purchase on primary election day," he says.

Despite his opponent using the issue to campaign against him, Stout won



Ted Stout, who has spent more than four decades serving Clifton Township, says the key to being a good supervisor is listening. "You have to be compassionate," he says. "Maybe you can't do anything for them, but you have to listen."

the primary. He is certain it will come up again in November, though, because the candidate from the other party also opposed the acquisition.

Looking ahead

Stout followed in his father's footsteps to become a public servant. His father had served two terms as a supervisor for the township but was defeated in his run for a third term. When the top vote-getter moved out of the town-

ship after serving only two years, the board asked the junior Stout to finish out the term. He agreed and has been on the board ever since.

One of the reasons he agreed to take the reins was to make sure the township did not lose its rural character.

"I could see things changing in the community," he says. "It was during the land boom in the Poconos. My No. 1 priority was to update the land use ordinances. My second was to get a municipal building."

At the time, the supervisors were meeting in the township secretary's living room, he recalls. It was a chore to get the residents on board with spending the money for a municipal building, but they came around and in 1979, the township borrowed \$100,000 to erect a small but adequate facility.

"It was something that the community really needed," Stout says.

He feels the same way about the land that the township purchased recently, despite the controversy. The supervisors had been trying to buy the land for years but could never come to an agreement with the owner, he says. The landowner is getting up in years, however, and finally agreed to sell the township 50 acres.

Before the land became available, the supervisors had been considering raising taxes to offset such budget impacts as dwindling realty transfer taxes, decreasing earned income taxes, and reduced liquid fuels funds from the state.

They decided to raise taxes from 3 mills to 6 mills, including a 1 mill fire tax and the equivalent of ¼ mill for a fire truck fund. Even with the increase, the township has the second lowest tax rate in the North Pocono area, Stout says.

After the board made the decision about the taxes, the call came that the land was available, he says. What the residents didn't realize and Stout has taken pains to tell them over and over again is that the township didn't need to raise taxes to pay for it.

"We had put money away over the years for land purchases," he says. "We had accumulated \$100,000."

The township entered into an agreement with the owner to purchase the land for \$180,000. It secured a \$77,000 grant from the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which left just \$3,000 that would have to come from the general fund.

"That's a pretty good deal, I think," Stout says.

Ten of the acres were added to the municipal grounds for future expansion, and the other 40 will be used for active and passive recreation.

"Now we have a recreation committee, and there have been lots of suggestions about what to do with the land," Stout says. "People want ball fields and all kinds of things, but there are wetlands and rocky areas, so some of it will be left as open space."

Despite the uproar it has caused in the township, he is confident that the board made the right move.

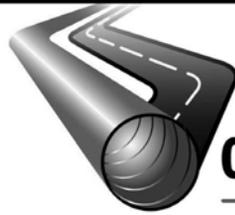
"Eventually, people will see that it benefits the community," he says.

Straight answers

After more than four decades of service to the people of Clifton Township, Stout says the key to being a good supervisor is listening.

"You have to be compassionate," he says. "A lot of people have problems; you just have to listen to them. Maybe you can't do anything for them, but you have to listen."

That is something Stout does at the diner, the truck stop, and anywhere else that people stop him to talk about what's happening in the township.



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