

SUPERVISOR

HALLOFFAME

Over more than two decades in office, supervisor **Wilson “Butch” Balthaser** of Upper Tulpehocken Township in Berks County has worked to retain the community’s rural character and preserve its way of life.

Keeping it rural

Wilson “Butch” Balthaser
Upper Tulpehocken Township,
Berks County
24 years of service

BY **BRENDA WILT** / ASSOCIATE EDITOR

If you take Interstate 78 through Upper Tulpehocken Township in Berks County, you’ll see lots of farms. In fact, one that runs adjacent to the highway used to belong to past PSATS President Kenny Grimes.

That pastoral environment is just what longtime supervisor Wilson “Butch” Balthaser likes about the township.

“The board has worked to keep the township rural,” he says. “Most of the township is agricultural, and many of the farms are preserved.”

Balthaser himself was a dairy farmer when the supervisors suggested that he run for office more than two decades ago. He still lives on the farm where he was born, which his son now owns and runs.

“The supervisors approached me about running because I was a farmer and they wanted someone from the rural community,” he says.

He had spent some time on the planning commission and zoning hearing board before becoming a supervisor, an experience that proved invaluable, he says.



Wilson “Butch” Balthaser has been a township supervisor for nearly a quarter century. At home, he’s gotten a lot of support from his wife and children. At the township, it’s come from his colleagues on the board and the municipality’s secretary. “Any township that runs efficiently has to give credit to the secretary,” he says.

“When I was on the zoning hearing board, a man wanted to build on a parcel of land right on the boundary with the Borough of Strausstown,” he recalls. “The board was ready to approve it, but too many residents opposed it. So many people showed up at the hearing that we had to move it to the fire house.”

If the plan had been approved, the

developer would have had to install public sewer, which would have benefited the borough, too, he says. Because the sale never took place, the borough had to foot the bill to install a public system four or five years ago.

Balthaser says he learned then that sometimes you have to do what the residents want, even if it may not be the wisest move at the time.

That’s not always the case, however. The supervisor remembers a time when a housing development was being built and the owner of the third house to be erected wanted to know when the township was going to put up street lights.

“She didn’t realize that wherever she came from that had street lights, she had been paying for them,” he says.

Serving the community

In addition to its rural character, Upper Tulpehocken has the seventh lowest tax rate — 0.8 mills — of the 97 municipalities in the county, Balthaser says. It has changed only three times during his tenure, being lowered once and raised twice.

The township has seen the usual upgrades in equipment while he’s been in office and is building a larger equipment shed this summer. The projects that Balthaser is most proud of, however, benefit the larger community.

Several years ago, the township bought a piece of land and turned over its use to the Strausstown Area Rec-

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recreation Association, which installed a ballfield that is used regularly. It is the township’s only park.

The township was also involved in a project in which the fire company purchased an old elementary school. The building has become home to several community organizations. The fire company rents out the kitchen and dining area for parties and events, a senior citizens group uses it for gatherings, and St. Joseph Hospital is renovating the top floor for use as a satellite clinic.

Balthaser served on the committee, known as the Upper Tulpehocken Community Leaders Coalition, that coordinated the purchase and reuse of the building.

His only complaint about being a supervisor, if you can call it that, is the ups and downs of working with the state government.

“You find out pretty quickly what you can and can’t do,” he says.

The township is currently trying to work out a deal with PennDOT to give a portion of Old Route 22 back to the state.

“It’s our road, but anytime there is an accident on I-78, traffic is detoured to Route 22, and the road is getting beat up,” he says. “We can’t afford to maintain it. If we give it back to the state, we have to take back the same number of road miles elsewhere. It will be an even swap.”

You can’t do it alone

Balthaser is the senior statesman on the board of supervisors these days. The other two are in their second and fourth years of service, he says.

“We get along pretty well,” he says. “We don’t always agree, but you’ll always have that. The three of us try to work with the residents as best we can to figure something out. Most of the time,

we can come up with a solution, but not always in a way that suits everyone.”

“Any township that runs efficiently has to give credit to the secretary,” he says.

The supervisor also acknowledges the support he has received from his wife of 45 years, his three children, and five grandchildren.

“Sometimes my wife has to listen to a lot after a meeting,” he says. He makes up for it by taking her on a yearly cruise.

The grandchildren keep them busy attending state fairs and agricultural shows.

“All of them are involved in 4-H or showing animals,” he says, “and they all have their grandma wrapped around their little fingers.” He will neither confirm nor deny that the same can be said for their grandpa.

Balthaser is running for re-election in November — unopposed, unless there is a write-in candidate. He also continues to help out on the farm, up to 12 hours a day.

“It’s hard to stop after doing it for so many years,” he says.

Apparently, the same can be said about public service. ♦

News from Central Pa. Public Works Association



Central Pa. APWA Symposium scheduled for September

Public works employees in central Pennsylvania are invited to the annual symposium of the local chapter of the American Public Works Association on **September 19**. The event will be held at the Hampden Township Public Works Facility in Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County.

Featuring 25 to 30 vendors, the symposium will include two educational sessions by PennDOT LTAP on full-depth reclamation and roadside vegetation control.

PennDOT Deputy Secretary of

Planning James Ritzman will speak about transportation funding, and Dave Muzzy, chief staff officer of the Pennsylvania Rural Water Association, will speak about securing public drinking water and wastewater.

The symposium will also include the popular lawn mower rodeo and cone toss contest, with cash prizes.

The event is free for public works employees and includes lunch. For more information and a registration form, call Vance Spicer at (717) 875-2612 or email vns@usmuni.com.